

ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS

1 PETER 02: 11–12

Introduction

We live in a day when the flesh (sinful nature) is exalted and evil desires honoured. A person's esteem and worth and image are often determined...

- by how much of the world he possesses
- by how much money he has
- by how much power he has
- by how much worldly recreation and pleasure he is able to enjoy
- by how famous he becomes
- by how many people he conquers in face to face confrontations or in bed sexually

The flesh (sinful nature) is exalted and evil desires honoured. But this is not the way of God and His Word. Scripture is clear: abstain from evil, sinful desires.

- I. Reason 1: you are aliens and strangers on earth (v. 11).
- II. Reason 2: evil desires, lusts war against your soul (v. 11).
- III. Reason 3: unbelievers are watching (v. 12).

I. *1 Peter 02: 11 Aliens and Strangers on Earth*

Abstain from evil desires because you are aliens and strangers on earth.

1. The word “alien” (parepidemos) has more of a temporary idea than *stranger* (paroikoi). Alien has the idea of a visitor or sojourner, of a foreigner who may be visiting and staying for a while but not long enough to lease a house.

The point is this: the believer is only passing through the earth on his way home to heaven. Heaven is his home, and his heart and mind are at home. He lives in a consciousness of home and his thoughts are upon home. He lives and walks in the consciousness of being in heaven with God. This is his attitude, his thoughts as he walks through his pilgrimage upon earth. He travels through life often moving from city to city, but his mind and heart are always upon heaven which is his permanent home.

Note what this means in so far as the world is concerned: the believer does not become entangled with the world and its affairs. His customs and lifestyle come from heaven, not from the earth. He does not practice the customs and lifestyle of the earth but of heaven.

Heb 11:9-10 *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Heb 11:13-16 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

Heb 13:14 *For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.*

2. The word “stranger” (paroikoi) means someone who dwells alongside or is exiled, but his home is elsewhere. It is the picture of a foreigner who is in a country for a while, long enough to rent or lease a house, but he is not a permanent resident. He has no legal rights or status. He is a stranger, an exile who dwells in a strange land (B.C. Coffin. *First Peter*. “The Pulpit Commentary,” Vol. 22, p.72). What Peter is saying is this: the believer is a stranger, a foreigner, an exile on earth. He is a resident, but he is not a citizen of this earth. He has no legal status in the world. He is not to follow the standards and the ways of the world. He belongs to God and to heaven; therefore, his legal status is in heaven. He is to follow the standards and the ways of God. The believer’s laws are the laws of God, the highest and most moral and just laws in all the universe. The believer has no right to live by the standard and laws of the world, for they are far lower than the standards and laws of God. The believer is to live as a stranger on earth, as one whose heart and mind are upon a far greater home and world. The believer’s heart is to be upon perfection of life and morality and justice, a home and world where perfection is the rule and standard.

Thought 1. This does not mean that the believer does not obey the legal laws of a land. He does; all foreigners are to obey the laws of a land when they visit that land. In fact, believers will go far beyond obeying human laws and do much more when they obey God’s laws. God’s laws and standards stress perfect behaviour plus love, and there is no greater law than love. Therefore, the believer is to abstain from fleshly, sinful desires because such desires are of the world, and he has no right to partake of those fleshly, sinful desires. He is to obey the laws of God which forbid such sins and immoralities.

Phil 3:20-21 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Rev 21:27 *Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*

1 Chr 29:15 *We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.*

II. *1 Peter 02:11 Sinful Desire War against the Soul*

Abstain from evil desires because they war against the soul. The term “sinful desires” (sarkikon epithumion) means the evil desires, urges, passions, lusts of the flesh and cravings of the sinful nature. It means to have a yearning passion for the things of the flesh. Every person has experienced the flesh...

- yearning
- longing
- wanting
- taking
- thirsting
- desiring
- grabbing
- hungering
- pulling
- grasping
- craving

Every person knows what it is to have his flesh craving after something, to have it yearning and yearning to lay hold of something. The flesh is strong and difficult to control, and it never lets up its assault against the will.

1. What are the lusts of the flesh, the acts of the sinful nature? What kinds of sins are being referred to by Scripture? Scripture means far more than the sexual sins usually thought about when the lusts of the flesh are mentioned. They are listed in Galatians 5:19-21. When they are read they paint a picture of human nature that is seen or experienced by us all every day:
 - a. *Sexual immorality* (moicheia): a broad word including all forms of immoral and sexual acts. It is pre-marital sex and adultery; it is abnormal sex, all kinds of sexual vice, sexual unfaithfulness to husband or wife.
 - b. *Impurity* (akatharsia): moral impurity; doing things that dirty, pollute and soil life.
 - c. *Debauchery* (aselgeia): filthiness, indecency and shamefulness.
 - d. *Idolatry* (eidololatreia): the worship of idols, whether mental or material; the worship of some idea of what God is like, of an image of God within a person’s mind; the giving of one’s primary devotion (time and energy) to something other than God. (See *Idolatry*, 1 Cor. 6:9.)
 - e. *Witchcraft* (pharmakeia): sorcery: the use of drugs or of evil spirits to gain control over the lives of others or over one’s own life. In the present context it would include all forms of seeking the control of one’s fate including astrology, palm reading, séances, fortune telling, crystals and other forms of witchcraft.
 - f. *Hatred* (echthrai): enmity, hostility and animosity. It is the hatred that lingers and is held for a long time, a hatred that is deep within.
 - g. *Discord* (ereis): strife, contention, fighting, struggling, quarrelling, dissension and wrangling. It means that a man fights against another person in order to get something:

position, promotion, property, honour or recognition. He deceives, doing whatever has to be done to get what he is after.

- h. *Jealousy (zelo)*: wanting and desiring to have what someone else has. It may be material things, recognition, honour or position.
- i. *Fits of rage (thumoi)*: indignation; a violent, explosive temper; anger; quick and explosive reactions that arise from boiling emotions. But it is anger which fades away just as quickly as it arose. It is not anger that lasts.
- j. *Selfish ambitions (eritheia)*: self-seeking: craving position, power, fame for selfish ends; a strong desire for attainment or achievement to gain honour or recognition; pretension.
- k. *Dissensions (dichostasiai)*: division, rebellion, standing against others and splitting off from others.
- l. *Factions (haireseis)*: sect, party, differences, heresies; some faction rejecting the fundamental beliefs of God, Christ, the Scriptures and the church; believing and holding to some teaching other than the truth.
- m. *Envy (phthonoi)*: this word goes beyond jealousy. It is the spirit...
 - that wants not only the things that another person has, but begrudges the fact that the person has them.
 - that wants not only the things to be taken away from the person, but wants him to suffer through the loss of them.
- n. *Drunkenness (methai)*: taking drink or drugs to affect one's senses for lust or pleasure; becoming tipsy or intoxicated; partaking of drugs; seeking bodily or sexual pleasure through drink or drugs.
- o. *Orgies (komi)*: carousing; uncontrolled license, indulgence and pleasure; taking part in wild parties or in drinking parties; lying around indulging in feeding the lusts of the flesh.
- 2. Note that the flesh, sinful desires war against the soul. The flesh has within it base and unregulated urges and passions. A man senses the desire and urge to do what he likes, to lift the restraints and to follow his own desires and passions. He knows he should not do it, but the pull and desire tugs and struggles and wars against the soul.
- a. The flesh or sinful nature keeps a person from doing what he would. Every person has experienced the power of the flesh; everyone has caved in to the flesh and done something that he did not want to do. He fought against doing it — knew it was harmful or hurtful — yet he could not resist the flesh. He gave in to the power of the flesh and did it. He...
 - overate
 - became angry
 - began smoking
 - got drunk
 - did evil things
 - lusted

- became prideful
- committed immorality
- cursed
- cheated, lied or stole
- acted selfishly

Note another fact as well. All of us have been tempted, and we have known how to combat and overcome the temptation. However, the flesh was so strong we just did not struggle long enough to overcome it. The struggle we experienced involved that of...

- controlling
- showing kindness
- sacrificing
- showing kindness
- being patient
- loving
- helping
- reaching out
- giving
- giving in

The point is this: the flesh is so strong that it often keeps us from doing what we would. The only hope of ever controlling the flesh is to walk in the Spirit of God — in His presence and power.

Rom 7:15-20 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

2 Cor 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

- b. Now note a fact of critical importance: the flesh in itself is not sinful. The flesh or human body is God given; it is for God's use. In fact, when a person is converted to Christ, his body becomes a temple for God to dwell in through the Holy Spirit. The Christian is not told to cleanse himself from the flesh but from "the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16), from "everything that contaminates body and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1), and from "the acts of the sinful nature" (Rom. 13:12; Gal. 5:19). The acts of the sinful nature are the fruit of indwelling sin, and sin originates in the heart not in the flesh.
3. The exhortation is strong: "abstain from sinful desires, which war against the soul." We must abstain from them, for they do unbelievable harm and damage to the soul.
 - a. Sinful desires or fleshly lusts enslave and weaken the freedom of the soul. Sinful desire enslaves, no matter what the desires are:
 - => Desire for drugs enslaves.
 - => Desire for alcohol enslaves.
 - => Desire for cigarettes enslaves.

- => Desire for sex enslaves.
- => Desire for pornography enslaves (films or magazines).
- => Desire for position and power enslaves.
- => Desire for money enslaves.

The more a man follows the desires of the sinful nature, the more freedom and liberty he loses. He becomes a slave to that which he sets his heart upon. If he sets his mind and thoughts upon the flesh and its desires, he will enslave himself to desires. He finds himself enslaved and in bondage to those desires and finds it very difficult to break away from them.

- b. Sinful desires disturb and often destroy the peace and security, assurance and confidence of the soul. When the believer came to Christ, one of the first things Christ did was give him peace and security of soul. If the believer turns back to the world and follows his desires, he breaks his peace with God and loses the security of God's presence and guidance and protection.
- c. Sinful desires hamper the growth of the soul. The soul living in the desires of the flesh [sinful nature] is destroying its fruit, not growing and proclaiming the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).
- d. Sinful desires doom the soul to defeat, sorrow, brokenness and eventually to eternal separation from God.

Thought 1. The exhortation is strong: believers must abstain from fleshly lusts or desires, for they war against the soul.

Mat 5:29 *“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”*

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

Rom 13:14 *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

1 Th 4:3 *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.*

1 Th 5:22 *Avoid every kind of evil.*

1 Pet 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

1 Pet 4:2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

III. 1 Peter 02:12 Witness to the World

Abstain from evil, sinful desires because unbelievers are watching you. The world watches everything a genuine believer does. If a person really follows Christ — if he is genuine — then the world watches. This is the reason for this exhortation: we must live good lives before the world, always abstaining from evil desires.

The word “good” (kalos) means a good life, a life that is honourable, righteous, pure, lovely, decent, excellent, upright and noble. It means a life that is without blame, that cannot be justly or accurately blamed with any sin or evil. The world watches a genuine believer to see if he really lives what he professes. Therefore, we must live good lives, lives that are just what we profess: holy, righteous and pure. Note two reasons why:

1. Unbelievers accuse believers of doing wrong. Some will always accuse genuine believers. If a person really lives for Christ, his righteous and self-denying life convicts those who love the world and its pleasures and possessions. Therefore, they talk about, joke, mock, ridicule, abuse and persecute the believer when they can.

The point is this: the believer must never add fuel to the fire. He must never give the world a chance to justly accuse and down him. The believer must abstain from evil, sinful desires: he must live a good life, do exactly what he proclaims and professes.

2. Unbelievers must have a chance to be saved. If we live bad and fleshly lives — go against all that we proclaim and stand for — then unbelievers will know we are hypocrites. They will not be attracted to Christ. We must, therefore, live for Christ and do good works. When unbelievers see our righteous lives and good deeds, they will experience the day of God’s visitation and glorify God. The day God visits us means two things:

=> the day a man is visited by God to bring the man to repentance and salvation.

=> the day God will visit the earth for final judgment.

The day of visitation is the day of God’s inspection and salvation, the day when He saves a man. It is also the day when He returns to earth as Saviour and Lord. The idea is that unbelievers will be won to Christ by our good lives and glorify God in the great day when He shall visit the earth.

Mat 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

1 Th 1:8 *The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.*

1 Tim 4:12 *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

Titus 2:7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

James 2:18 *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*

James 3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

1 Pet 2:12 *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.*

2 Pet 3:10-12 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ■*