

I PETER

- I. A Short Review And Look At Where We Are Going
 - A. In the first 16 verses of **I Peter 1**, Peter talks about God's greatness and His mercy in saving us. He then brings to our attention the challenge of trials and tribulations that come upon God's children, and encourages us to value their spiritual profit rather than complain or sidestep God's good purposes by taking matters into our own hands to find a way out from under them. Next, Peter reaches back into Israel's history and reminds us that God's prophets wanted to know what we now know about God's great salvation, but they were serving us, not themselves. He then finishes his introduction by calling us to spiritually serious thinking, obedience to Christ, and a zealous guardedness against returning to old, sinful ways – all with the purpose of becoming holy in all our behavior as God is holy.
 - B. As I have said before, the rest of I Peter, is about how to be holy in various settings, familiar situations, and common relationships. Though Peter primarily speaks to us as individual Christians throughout his letter, he speaks to us as a group, or as the church in **I Peter 2:4-10**.
 - C. Following Peter's direct exhortations to us as the church, he returns to addressing us as individual Christians – which brings us to where we are today in our study of **I Peter 2**. Beginning with **verse 11**, Peter gives us two general rules for holy living, one dealing with personal behavior and one for public behavior. He moves from there to talk about how we ought to behave toward government, how we are to use our Christian freedom for good, how we are to be godly workers, godly wives, and godly husbands – which brings us all the way to **I Peter 3:8**, where Peter sums up the material he just covered. So with this in mind, I will read **I Peter 2:11-17**.

- II. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. **I Peter 2:11-17** . . . 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. [13] Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, [14] or to governors as sent

by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. [15] For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. [16] Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. [17] Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

B. Pray

III. General Rules For Holy Living – Personal Behavior

A. **I Peter 2:11** . . . Beloved, I urge you (**I exhort you, I beg of you**) as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

B. **As aliens and strangers:**

1. This is the second time Peter (**1:1**) has referred to God's people as aliens or strangers in this world.
2. Now when God calls us aliens and strangers, He is not saying we cannot hold citizenship in a particular country or be identified with a particular people group. What He is saying is that though we live here, we no longer belong here. Our home is His home and our allegiance belongs to Him, alone.
3. The reason we no longer belong here or give allegiance to anything here is because –
 - a. The scripture says that this world as we know it is under the rule of Satan (**John 14:30**).
 - b. And this world lies in the power of the evil one (**I John 5:19**).
 - c. The god of this world – who blinds the eyes of the unbelieving – is the devil (**II Corinthians 4:4**).
 - d. The unbelievers who dwell here are dead in their trespasses and sins because they are living according to the ways of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air who is working in them (**Ephesians 2:1-2**).
 - e. And our struggle as Christian's is not against flesh and blood, that is, it is not against the specific nations and human rulers of this world, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness, that is, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places – which are the devil and his demons (**Ephesians 6:12**).
4. What these scriptures describe is the world we once belonged to and the homeland we have been saved from. As Christians, our citizenship and our allegiance and our home is with God in heaven. However, we have not yet been transported out of this world and

into our new homeland, which is why we have become aliens and strangers passing through this world on our way home.

5. Therefore, though we live in this world, we live as those who are no longer of this world. Though we are citizens of an earthly nation, we live as citizens of heaven. Though we may pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America (and there are some US Christian citizens who don't), we live as those whose only allegiance is to God. And though we may own a home in this world, it is only temporary shelter, for our permanent home is in heaven.

C. Peter urges us to **abstain from fleshly lusts**:

1. This first general exhortation to holiness directly deals with what we allow to go on inside of us (*i.e., thoughts, feelings, emotions*), and as a result, how we allow ourselves to behave.
2. In our day, the word lust is most often used in reference to strong desires related to some form of sexual immorality.
 - a. However, for much of history, the word "lust" was a general term for any excessive desire.
 - (1) In the unbelieving world, a lust is any desire goes outside the boundaries of what society deems acceptable.
 - (2) Within scripture and in the teaching of the church, a lust is any desire that goes outside the boundaries set by God.
 - b. Therefore, from the disciples onward, the word "lust" was used to signify (1) any longing or craving or compelling desire that turns you against God or your neighbor, (2) or any desire that leads to neglecting God, (3) or any longing that displaces God as the supreme love of your heart, (4) or any desire that keeps you from drawing closer to God, (5) or any longing or craving that in some other way damages or diminishes your relationship with God and your relationships with those around you.
3. To help us see this broader use of the word "lust," in the scripture, we need only turn to the first part of **II Timothy 2:22**, where Paul instructs Timothy to **flee youthful lusts**. And I am certain that if you spend some time pondering the adjective **youthful**, you will see that the word lusts goes far beyond sexual immorality.
4. Now with this broader view of the word lust in mind, I want to take some time to consider just how wide ranging this word lust is. And the first thing I want to clarify is that not all desires are lusts. Many desires that turn into lusts start out as natural, God given desires that we, through selfishness or foolishness, or through the

pressures of the world and the temptations of the devil, expand to areas and apply in ways that take us outside of God's boundaries.

- a. For example, we have a natural desire for procreation, but most of us here realize how easily we turn that natural desire into lust which leads to all kinds and degrees of sexual immorality.
 - b. We have a natural anger toward that which is truly harmful and evil, but it becomes a fleshly lust when we use our anger to get our way or make others live up to our expectations.
 - c. Many of us are naturally competitive, but that desire becomes a fleshly lust when it drives us to compete in ways that are unloving and for things we ought not to have.
 - d. We naturally desire glory, but our flesh turns that desire inward so that we lust for self-glory instead of God's glory.
 - e. It is natural to desire happiness and pleasure, but we all know how easily those desires become fleshly lusts in the pursuit of self-indulgence and excessive acquisition – including indulging in ungodly pleasures.
5. Adding to this list of natural desires perverted into fleshly lusts, we can turn to the long-standing teaching of the church concerning the seven deadly sins, which is another way of referring to fleshly lusts. These seven sins are pride, envy, gluttony, bodily pleasures, anger, greed, and sloth (*laziness*) in relation to physical and spiritual work.
 6. Beyond this list, the scriptures list such fleshly lusts as impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, bitterness, unforgiveness, hatred, hostility, malice, drunkenness, carousing, cross-dressing, homosexuality, stealing, covetousness, reviling, swindling, and things like these (**I Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:31; Galatians 5:19-21**).
 7. And here is one last example from **James 4:1**, where the question is asked: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? And the answer is, "The source is your pleasures (*i.e., fleshly lusts*) that wage war in your members."
 8. As you can see, the term "fleshly lusts" takes in a rather extensive variety of desires. And with this list of lusts in mind, I want to bring us back to the word "**abstain**" from **I Peter 2:11**, and the word "**flee**" from **II Timothy 2:22**.
 - a. There are two important things I want us to see about these two words.

- b. **First**, to **abstain** from fleshly lusts is to stay away from them so as not to indulge them in any way. To **flee** fleshly lusts is to get away from them as quickly as possible.
 - c. **Second**, both words imply choice. To abstain or to flee, we must choose to do so. Thinking about abstaining or fleeing, or talking about it, or praying about it, is a good first step. But a first step is not equal to a completed act. To actually abstain or flee, you must choose to do so when tempted to engage in any fleshly lust.
9. For an example of choosing to abstain or flee, consider Joseph, the eleventh son of Jacob. When he was being tempted by Potiphar's wife, he honored his master by choosing to abstain from the lustful activity. And He honored God by choosing to abstain from the sin he was being tempted to commit. Then, he chose to flee, and flee he did.
- a. Notice, Joseph did not try to keep from hurting his tempter's feelings by explaining to her how hard his life was and how much he appreciated her offer, but since it would be wrong, he had to say no. He did not try to talk her into being faithful to her husband. And he didn't sit down on the edge of the bed and discuss the rights and wrongs of her request. What Joseph did was to quickly say he could not do such a thing to neither his master nor His God. And then he fled!
 - b. It is the wise Christian who follows Joseph's example in dealing with fleshly lusts.

D. Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul:

- 1. So why is abstaining and fleeing so important? Because God clearly states that there is no fleshly lust that is benign. All fleshly lusts are enemies of our spiritual, moral, emotional and mental health, and when we engage any of them, to any degree, they war against our soul.
- 2. There is a well-known OT story that gives us a picture of how our fleshly lusts war against our soul. And I am sure you know this story, because the primary character is Samson. Consider:
 - a. Some of Samson's fleshly lusts led him to get involved with Delilah. Other fleshly lusts led him to give in to Delilah's plea to tell her his source of strength. And what was the outcome? He lost his strength and his usefulness to God.

- b. Now apply this to us. Just like Samson lost his God-given strength, at least for a time, and lost his usefulness to God, so we lose spiritual strength and usefulness to God when we give in to fleshly lusts.
3. Let me expand my Samson illustration a bit. When you give in to any of your fleshly longings or desires, by they hidden deep inside or manifested outwardly,
- a. you add a layer of desensitization to your moral sense of right and wrong.
 - b. you add a layer of dullness to your conscience,
 - c. you add a kind of pollution to your mind that feeds double-mindedness,
 - d. you further defile your imagination so that you fantasize and day-dream about things that you ought never to think about,
 - e. you feed feelings for things you ought not to have or engage in,
 - f. you nurture fears that argue against trusting God,
 - g. you add a layer of hardness to your heart which makes it that much harder to get God's intended message from His word,
 - h. you encourage self-rule, thus eroding your cheerful submission to the rule of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life,
 - i. and you push God away, while at the same time, moving away from Him.
4. Regarding this last thing – pushing God away and moving away from Him – it is possible you have no awareness that this is what you are doing, or even that there is an increased distance between you and God when you give way to some fleshly lust. Yet I assure you it is.
- a. It is also possible you may think that that distance is easily repaired by asking for forgiveness. But its not. And such thinking is the thinking of an immature Christian, not the knowing of a Christian who has grown in both godliness and nearness to God.
 - b. You see, the more sin you put out of your life, the closer you will draw to God, and the closer you draw to God the more you will notice even the slightest distance caused by sin. And the more you notice even the slightest distance between God and you, the more you will know how hard it is to close that distance.
 - c. In other words, the closer you grow to God, the harder it is to regain the distance lost when you deliberately push Him away by giving way to some fleshly lust.

- d. The example of the tightrope walker who falls from the tightrope.

IV. Conclusion

- A. As I stated at the beginning, **I Peter 2:11** is God's first of two general exhortations toward being holy as He is holy in all our behavior. Here God exhorts us, or we can rightly say commands us, to abstain or flee from fleshly lusts because if we don't, they will weaken us spiritually and put distance between God and us. Paul affirms this truth when he said: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life (**Galatians 6:7-8**).
- B. However, as those who have been born again, we are not only made up of fleshly lusts, we have the divine nature within us, and we have a desire for God within us, and we know that the pursuit of godliness is our proper response to God's salvation.
 1. In other words, we have mixed desires – some fleshly and some spiritual. And as you already know, they are at war with each other. Again, Paul affirms this when he said: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (**Galatians 5:16-17**).
 2. And so I ask, which desires are winning in your life, the godly desires or the fleshly desires?
 3. I can answer that question for you just as easily as I can answer it for myself. And the answer is, the desires that are winning are the ones you are feeding, and the desires that are losing are the ones you are starving.
- C. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.