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### **Godly Living in a Hostile World**

#### *God's People's Relationship with the World*

The question of how God's people ought to live in this world has always been a big issue in the Bible! Knowing the "organic maturation" which occurred throughout redemptive history on the part of the people of God as a group (Galatians. 4:1-5), it should NOT surprise us that God's command for this people has differed throughout the ages.

In the Garden, the command was quite simple as God's people were in their infancy: Do you see all the trees in the world? You can enjoy every one of them. Climb them! Eat from them!

Build with them! But of the fruit of this tree- this one little tree- don't eat (Genesis 2:16-17)!

Of course, the toddler named Adam did the ONE thing God called him not to do — and the world fell into this estate sin and misery!

The second command given to Adam is found in Genesis 3:23 right after the Fall. Here God issued the command to the now more “mature” Adam and Eve to cultivate the world. That means, they were to care for it unto its productivity. They were NOT to seek from the world all that they could get BUT use it to bring forth fruit in keeping with their status as co-Regents with God. Not surprisingly, they failed here too! Our parents lived in this world as if there was no tomorrow and so sin became a major problem with murder, polygamy, false worship, vengeance, drunkenness, and the like dogging His people.

The third approach is seen when God confined His redemptive program to a people, specifically the sons and daughters of Abraham. Here God isolated them from the world via the ceremonial and judicial laws which made a massive distinction between God's people and the world... how they dressed, spoke, worshipped, lived, and the like.

Finally, God's people entered into adulthood with the coming of Christ (cf. Galatians 4:1-5). Now with the “law of God written on their heart” (Jeremiah 31:33-34) the command for them was to be “In the world, but not of it” (John 17:15-16)!

Now if there is one constant throughout all these eras, it is that God's people did not heed God's command. Rather, they perennially fell into an unhealthy relationship with the world. We see it today in the church. As just referenced, we are called to be “in this world, but not of it” (cf. 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:1). Yet today, most of God's people are of the world and not in it!

Now this problem is NOT new to us. As far back as the Apostolic Age God's people blurred the line when it came to their relationship with the world. Accordingly, the New Testament is filled with exhortation after exhortation directing God's people on how they ought to live in this fallen world.

And this is the focus of 1 Peter 2. The first section of this epistle, 1 Peter 1:1-2:10, focused on our relationship with Christ and its manifold implications. As a persecuted people, our glory and joy must be housed NOT in anything in this world, BUT from/in Christ's love and grace!

As we transition into the second main section of this epistle, 1 Peter 2:11-4:11 we find the focus is on the practical, specifically the Christian's call when it comes to living in a hostile world. The text before us represents a general introduction — what Bible commentators call “A Prologue” — to what Peter is about to teach when it comes to our relationship with the world in which we live. Peter exhorts us first to guard our heart's piety.

1 Peter 2:11, “Beloved [this is an important address, for it connects everything Peter is

about to say to the glorious position we have in Christ.<sup>1</sup> Knowing that position...], I urge you as aliens and strangers [this is another important address. Because this world is not our home, we must NOT derive our standards of behavior from the world, BUT from our home-culture, which is heaven!!<sup>2</sup>] to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.”

As a general principle, this command is huge! In order to be a faithful Christian living in a hostile world, the battle begins with the heart— abstaining from inward fleshly lusts/passions/desires! There is a war that is being waged at every moment in our lives which we can't afford to ignore, neglect, or lose. As a result, we are called to “abstain” — a present tense, giving the sense that this command is something we are to do every moment of our lives!

Why are we called to “abstain”? It is on account of the “fleshly lusts” which “wage war against the soul.” The expression, “waging war,” is incredibly strong in the Greek. It was used in reference to a long-term military campaign involving relentless, malicious aggression! Consider how it is used:

Galatians 5:16-17, “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 [again, military language implying that life as a Christian is warfare], 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.”

Listen to Paul's personal testimony:

Romans 7:22-23, “For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

These passages are NOT metaphorical. They are speaking of a literal battle that is being waged right now in our heart! In this regard you must see with Peter that the best defense is a strong and resolute offense in which, with vigilance and great effort, we “abstain from fleshly lusts.” Chuck Swindoll put it this way:

For unbelievers, the world is a playground of passions. But for believers it's a battleground of opposition and temptation. (Swindoll, 2014, p. 173)

his requires us to ask the question; what are the “fleshly lusts” referenced here? They are any passion, inclination, or desire which arise out of our fallen humanness. And because they arise out of our fallen heart, they will always be present with us as long as we live! See, many in the church have the idea that the more we grow in Christ the more these “fleshly lusts” will diminish; and that is wrong! What is more accurate would be to say that the more we grow in Christ the less we will HEED these “fleshly lusts” which are ever and always calling out to us! Recall the words of Augustine: “in an dog fight, which dog wins? The dog you feed!”

So, “abstaining from fleshly lusts” begins with the thoughts we allow to occupy our mind! Yet once again, why is this important? And how do we win the battle of the heart when it comes to our “fleshly lusts”? There are two important passages in Scripture which speak to this question.

James 1:14-15, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust [passions/desires]. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

This passage describes how a fleshly lust becomes sin in our lives. First, the lust is proposed by our fallen humanness — our flesh. And so, the sinful thought enters into our mind. What we do at this moment is key. If we allow our hearts to be “carried away and enticed” by the lust, we will enter formally into a “temptation.” Then if this temptation is played with, contemplated, and so heeded, the lust will be incarnated into action — it will “give birth to sin” which, if not repented of, will eventually “bring forth death.”

In light of this progression, where must the battle for purity begin? The moment the sinful lust enters into our minds! At this moment we must “abstain from fleshly lusts” (our text)! Practically speaking, how do we do that? Psalm 101 gives us a wonderful answer by a man who had his struggles with “fleshly lusts.”

Psalms 101:3-4: while this Psalm is NOT a chiasm, nevertheless it has a chiastic element in vv. 3-4; latent to what David wrote, “I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not fasten its grip on me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will know no evil.”

Pictorially the passage looks like this:

<p><b>A:</b> I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; <b>B:</b> I hate the work of those who fall away; <b>C: <i>It shall not fasten its grip on me.</i></b></p>
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The focus of this section clearly is at the end of verse 3: “it shall not fasten its grip on me.”

How is it that sin can be prevented from fastening its grip on any of our hearts? It occurs when you and I “watch over our heart” by doing two things:

1. “Setting no ‘worthless word’ before our eyes” (v. 3a) and so experientially “knowing no evil”- A & A<sup>1</sup> (v. 4b)!
2. “Hating the work/actions/freedoms of those who fall away” (v. 3b) and so making sure that “a perverse heart departs from us”- B & B<sup>1</sup> (v. 4a).

The first expression, “I will set no worthless thing before my eyes” is awkward in the Hebrew. The expression “worthless thing” literally translates as “a word of Belial.” And it is this “WORD” which David said he would NOT “set before his EYES.” Now because you can’t place a word/the voice of an individual before your eyes, Bible translators have opted for “I will set

no worthless thing” which obscures the meaning. So, what is David saying? It is rather vivid; he is picturing the individual walking around with Satan/a demon/our flesh whispering in our ear, and so giving us a commentary on the things which we see:

1. “Look at that chariot! Wouldn’t your life be better if you owned that?!”
2. “Look at how that man treats his wife! Too bad you married such a worthless man!”
3. “Look at that wealth! What do you need to do in order to get a piece?”
4. “Look at that woman!”
5. “Look at that power!”
6. “Look at that popularity!”

These are just some of the “worthless words” which come across our minds on a daily basis. So, Mark It: The battle for purity begins here and what we do with these “worthless words/thoughts/desires”! Do we gaze at them and allow our hearts to dwell on them? Or do we immediately attack these “words” and dismiss them as folly? Warning: If we allow these words in any way to occupy us, we will be “knowing evil” (v. 4b) which David emphatically says we must not allow ourselves to do!

Secondly, what do you do when it comes to the sinful actions, pleasures, and short-term benefits that a brother or sister enjoys when they give themselves to sin? What ought we to do with the temptations that come from without? For don’t miss it, more often than not, from afar, we can find ourselves vicariously taking delight in them.

- Bob just left his spouse! While I know this is wrong, yet talk about freedom!
- Sally no longer goes to church but spends her weekend paragliding. Oh, how I would love to do that! And besides, she seems so happy now!
- Jim and Barb are sleeping together. I know that is wrong, but somehow these Christians not only are doing that, but continue to attend church and seem to be blessed.

Christian, sin brings with it a “passing pleasure” (Hebrews 11:25). Knowing this, David said that if you and I are going to be free from any slavery of sin, we must purpose in our hearts not to allow it to “fasten its grip on us” which means this:

- We must hate NOT the sinner, BUT their sin!
- We must make sure that any and every thought, act, or imagination of a “perverse heart... departs from us” (v. 4a)- which means we don’t envy the actions of a rebellious Christian!

Now if we do this will it involve missing out on perceived pleasure? Most certainly! Yet if we do NOT take this battle seriously, it will be no time before “sin fastens its grip on us.” That is Peter’s point in the text before us! The call is to “abstain from every fleshly lust” — and so realize that the battle is waged NOT first at the point of action, BUT at the point where the thought or inclination first enters into our mind/heart!

In this regard, thinking of what we have learned from 1 Peter 1-2:10, how do we win this facet of the battle? We do so by giving ourselves to the one ordinate lust/passion that trumps any passing pleasure of this world: fellowshiping with and so enjoying Christ (~1 Peter 1:1-2:10)! That brings us to a second exhortation when it comes to “Godly living in a hostile world” as it relates to the world we need to mind our manners.

### As it Relates to the World: Mind Your Manners, v. 12a.

1 Peter 2:12a, “Keep your behavior [which speaks of our day to day conduct] excellent among the Gentiles<sup>3</sup>...”

At the outset note that this is linear! If we fail when it comes to guarding our hearts (v. 11), we most certainly will struggle here. So, with a vigilant heart fixed on Christ and so ever quick to take on any sinful thought/desire that might cross our mind, we transition to our outward conduct and so the acts and attitudes we sport before a watching world.

Of these, Peter told his persecuted brethren, “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.” The word for “excellent” is *καλός* (*kalos*) which we’ve seen before. It refers to that which is good or virtuous and has as its background two Old Testament words: *טוב* (*tob*) which speaks of that which is *morally* or *intrinsically good* and *יָפֵה* (*yāpēh*) which speaks of that which is *outwardly beautiful*. The emphasis here in our text is on that which is outwardly beautiful (since v. 11 addressed the intrinsic good). Peter’s second exhortation when it comes to general guidelines for living in this world is that we want our behavior to be excellent before all- for truly we must ever and always be mindful that the non-Christian world is watching. They are watching us when:

1. We don’t get our way.
2. We are overlooked when it comes to the pay raise.
3. Our will is crossed.
4. They sin.

How we respond/react in these situations will either honor the Lord or bring ill-repute to the gospel. It is as Paul said in Titus:

Titus 2:9-10, “Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.”

No doubt this is where the well-known statement came from supposedly spoken by Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.”

2 Corinthians 6:1, 3, “And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the

grace of God in vain... giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited.”

That is the focus of Peter! Warren Wiersbe illustrated the importance of this with the following story.<sup>4</sup>

In the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, New York, to hear a presentation of the gospel by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things, the chief said: “We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said.”

That is Peter’s concern here! In the coming two chapters Peter is going to address how we as Christians ought to interact with the world in which we live- addressing such things as our relationship with:

- The State: Living as Citizens, 2:13-17.
- Our Jobs: Living as Servants, 2:18-25.
- Our Marriages and so Living with our Spouse, 3:1-7.
- Mankind in general, 3:8-12.
- The Persecutor: Living as a Sacrifice, 3:13-17.
- The Lord: Living as a Holy Vessel, 4:1-6.
- The End of the World: Living on Borrowed Time, 4:7-11.

The general principle Peter wants us to approach each of these areas is a concern for an “excellence” that flows from a heart that is right before God! For, as we transition into the final exhortation, it will be in through areas that we will bring honor and glory to God at the Second Coming!

Thirdly as we live in this world, we need to remember the Last Day and keep our eyes on the prize.

1 Peter 2:12b, “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles [the ἔθνος (*ethnos*) which refers NOT simply to individuals, BUT to people groups and nations], so that [ἵνα (*hina*)] in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers<sup>5</sup>, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

What a mouthful. First, what is meant here by “the day of visitation”<sup>6</sup>? Bible commentators are divided on this question. It could refer to the time when a person comes to a saving relationship with Christ. Or it could refer to the time when God “visits” this world in judgment

or blessing. Now as

1. Peter throughout this epistle has already made extensive use of the Old Testament (quoting from it directly), and as
2. What Peter wrote here is a direct quote taken from Isaiah 10:3 (LXX), we conclude that the focus is on the eschatological coming of God in Judgment!

In this regard, if you do a study of this expression in Scripture, the vast majority of references to this “divine visitation” is in the context of blessing for His people! At the end of the world, God is going to come back in order to bless His people — you and me. That in part is the point of the Second Coming of Christ! We might think of it as an awful day when the “thoughts of our heart” are exposed (1 Corinthians 4:5). Yet the focus of this day in Scripture is on the joy of the Lord as our best — which is God being honored, glorified, and praised- is realized!

That doesn’t mean that it won’t also be accompanied by judgment for those who do not know Christ; for indeed it will (cf. Job 7:18; Isaiah 10:3; 29:6). Yet and again, the focus is on the celebration of the Lord — His honor, His glory, His greatness, and so His salvation! On that day, what do you suppose will be one of your greatest joys? Seeing the world of man fall down and make much of Christ!

Now, do we have a role in that? We most certainly do! According to this text, it is by conducting ourselves amongst the non-Christian world in such a way that they will have nothing BUT good to say about our Savior! That is what Peter says here.

1 Peter 2:12, “so that in the thing in which they [temporarily] slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

I tell you, brothers and sisters! On that day, this will mean so much more to us than any passing pleasure of sin, any getting even, any temporal vindication, or any worldly victory or joy.

Now the idea of “glorifying God” is much more than simply praising God. To glorify is to state the true impact that a person or thing has. Therefore, for a people group or nation to “glorify God” is for them to recognize the true substance of God — that God is:

- Holy.
- Pure.
- Righteous.
- Loving.
- Gracious.
- Kind.
- AND- most importantly- the one and only true God!



That righteous “behavior” will do on “the last day” when God “visits” the people of this world!?

That is what we are after and that is what Peter here exhorts! See we must see that at any given moment there is much more at stake than the given task or crisis. A sinful and rebellious world is watching and drawing conclusions about God which they will take with them to the Last Judgment.

In this regard, what is THE most important testimony we can give to a fallen world? A perfect life? No! That is impossible. What then? A broken life that does NOT make excuses, BUT is quick to say sorry, quick to repent, and quick to trust God, and quick to give the praise and glory to God! This coming week I dare say the world will NOT be impressed with our grace; BUT may they be impressed with the grace of God operative in our lives, transforming the:

- Complainer into one who keeps his mouth closed.
- Gossiper into one who speaks to edify and build up.
- Blame-shifter to ones who take responsibility for their actions.
- Pessimist to one who looks with confidence and joy to the future when God will visit them.

There is a whole lot more Peter is going to say in the coming chapters. Yet generally speaking, all of it will be an extension of the three words given here. When it comes to the world in which we live:

- Guard your heart!
- Mind your manners!
- Keep your eye the prize of the upward call of God!

If we can do this when it comes to our interaction with the world, we not only will survive, but we will thrive in the Hostile World in which we live!

## References

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> This also indicates that Peter is introducing a new section. Peter's final section also has this appellation, cf. 1 Peter 4:12.

<sup>2</sup> "The assumption Peter makes in his exhortation is that they are indeed the people described in the first part of the letter, that is, "aliens and sojourners" (1:1, 17; frequently implied elsewhere). The combination itself is rather surprising, for the term "alien" usually indicates a permanently resident alien (e.g., a landed immigrant in Canada), while "sojourner" indicates a foreigner who is only temporarily in the area. But Peter is more interested in the sense of our belonging elsewhere than the exact shades of meaning of our being in this world, and he likely draws his language from the Septuagint, for example Gen. 33:4... Similar language is used in Eph. 2:19 (alien) and Hebrews 11:13 (sojourner). The knowledge that they do not belong does not lead to withdrawal, but to their taking their standards of behavior, not from the culture in which they live, but from their 'home' culture of heaven, so that their life always fits the place they are headed to, rather than their temporary lodging in this world." (Davids, 1990, p. 95)

<sup>3</sup> "Peter calls unbelievers Gentiles, not because he thinks that his readers were all Jewish Christians, but because he once again assumes that Christians (both literal Jews and literal Gentiles within the body of Christ) are the 'true Israel'." (Grudem, 2009, p. 123)

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in *Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter*, Chuck Swindoll, SNTC, pp. 173-174.

<sup>5</sup> "While good lives will eventually force all to glorify God for what they see in the Christians, now unbelievers see the same facts in quite a different light, for 'they slander you as evildoers' or 'criminals.' It was often the very abstaining 'from fleshly desires' that caused pagans to despise Christians (so 4:4). They accused them of a number of crimes, such as practising [sic] murder, incest, and cannibalism in their secret church meetings (from expressions such as 'love feasts,' 'brother and sister,' 'eating the body,' and 'drinking the blood,' transferred to pagan contexts), and especially of disturbing the peace and good order of the Empire... Such slander was the common fare of public discourse and, when brought to the attention of the authorities, became the basis for judicial persecution. Peter knows that nothing can be done to confront this rumor mill directly, for it is a spiteful slander based on the guilt of those who perpetrate it." (Davids, 1990, p. 97)

<sup>6</sup> While visitation by God can mean salvation, in Isaiah 10:3, which is the only exact parallel to Peter's expression here, it indicates the Day of Judgment.

<sup>7</sup> By the way, we must also note that how we live on this earth today could bring shame upon the name of our Lord in that day! Do you remember the horrible criticism that Paul leveled against his fellow Jews, "For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' just as it is written [~Isaiah 52:5]." (Romans 2:24) Speaking of God's people when they came Babylon, Ezekiel wrote, "When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.'" (Ezk. 36:17) In contrast, consider the exhortation of Christ in His Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)