

Imagine with me if you will Peter's early readers, spread out as they were across the isolated terrain of modern day Turkey, pausing for a moment when they read verse 10 of this chapter. I think they must have been lost in wonder and praise as they read these words,

“Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.”

Peter had captured them with reminders that were fresh and invigorating.

They had been “born again to a living hope.” (1:3)

To them belongs, “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.” (1:4)

They are the recipients of God’s prophetic promises.

They are the people and place of God.

And then Peter moves from verse 10 to the transition verses of 11 and 12. Modern translations perhaps do this opening an injustice but he opens with these words: Dear friends. In older translations the word used was “beloved.” There is no doubt that the word beloved should be a title that accompanies everyone whose spiritual identity and eternal destination are wrapped up in Christ.

Peter wrote them in very plain language and the word was rising up within them as it should within us when we read it. He now turns his attention away from where they are going and to whom they belong. From these two verses (11-12) Peter will now urge his readers to live in this wilderness culture and world as those who are worthy to inherit all the amazing wonders and relationships that belong in the next world. He will write to them and us about our relationship to our society and government, employment and even marriage.

See if you can feel the power of his pen when he wrote these words:

Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. 1 Peter 2:11-12
NLT

These verses describe the basics of Christianity; the basics of normal Christian living. Following this week we will dive deeper into Peter’s descriptions and examples of life expressed in the many contexts in which every follower of Jesus Christ must walk.

So what is the call of these two verses for us today? What is the required foundational truth that we can pick up in these verses?

It is so simple that I don't think there is one of us that won't understand this.

We are to: Abstain from some things Hold on to other things.

Here are two other translations of these two verses:

¹¹ *Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² 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 NIV

¹¹ *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain** from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. ¹² **Keep** your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.* 1 Peter 2:11-12 NASB

As a people marked by God and His grace, we must refrain from some things while at the same time give ourselves to other things. In verse 11 the “how to” of gracious and godly living is stated negatively and in verse 12 it is expressed positively.

This means simply put that there are things we should not be known for and things that we should be known for.

1. We are to abstain from the passions of our flesh

To live in this world as citizens worthy of all the wonders and relationships in the next world we must abstain and refrain from indulging the impulses and desires of our flesh. The standard for this is found in the word of God.

To understand this more clearly let's look around a little in the rest of this epistle. Go back to 1:4,

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also must be holy in all your conduct.”

Peter goes on to define some of those passions: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. These are the vices we are to abstain from. They are the attitudes, actions and way of life that we once knew but as a Christian they will not be part of our lives.

There was once a time when we were tethered like a tether ball to this world without God's indwelling Spirit and power to resist.

Here is what else he writes for clarification purposes:

“Live for the rest of your time in the flesh longer for human passions but for the will of God. The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties and lawless idolatry.” 1 Peter 4:2-3

We are called to renounce and abstain from these things.

To catch the force of his appeal let’s look at these words in verse 11 once more:

*“¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain** from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.”*

He says, “Beloved, I urge you. . . to abstain.” There was angst and passion in his writing. If he were standing before you today you would know and understand the seriousness of this by his emotion.

We are to abstain from the malicious desires of our mind that would feast on others like carcasses to be consumed, and we are to renounce our tongue when it wants to slander and gossip about others. Christians will abstain from the passions of physical pleasure outside of God’s sacred marriage covenant.

To abstain from the “passions of the flesh,” we must live with a renewed mind, a disciplined tongue and a controlled body.

Peter says that “fleshly lusts” wage war against our souls.

Abstain means simply don’t give in to the current contemporary thinking that what think with your mind,(reading, watching, or looking at) or say with your mouth, or do with your body can be thought or said or done without doing damage to your soul.

Our world and especially our Country have fallen from the commonly shared morals of the past. The bible has very little bearing on people’s behaviors outside the church and has decreased in influence within the church at an alarming and mind-blowing rate in recent years.

Two Reasons Why:

We abstain as “sojourners and exiles”

Our commitment to abstain from the impulses and desires of the flesh is based upon our true identity in Christ. If somehow you and I don’t grasp this truth we will inevitably find ourselves outside of the Kingdom of God on earth.

We are to view ourselves as sojourners and exiles. Our true identity should be tethered to heaven. The pull on us should be irresistible because when you become a Christian you don’t belong to this world anymore.

If and when a Christian falls into sin, we are making a statement to the world around us and God that we have forgotten that there is something far greater than earthly pleasure that exists. There is more to life than pleasure.

Maybe you should hear the simple definition of a couple of words:

Sojourner: To reside temporarily. A temporary stay; a brief period of residence

Exile: Enforced removal from one's native country. Self-imposed absence from one's country. The condition or a period of living away from one's native country.

Alien: Owing political allegiance to another country or government; foreign: *alien residents*. Belonging to, characteristic of, or constituting another and very different place, or society

The word sojourner is used in the Old Testament to describe Abraham wandering around Egypt. (Genesis 23:4)

Peter cries out to us from this passage and says “Abstain,” and we might answer back, “Why?” and his response will be to proclaim that we are sojourners on this earth.

We abstain because fleshly passions war against our souls.

If our identity in Christ is not enough to motivate us Peter gives us one more reason to abstain from sins of the flesh and from human passion.

“ . . . they wage war against your soul.”

You might expect him to say against your body but he goes much deeper than that. He makes the point that there is an intimate relationship between what we do in the body and what happens to our souls. The literal translation of this is that these human passions are “serving as soldiers” against your soul.

The devil wants nothing more than for us to be tethered to this earth and its temptations. Disaster is all that awaits us if we fail to win this war.

There are some things that we will inevitably give up to follow Jesus Christ.

In *The Cost of Discipleship* Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

“The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

2. We are to keep our conduct holy and honorable

¹² *Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.*

The Christian life is not just about abstaining or giving up things but it is about choosing to embrace the things of God and godliness. We are to be a people filling our lives with the good things of God.

Here are the words of Jesus saying essentially the same thing found in Matthew 5:16:

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Too often modern theology has emphasized justification of faith and neglected to preach and teach the works that God calls us to perform for and with Him.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good, which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works.” Titus 2:7

“I want you to insist on these things, so that those who believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.” Titus 3:8

We should hold on to God’s word and His ways and never let them go.

We all know what guardrails are. A guardrail is actually a system designed to keep vehicles from straying into dangerous or off-limit areas. Now, nobody pays attention to guardrails unless you need one. There are all different kinds of guardrails, but guardrails are that invisible part of our driving experience. We’re glad they’re there when we need them, but for the most part, we pay no attention to them.

You generally find guardrails in one of three areas. You find guardrails on bridges, because on a bridge there’s very, very little margin for error. You also find them in medians to keep us from where we’re very, very close to people moving in the opposite direction. The closer we are to people who are moving in the opposite direction, the more we need protection. The third area where you find guardrails, specifically, is around curves--unexpected changes in roadside conditions.

Now the really interesting thing about guardrails is that, generally speaking, guardrails are not actually located in the most dangerous part of the road. Guardrails are actually located and constructed in areas where you could actually drive, if you think about it. The point of a

guardrail isn't to say, don't drive on this particular piece of real estate. The point of a guardrail is it's the piece of real estate just beyond the guardrail that's a point of danger: oncoming traffic, curves, mountainsides, edges of bridges, or whatever it might be. So, generally speaking, guardrails are actually constructed in areas where theoretically and actually you could drive, but guardrails are there to keep us from moving into an area where there's actual danger.

But when it comes to guardrails, nobody really argues the point and says, Hey, I don't know why they put guardrails around the edge of the bridge. They need to take the guardrails off, because actually I could drive closer to the edge of the bridge if they would just move the silly guardrails. We understand in driving that there needs to be some margin for error. The theory behind a guardrail is that you will do less damage to your body, and even in some cases less damage to your car, if you hit a guardrail than if you actually hit what was on the other side of the guardrail, or if you actually went off the side of something that would cause damage to you or your car. So the whole idea is it's okay to cause a little bit of damage in order to keep you from creating and experiencing a lot of damage, either to your physical body or to your car. So that's kind of the idea behind a guardrail.

The truth is, your greatest regret relationally--your greatest regret financially, your greatest regret morally, your greatest regret ethically, maybe professionally--chances are your greatest regret could have been avoided. And if you think of it in terms of driving, that ditch that you went off into, that cliff that you rolled off into relationally, however you want to describe it, your greatest regret could probably have been avoided and would probably have been avoided if you had had some guardrails in your area, in your life financially, morally, relationally, in your marriage, in your parenting, in your whole perspective on authority, whatever it might be. (Stanley)

Take Peter's words today and apply them as though they are guardrails in your life. Do you have any guardrails? Are there things that you have felt check about or even convicted but you looked around and it seemed that everyone else is doing it so it must be okay? Very rarely is it safe to follow the herd. (Maybe flock is a better word)

Let Go: Abstain Lose it Hold On: Keep Live it

The mark of a saint is not perfection, but consecration. A saint is not a man without faults, but a man who has given himself without reserve to God. — W. T. Richardson

At the close of life, the question will not be,

"How much have you gotten?" but "How much have you given?"

Not "How much have you won?" but "How much have you done?"

Not "How much have you saved?" but "How much have you sacrificed?"

It will be "How much have you loved and served," not "How much were you honored?"

Nathan C. Schaeffer.