

## Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE  
EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### Beautiful Behavior

#### 1 Peter 2:11-12 (694)

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

The big idea of my sermon this morning is this: the exemplary lives of His people glorify God. The exemplary lives of His people glorify God. Our first concern in any statement that mentions His name ought to be God Himself.

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth (SC, Q. 4). He is a God of infinite perfections. He is the one living and true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. He is absolutely free, working all things according to the counsel of His own holy will and for His own glory. He is loving, gracious, merciful, patient, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He is also perfectly just; a God who hates sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. To Him is due from angels, men, and every other creature, whatever worship,

service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them (WCF, Chapter II, *Of God, and of the Holy Trinity*, I, II).

We know God is worshipped and glorified in heavenly realms. Indeed, angels and heavenly hosts are, at this very moment, offering to God the worship that is His due.

**Isaiah 6:1-4**, *I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphim stood above Him .... <sup>3</sup> And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.*

**Revelation 4:8-11**, *and day and night [the four living creatures] do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." <sup>9</sup> And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."* God is continually worshipped and glorified by angels and heavenly hosts.

God is (and will be) glorified also by and in the lives of men and women. Not that we shall contribute or add to His glory. **Indeed**, God possesses all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself. God is sufficient unto Himself. He does not stand in need of any creature which He has made, including man.

He derives no glory from us, but only manifests His own glory in, by, unto, and upon us (WCF, Chapter II, *Of God, and of the Holy Trinity*, II, I). Manifests His own glory by us. Manifests His own glory by us.

At the end of verse 12 Peter says that God will be glorified in *the day of visitation*. Of course, we know this as that day in which Christ will return; that day in which the final judgment will take place; that day which shall mark the consummation of all things, the end of time as we know it. In that day God will be glorified. His glory will be manifested through the exemplary lives of His people. Even at this time it will be evident to all that it was never about us. Indeed, even those who rejected and despised God and His people and died in that awful condition will acknowledge the righteousness of the saints (**Phil. 2:11**), that our lives were approved by God, and that God Himself was the One who, by His power and all-sufficient grace, enabled us to live such lives in the midst of the hostility of sinful men. God will bring glory to Himself through the exemplary lives of His people. Let's unpack this idea.

**“We have now finished the first part of Peter’s letter (1:1 – 2:10). So far the apostle has mainly been laying down the basic doctrines which he wants to teach to the scattered Christians of northern Turkey”** (Bentley, *Living for Christ*, p. 82). Today we begin the second major section of 1 Peter (**2:11 – 4:11**). The theme of this section is God glorified in our behavior. Peter opens this section with an appeal. He says, *“I urge you.”* He is urging these believers to exemplary living in the hostile and trying environment in which they find themselves. Now, upon what basis does he appeal to them?

First, he urges them to exemplary living based upon God's (and his) affection for them. This is expressed in the tender term "*beloved*." With this endearing term Peter reminds his readers that they are *beloved of the Lord* (**Rom. 1:7; 2 Thess. 2:13**); that God Himself has set His affection upon them. How is such an extraordinary privilege to be accounted for? The Bible teaches that this blessed status is ours on account of the electing grace of God. **Colossians 3:12**, for example, says, *and so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved* (see also **Deut. 7:6-8a; Rom. 11:28**). We have seen the same thing in 1 Peter as well. In **1:1** Peter reminded us that we are the *chosen* of God. In **2:9** he explained that we are precious to God as His *own possession*. We are among the beloved of the Lord.

*Beloved* also speaks of Peter's own attitude toward these struggling Christians. In other words, they are also the beloved of the apostle himself (see **1 Cor. 10:14**, *my beloved*). From about 1974 through the early 80's I listened to Dr. J. Vernon McGee on the radio as I made my way to work each morning. He would begin his program with a male chorus singing *How Firm a Foundation*. He would always end the broadcast with these words – "May God richly bless you my beloved." I was always moved a bit by those words.

I have not always referred to you as *beloved* in my sermons. In the last couple of years I have found myself using the term more frequently. This privilege has come with time. It has come with age. It has come as we have shared experiences together. It has come as we have pursued the work of the gospel together these fifteen years. The depth of our own affection *for* one another in this place should now express itself in the intensity of our appeals *to* one another to live righteously for the glory of God.

And so Peter is appealing to them based upon his own affection for them and upon their status as the beloved of the Lord. *Beloved, I urge you.*

But Peter also urges them to exemplary living on the basis of their status in the world. *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers.* You recall in **1:1** Peter referred to the recipients of this letter as *those who reside as aliens*. Once again, Peter takes a term originally applied to Israel and applies it to the New Testament Church (**Lev. 25:23; Gen. 23:4; Ps. 39:12**). By *aliens* Peter is not suggesting that Christians are coneheads (SNL) or grotesque creatures from outer space (Alien). The word translated *alien* (see also **Eph. 2:19**) emphasizes our status as non-citizens while the word *stranger* (see also **Heb. 11:13**) emphasizes the transient or temporary aspect of our stay here in this world. “We are here today and gone tomorrow. We do not put down firm roots” (Marshall, *1 Peter*, p. 80). These two terms are not intended to describe our political status as believers. Rather they describe our status relative to the surrounding culture. Beloved, ours is the necessary status of estrangement from the values and customs of the culture within which we, in the providence of God, find ourselves (see Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, p. 175). The fact is that we are called to be different.

Indeed, we are *to abstain from fleshly lusts*. The call of God is that we *abstain* (**2:1, putting aside**), like a former drunk abstains from alcohol, from behavior that marks unredeemed culture (**1:18, you were redeemed**); to no longer conform or be pressed into the mold of that life which was ours before we were saved; to not adapt our conduct to that of our surrounding culture (Achtemeier, pp. 175-76). “Because we are now aliens and exiles within this society, it is no longer appropriate for us to act in accordance with its customs” (Achtemeier, p. 176). That which we must combat is adopting and adapting to its values, its priorities,

and its pursuits as if this were our permanent residence (see Bentley, *Living for Christ*, pp. 20-21).

This verse is one member of a family of similar verses in 1 Peter. Look at **1 Peter 1:14**. *As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.* In **1 Peter 1:18** he speaks of being *redeemed from your futile way of life.* In **1 Peter 4:2** he says *so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men.* In **4:3** Peter actually gives a sampling, a “thumbnail sketch” (Kelly, p. 68), of what he has in mind – *sensuality, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.* From this short list you might conclude that all Peter is urging believers to avoid is such wild behavior as you might see at a college fraternity party or at Cancun during spring break. And with a sigh of relief we say, “Whew, I’m glad I don’t do that.” But the term *fleshly lusts* encompasses much more.

These *fleshly lusts* of which Peter speaks are those sinful habits and attitudes characteristic of unregenerate men and women. They are the values of an unredeemed culture. Let me give you just a few examples of what I believe Peter has in mind: contentious, ugly personal relationships (**Gal. 5:19-21**), jealousy and anger (**Gal. 5:19-21**), the compulsion to accumulate more stuff, being driven by current cultural fads, susceptibility to pandering commercials, and embracing the unbiblical values, crude language, sloppy and provocative dress, sensual, hammering music and disrespectful attitudes of the popular culture.

To abstain is, of course, is a negative appeal. Half of the exemplary life to which we are called consists of stuff we shouldn’t do. Recently in a letter to a young woman I wrote a straightforward sentence. “I appeal to you, do not do this.” I

urged her to not pursue a certain destructive course of action. God Himself has said, do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not covet. John wrote some very solemn words: *Do not love the world, nor the things in the world (I John 2:15)*. Why does Scripture pile these prohibitions one on top of another? Because the fleshly lusts Peter is urging us to put aside, to keep away from, to avoid *wage war against the soul (1:9, 1:22, 2:11, 2:25, 4:19, soul)*. War knows no manners, no niceties. War is brutal, bloody, sheer terror. The aim is to kill enemy soldiers. These *fleshly lusts* work to destroy our new life in Christ. They work to pervert our new life in Christ.

Beloved, listen to me. I earnestly appeal to you out of my affection for you. To the degree that you allow your behavior and values to be shaped by and conformed to the popular culture around you, you will sustain spiritual damage. You will suffer spiritual wounds. You will be a spiritual casualty of war. Your loyalties will be divided. Your affections for Christ will cool. Your spiritual appetite will be dulled. Your good conscience will be wrecked. You will no longer know the freedom of discipline but will be enslaved by an addiction to self-indulgence. Your absorption with self will be expressed in unconcern for others. Your convictions will be compromised. Your witness neutralized. Your life will bring reproach upon the gospel. Yours will be a wretched existence indeed.

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

Now Peter issues a positive command in verse 12. You see, the other half of the exemplary life to which we are called consists of what we actually do. *Keep your*

*behavior excellent.* What is *excellent behavior*? Let's look in 1 Peter itself for the answer. An excellent life is one lived in conformity with our new status as obedient children of God (1:3, 14). An excellent life is one lived in conformity with our new status as the people of God (2:9-10). An excellent life is one lived in conformity to the will of God as we know it from the Word of God (4:2). An excellent life is one lived righteously (2:15, 24). We are not called to live perfectly but to strive, in humble reliance upon divine grace, to live beautiful, attractive, winsome lives of consistency and Biblical integrity. 1 Peter 2:11-12 is a call to redouble the pursuit of excellence in living; to live well before God and men.

Indeed, this excellent life is to be lived out *among the Gentiles* Peter says. We are called to live exemplary lives before an unbelieving world; to live exemplary lives beyond the walls of the sanctuary - in your neighborhood, on the campus, at the office, with our families when they gather, with our non-Christian friends, on the phone, in our homes with our wives and children. Scripture does not allow a separation/distinction between what you believe and practice in the community of faith and what you believe and how you behave in the culture around you. **Matthew 5:14a, 16**, *"You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before men [wives, husbands, children, parents, friends, co-workers, strangers, jerks] in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

"But, given the bias of unbelievers against God, even the good that Christians do will be ill spoken of. That certainly happened. The Roman historian Tacitus remarks that Christians were 'loathed because of their abominations.' Another author, Suetonius, approved of Nero's persecution of Christians, 'a class of

people animated by a novel and mischievous superstition' " (Clowney, *1 Peter*, p. 103). These people, for example, were being *slandered as evildoers*.

"Yet in spite of [opposition from and criticism by the culture], the impact of our Christian witness will not be lost, in Peter's day or ours" (Clowney, p. 103). God has purposed to glorify Himself in and through the exemplary lives of His people. Surely, let the world see your family rise and leave for church on the Lord's Day. Let the world see you bow your head in thanks in a restaurant. Let them hear your religious conversation. But, dear friends, also let the world see your gracious response to their slander and other verbal abuse, your courage in the face of intimidation (3:14), your calmness when misrepresented (4:4), your joy in the face of trials (1:6, 8), your quiet confidence in the face of frowning providences, your love for an unseen Savior (1:8), your generosity in a world awash in selfishness, your mutual love and care for one another (1:22), your love for your wife and your respect for your husband, your self-deprecation in the midst of a culture obsessed with self-advancement and personal rights (2:1), your refusal to compromise faith or practice, your glad deference to the will of God, and your gracious exit from compromising situations.

The impact will not be lost. God has purposed to glorify Himself in and through the exemplary lives of His people. The effect of our witness may not be known until Christ is revealed. We must place the total impact of our lives into His hands. Lord, use my simple obedience, my integrity, my voice, my habits, my demeanor, my steadfastness, for a redemptive purpose in the world. This impact will surely be manifested at last *in the day of visitation* (1:5, 1:7, 1:13, 2:12, 4:7, 4:13, 5:1, 5:4).

God's glory will be manifested through the exemplary lives of His people. For sure His people will exalt Him. We believe that many of those who shall do so are as of this hour unsaved. They are dead in trespasses and sins. Indeed, many of those who will one day glorify God are presently entrenched in their opposition to God and to those who bear His name. Among them may be your own friends, children parents, and neighbors. Such were those who opposed the readers of Peter's letter. They slandered God's people (2:12). They treated God's people harshly (2:20). They intimidated God's people (3:14). They reviled the good behavior of God's people (3:16, 4:14). They maligned God's people (5:4). God will be glorified as sinners such as these turn to Him in repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

How is it that God brings such people to Himself? How is it that hearts so hard are softened? How is it that eyes so blind are opened? How is it that hatred so intense is dispelled? How is it that wills so stubborn are broken? Ignorance so profound is overcome? We know that God and God alone can break the bondage of sin. Indeed, God has chosen to use means for such mighty work. Peter calls our attention to one of these in 2:11-12 - the exemplary lives of those who know God through Jesus Christ His Son. God is glorified in the exemplary lives of His people.

**Benediction** (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

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THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### *Beautiful Behavior*

1 Peter 2:11-12 (694)

**1 Peter 2:11-12**, *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 on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

#### **The big idea:**

**the exemplary lives of His people \_\_\_\_\_ God.**

God is worshipped and glorified in heavenly realms (**Is. 6:1-4; Rev. 4:8-11**).

God is (and will be) glorified also by and in the lives of men and women.

**Today we begin the second major section of 1 Peter (2:11 – 4:11).**

The theme of this section is ... **God glorified in our behavior.**

#### *I urge you*

He is urging these believers to exemplary living in the \_\_\_\_\_ and trying environment in which they find themselves.

#### **Now, upon what basis does he appeal to them?**

First, he urges them to exemplary living based upon God's (and his) \_\_\_\_\_ for them (*Beloved*).

But Peter also urges them to exemplary living on the basis of their \_\_\_\_\_ in the world (*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers*).

These terms describe our status relative to the surrounding culture.

***to abstain from fleshly lusts*** (see 1 Peter 1:14, 18; 4:2, 3)

These *fleshly lusts* of which Peter speaks are those sinful habits and attitudes characteristic of unregenerate men and women. They are the values of an unredeemed culture.

*To abstain* is, of course, a negative appeal.

Half of the exemplary life to which we are called consists of stuff we \_\_\_\_\_ do.

The fleshly lusts Peter is urging us to put aside, to keep away from, to avoid  
***wage war against the soul*** (1:9, 1:22, 2:11, 2:25, 4:19, *soul*).

These *fleshly lusts* work to \_\_\_\_\_ our new life in Christ.

They work to \_\_\_\_\_ our new life in Christ.

The other half of the exemplary life to which we are called consists of what we actually \_\_\_\_\_.

***Keep your behavior excellent***

What is *excellent behavior*?

**An excellent life is one lived in conformity ...**

with our new status as \_\_\_\_\_ of God (1:3, 14)

with our new status as the \_\_\_\_\_ of God (2:9-10)

to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God as we know it from the Word of God (4:2)

An excellent life is one lived righteously (2:15, 24).

***among the Gentiles*** (before an unbelieving world)

**Matthew 5:14a, 16**, "You are the light of the world ... 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."

***slandered as evildoers***

***they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them,  
glorify God in the day of visitation***

Yet in spite of [opposition from and criticism by the culture], "the impact of our Christian witness will not be lost, in Peter's day or ours" (Clowney, p. 103). God has purposed to glorify Himself in and through the exemplary lives of His people.