



**“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:11–12).**

How do we live a good and godly life in an unbelieving society? What does it really mean to live the Christian life among people who don't hold our same values? It's not easy, is it? What does an authentic Christian look like?

All the commands coming in the weeks ahead flow from our identity in Christ. Adam told us last week that “you are the people of God.” He did a great job and I was blessed hearing his message. You're the spiritual house. You're the living stones. You're the chosen people, a holy nation. What you do flows from who you are. What you believe flows into how you live.

If you don't get that, then everything Peter says here and later will feel oppressive and overwhelming to you. If you don't get that, you'll feel that you don't measure up.

In these two verses, Peter tells us two important things: There is a battle to fight, and people are always watching.

### **Beloved Exiles, There is a Battle to Fight**

#### **“Dear Friends”**

Better translated it means “Beloved of God.” You are friends, you are beloved by God. Your behavior flows from your identity in Christ. Peter has already told us we are chosen; now he calls us beloved by God.

God loves you. He can't love you any more or any less than how much he loves you right now. Once you get this, once you understand this, once you embrace you are the beloved sons and daughters of God you will have the power to obey these commands.

#### **“I urge you”**

This is an encouragement, not a rebuke. This is coming from a pastor's heart. This is not just good advice. This is not just a good idea. Peter is urging/pleading with believers to pay attention to sin in their lives and how they live their lives around pagans, those who don't know God.

#### **“Foreigners and exiles”**

Don't ever forget you are socially foreigners and exiles. You don't fit in here because you don't belong here. Because of their faith

in Christ, because of your faith in Christ, you will feel and be viewed as exiles, strangers, foreigners, and aliens in our society.

Why? Because you have a new set a values, new allegiances, a new worldview, you follow a new king, you are citizens of heaven, you are holy, set apart; comfort and security are no longer your life's pursuit. All of this means you will feel like exiles in this world.

The entire time I was in Israel, especially in Jerusalem, I felt like an outsider. I looked different, I felt different, I talked different, I was an obvious outsider. And then we went to the Temple Mount, an area controlled by Islam, and I **really** felt foreign then because I was treated as a foreigner. We were “escorted” around the site by “security.” As I left, the guy told me, “Don't believe everything that guide says!”

Then at the Western Wall (wailing wall), below the Temple Mount, I was very hesitant to go pray at the wall. I initially felt like it wasn't for me or for followers of Christ. But our tour guide, who is a Messianic Jew, sensing our hesitance told us, “This place is open to anyone, especially Christians. This place is for you. You are the people of God. Jesus said that his house will be a house of prayer for **all** nations, not just Jewish people.” So, I went to the wall with renewed confidence. I prayed. And God met me there.

#### **“Abstain from sinful desires”**

Here's only the second command in this letter; the other was to be holy. The term “sinful desires” is a loaded word. Paul called this the flesh, the carnal nature opposed to the spirit. Literally it means, “What the body wants.”

I think what Peter is saying is we need to stay away from “self-destructive behavior,” anything that's obsessive, destructive, and toxic. Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:19 puts it this way, **“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”** The call here is for self-control. We live by the spirit, not our sinful passions, and one of the fruits of the spirit is self-control.

All he is saying here and later are addressed to Christians. He's assuming they/we struggle with sin. That is important to remember. We are sinners. We are messed up. We are broken. But, God is at work in us. Why should we abstain from sinful desires Because they want to kill your soul.

### **“Wage war against your soul”**

Imagine a war, a fight, a battle. This is not a game! This is not even playing with fire; this is warfare. I talk to so many Christians who get discouraged and guilty because they feel they are constantly struggling with sin. But that is the key—it’s a struggle. That’s a good thing—the struggle, the fight. It’s dangerous when we throw up the white flag and surrender.

### **“Kill the spider, not the cobwebs!”**

Be killing sin or it will be killing you!” said John Owen. Romans 8:13 says, **“But if by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”** This is not easy. It’s a struggle, it’s a fight. Why is this so important? Because your soul is at risk.

We don’t talk much about the soul anymore. Part of the reason is we don’t really understand it. When the Bible talks about your soul, it’s talking about your whole being, your entire self. Your soul is not something separate from your body. That’s Platonic (Greek) influence, where your body is evil and your soul is good. No, Christianity teaches that they are connected—body, soul and spirit. So, at the resurrection, your body and soul rises, not just your soul.

The Bible uses the word soul, spirit, mind and heart almost interchangeably at times. So, the soul is the center of all you are. The place you make decisions. The place of your emotions. The place you connect with God. In three of the four Gospels Jesus says, “What good is it if you gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?”

What is the “whole world?” Essentially everything you have ever wanted. For some of us, we have gained most of everything we’ve ever wanted but deep down inside we feel empty, lost, tired and alone. Because what happens is that our souls become collateral damage in our pursuit of happiness. I’ve been there more times than I want to admit. As a pastor, it is so easy to talk about Jesus and do church without caring for my soul. But, it’s our souls that allow us to connect with God, with other people, with nature and with art.

What kills a soul? One of the things Peter tells us is running after things that are self-destructive: habits, relationships, power, success, image management, secret keeping. What then revives our soul? Truth, grace, rest, connection, honesty, being present over trying to be perfect, generosity.

“Our souls are of fundamental importance, truly the only things besides our physical bodies that we are entirely, independently responsible to steward. Many of us take care of our bodies with great attentiveness, conscious to fill our bodies with good things, to rest them well, to move and breathe deeply. After years of being careless with both my body and soul, trusting in some vague way that they’d probably be fine no matter what, I’m learning that both body and soul require more tenderness and

attentiveness than I had imagined.” –Shauna Niequist, *Present Over Perfect*.

Beloved Exiles, there is a battle to fight. How are you doing fighting sin?

### **Beloved Exiles, People are Always Watching**

The Roman Empire, the society in which Peter was writing, was a completely pagan place, where Christian values were little known and not honored. Corruption in government was pervasive. Morality was at an all time low. Divorce was so common that marriage was barely practiced. Sexual immorality was out of control. Abortion was frequent. Killing babies after they were born was safer so even more common, especially if you had a girl. Tolerance and diversity of religious ideas was the norm.

Like today, Christians were struggling with how to live for Christ in a world that is hostile to Christianity. How were they to work towards the renewal of society? How were they to honor God in the midst of their daily lives? Peter tells them: live a good life!

### **“Live such good lives”**

Good-honorable, lovely, winsome, gracious.

### **“Among the pagans”**

Gentiles, all those who do not know God.

### **“Accuse you of doing wrong”**

The assumption is that they are and will accuse you of doing wrong. The reputation of Christians were at stake. Because they were being treated as exiles, they were being accused of all sorts of nasty things.

### **“See your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven”**

God is not the only one watching us, non-Christians are. They are watching how we treat our spouses; they are watching how we raise our kids; they are watching what we spend our money on; they are watching how we treat other co-workers. What will they see? It doesn’t mean we’ll be perfect!

Peter is saying, that when the unbelieving world sees your lifestyle, some will in turn come to faith and glorify God on his return. Peter is teaching us the secret to evangelism—it’s how we live in front of others. It’s us. Not what we say but what we do.

One of the things in Israel that broke my heart was being around lots of religious people, but many of them do not have a personal relationship with Jesus. They obey the rules, they live righteous lives, but they don’t understand salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Our Muslim tour guide in Bethlehem, Amro, is someone like that. He was raised Muslim, went to Catholic school, and leads tours primarily to Christians. He is a lovely guy. But, when I asked him about his faith he said, “I know more than any of you about Islam, Christianity and Judaism, but I am not religious.” I was

blown away. Amro has lots of head knowledge but no heart knowledge, no relationship with Jesus. It broke my heart. How do we reach people like Amro? We pray. We befriend. We love. And we let them watch our lives.

Didn't Jesus say the same thing? Matthew 5:16 says, "***Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.***" I actually got to go to Mt. Beatitude, the place where Jesus said those words, overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

What ultimately changed Roman society? The godly living of Christians! Right after this passage, Peter will tell us how to treat those in authority, how to treat our spouses, and even our slaves.

How do non-Christians view Christians today? As hypocrites, judgmental, right-wing lunatics, irrelevant, extreme. How do we change that perception? We don't have a theology problem, we have a posture problem. How our posture has hurt our witness is sometimes we are mean-spirited and not connected to people. Peter believed they could live in such a way that even pagans considered it good. He knew that there were certain non-Christian values of his culture that overlapped with those of the Christian faith.

We too should work for the common good of society. There are values our society holds that overlap with Christian values and we should link arms and work together for those—justice, oppression, poverty, right of life, security and refugee care, orphans, adoption, peace, generosity, women's issues, and the environment are just a few examples. May we be known for what we are **for**, not simply for what we are against.

How do you live a good life in an unbelieving society? Abstain from sinful passions and live a good life of good works. As we live as foreigners and exiles in this world, people will see our godly lives and come to faith. After coming to faith in high school many of my friends later came to Christ as well as my brother and mom. It wasn't because I had all the answers or anything like that; it was my new life in Christ.

Non-Christians, this is not possible without Jesus! Not religion but relationship! As Adam said last week, "Many of us have built our lives on something other than the cornerstone of Jesus Christ." Christians, this is not possible without the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am not talking about sin management here. There is no such thing as a FitBit for sin. The problem is much much deeper. Destructive behaviors are a symptom of a deeper problem—idolatry. Our love, our heart, our worship, our affections are elsewhere and not on Jesus. Our behavior flows from our identity in Jesus. It flows from our worship. And only the gospel can change our worship to the point that behavior follows. Only God can help you desire him more than you desire anything or anyone else.

These two verses are pretty straightforward; you don't need to be a theologian or pastor to understand them: Beloved Exiles, fight sin and live a good life.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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300 Piedmont Avenue | San Bruno, CA 94066 | 650 349.1278 | [www.cpcweb.org](http://www.cpcweb.org). Additional copies available on request.