

A Plea for a Blameless Life

1 Peter 2:11-12

Pastor John Miller

I want you to follow with me as I read verses 11 and 12 of 1 Peter 2. Peter says, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you...”—I beg you, I plead with you, I urge you—“...as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your manner of living honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

A famous 19th century Scottish preacher, by the name of Alexander Maclaren, said these words. “The world takes its notions of God, most of all, from the people who say they belong to God’s family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible.” I like that.

Peter’s moving now from salvation to submission. And why he’s moving into submission is because these Christians were persecuted. They were being attacked. They were under affliction from the world for their faith. And what does Peter do? The first thing he does is tell them they’re saved. And he wants them to rejoice and glory in their election, in their destination, in the fact that they are chosen by God, they’re destined for glory and that they’re the people of God. He mentions that in chapter 2, verse 10. He says, “...in times past, you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. You had not obtained mercy, but now you have obtained mercy.” That was the wrap-up on the section on salvation. At one time you were not God’s people; now you are God’s people. At one time you had no mercy; now you do have mercy. That’s a summary of the fact that you’re saved. But now that we’re saved, how then shall we live?

Now a little principle before I move on. Doctrine always comes before duty. Principles always come before practice. A lot of preaching today is on practice. It’s on practical Christian living, to the neglect and absence of doctrinal content. You can’t be what you don’t know you are. And we can only live the Christian life if we know what the Christian life is. So we need not, and it’s important we must not neglect doctrine. In all of Paul’s epistles, as here with Peter’s epistles, he starts with doctrine, then he moves to duty. That’s why we’re going through the whole Scripture, reading every verse in 1 Peter, then in 2 Peter, because we want to get the balance. If I were topically preaching, I would preach on how to have a happy life, how to make money, how to make your dog not dig and go under the fence, how to get a better job, how to be president of the bank, how to be healed, how to lose weight and how to eat healthy and stuff like that. Have a familiar ring? It’s a lot of the preaching today. But the truth is, we need to know what the Christian life is to be able to live it. And always in the Bible, doctrine first, then duty; principles, then practice. We have to know what we are, so that we can live it. What you believe will determine how you behave.

So we’ve spent the last several weeks on salvation, the doctrines of our salvation. Now he moves into submission. And that’s going to be the reoccurring theme. And he wants us to submit—and I’ll come back to it in a moment—as citizens, chapter 2, verse 13; as workers on

the job, chapter 2, verse 18; in our marriage, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2—the wives—and then in chapter 3, verse 7—the husbands; and then in our church. As Christians, we're to be submitted to one another in the family of God. So the first thing that Peter does today, in introducing our topic for the next many weeks of submission, standing in submission, is Peter pleads for us to have a blameless life.

Now if you're taking notes, there's three main points I'm going to draw from this text. The first thing I want to point out is the plea itself. The plea itself. That has a negative side and a positive side; it's twofold. First of all the negative aspect to the plea in verse 11. "Abstain from fleshly lust." Now he starts with "Dearly beloved" because he's reminding them "I love you and God loves you." And then he says, "I beseech you." "I urge you, I plead with you." Peter is an Apostle. I don't believe he was a pope, but he was an Apostle. And yet he comes with this endearing term "My beloved" or "beloved." "God loves you and I love you." And then he pleads with them. He doesn't command them. He doesn't order them. He doesn't boss them around. He's on his knees with tears running down his face, and he's saying, "I beg you please." Number one, "abstain from fleshly lusts..."—he goes on to say—"...which war against the soul."

But the first is negative; "abstain." What does it mean to "abstain"? It means that we hold ourselves off or to refrain. The word "abstain" literally means in the Greek to hold yourself off, to stay away.

The other day, my granddaughter, Madison, was at the house. And our little ritual is always, when she spends the night, the next morning, Papa, who is Pastor John, takes her to get donuts. Someone said, "You are what you eat," and if I was what I ate, I would be a donut. I would be Pastor Donut right now. Pray for me. I taught all my kids to love donuts. I'm teaching all my grandkids to love donuts. I praise God for donuts. But I've been having one of those weeks where I've been eating too much of the wrong things. And I'm kind of like, "Okay. I need to be careful. I need to cut back, and stuff." And then Madison comes over, and it's like, "Papa, are we gonna get donuts?" "Yah, we're gonna get donuts." So I'm looking at my wife and going, "I don't wanna donut. Oh, man." So she goes, "Well, just take her and buy her a donut. You don't need to get one. Just go in and buy her a donut." You know how that works; right?

It started kind of radical too, because we pull up in front of the donut shop, get out of the car and all these policemen were standing in front of the donut shop. Where else do cops hang out? And she's holding this little doll, and she goes, "Papa, you hold the dolly." She wanted me to carry the baby into the donut store. So I'm carrying this doll into the donut store, and I'm thinking, "Okay, I'll just buy her a donut." We get in and "Wow! [sniffing]" I immediately began to speak in tongues. Hallelujah! Right there I drop the baby doll. Hallelujah! I bought six donuts. I figure she's hanging out all day, we're gonna have something to eat; right? It was awesome. We sat on the front porch just eatin' donuts. Man, that was really cool. So, anyway, I don't know how I got into that whole donut story. Abstain; right.

Remember this word and this verse the next time you go to a donut shop. You quote this text. "Abstain from fleshly lust." So it means to hold back. Now the words "fleshly lusts" there. What

does that mean? It is a general term for all evil desires. It connotes the idea of evil desires, not necessarily sexual. That is included but not just sexual desires that are evil. And by the way, there are sexual desires that are evil. The only place that God has ordained sex is in the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. That's God ordained marriage. Anything outside of the covenant is immorality or sexual immorality. So we are to abstain from all the things that are warring against our soul, which can include the cares of the world or overeating of donuts. Now there is nothing intrinsically sinful inside a donut. But if you eat six of them, that can become kind of gluttony; right? There's nothing intrinsically wrong with sleep. I'm going to do that this afternoon. But laziness is sin. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with drinking, but drunkenness is sinful behavior. We need to keep it in the covenant in the way God has ordained.

Now a couple of lessons before I move from this point of abstaining from fleshly lusts. And that is, number one, even we as believers do wrestle with the flesh. He's writing to Christians. Now when I say that, I'm not saying it's okay to go out and sin, that it's okay. We're to abstain. But don't get discouraged when you stumble and fall. We just taught in Romans, chapter 7, on Wednesday night, that Paul says, "The things I want to do, I don't do; the things I don't want to do, I do." My donut story is a classic example. "I'm not going to eat a donut. I'm not going to buy a donut for me." And I did, you know. And you get up in the morning, "I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray." And you don't pray. You get up and "I'm going to read my Bible," and you don't read your Bible. "I'm going to witness," and you don't witness. And we don't do what we want to do; we do do what we don't want to do. So don't be discouraged; we all struggle with the flesh. Even though we've been born again, we still have a sinful nature that can pull us down. That's why we are to abstain.

And it's often in times of difficulty that people will say, "Why should I refrain? Why should I abstain? I can't take it anymore. I'm just going to yield to my sinful impulses." Maybe you yield to discouragement or fear, and maybe then you overeat. Or maybe you yield to some other sin. Maybe you get so bummed out you just go, "I'm gonna go shopping and spend money." I've met people who go, "Oh, when I get really bummed out, I just go shopping." And then the bill comes, and you're really depressed. And we have different ways to escape. Maybe we just want to get alone. Maybe we just want to sleep all day. But we indulge in things that feed the flesh.

Peter knew that from experience when Jesus told him in the Garden of Gethsemane before He was crucified. "Peter, watch and pray..."—why?—"...that you enter not into temptation." And He said these words. He said, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is..."—what?—"...weak." Do you know that? I know that. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." So practice abstinence from things that "war against your soul." In Galatians 5:17-21 there are, like, 17 sins of the flesh that are listed there for us to abstain from: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft..."—which, by the way, in the Greek is "pharmakeia." We get our word "pharmacy," which means "drugs"—"... hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envyings, murders, drunkenness," and "revelings." In the King James Translation, it can be translated "orgies." Literally, we are to abstain from. If we do those things,

the Bible says there in Galatians 5:21, "They that do those things [habitually and continually] will not inherit the kingdom of God." So we are to abstain.

The second is the positive. And I want you to notice it there in verse 12. He says, "Having your conversation..."—and my King James has "conversation"—"...honest among the Gentiles..."—stop right there, first part of verse 12. Now my King James has "conversation," but it's not just about your speech. It's the word that literally means "the way you live." And some of your modern translations have it that way. "Let the way that you live be honest among the Gentiles...." And the word "honest" there means actually to live a "lovely life" or a "beautiful life." The word "honest" is also translated "good works." You might say, "Live a beautiful life before the unbelieving world." The word "Gentiles" is not talking about race. It's talking about non-Christians. The word is used two different ways in the New Testament. It's used for Gentiles, racially, but it's also used as a description for non-Christians. So you have to look at the context to determine how that word is used. Here "Gentiles" means "unsaved, non-Christians." They're not believers.

Now some of you live with non-Christians. Some of you work with non-Christians. I've had people say, "Well, Pastor John, at my job I'm the only Christian, and everyone around me are full-on heathens; idolatrous, fornicating, wicked, vile, wretched sinners. I want to work at Revival. I want to work around Christians." And I say, "God planted you there for a purpose." "Bloom where you're planted"; right? "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, Who is in heaven." Amen? I know it's hard. I know it's difficult. But God has placed you on that job. He's placed you in that office. He's put you in that cubicle. God's put you in that truck. He's put you on that construction site. He's put you in that office. He's placed you in that home. You're surrounded by other believers. We are to live a "beautiful" or "blameless" life. So that is the plea.

Now here's the purpose, point number two. Write it down. Purpose. Now I want to give you the reasons why we should live a blameless life. Reason number one is in verse 11. Because we are "dearly beloved" children. Go back with me to verse 11. "Dearly beloved." Now I think this is the term that we should revive in the church today. We say, "Hi, how you doing? Hey, what's up?" We say, "Hey, bro. What's goin' on?" But in the New Testament, the Christians would call each other "beloved." Now that may seem kind of mushy today, but it's Biblical. What does it mean? It means, number one, God loves you. And it means, number two, I love you. I like that term, "Beloved." And when we greet one another. "Hey, beloved." Because it reminds you that God loves you, and it reminds you that I love you and that we're brothers and sisters in Christ. So remembering that I'm a child of God, loved by God.

The second reason—and it's in verse 11—that we should live a blameless life, is that we are "strangers" and "pilgrims." "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul..." because you are "strangers..."—verse 11—"...and pilgrims." Now what's the difference between a stranger and a pilgrim? Well, they're closely related, but there's a slight distinction. A stranger is an alien. It means a person who is a foreigner. Ever gone to a country you're not a citizen of? You really don't belong there. You're just visiting. You're not a citizen. I've traveled around

the world. I've been in countries when I travel where I can't speak the language, because I only know English. I don't know that very well. I can't speak another language. I can't speak German. Can't speak other languages. Can't speak Spanish. So I'm limited. And you feel funny. You're kind of out of your element. You're a foreigner. People look at you and snicker and laugh, you know. Look at your clothes. And listen to them talk. And you're a stranger. The idea is that you're a foreigner. The spiritual application is that this world is not our home. Do you know that's a reality for you as a Christian? So that's why you should abstain from fleshly or worldly lusts, because this world's not your home. You don't go to the parties you used to go to. You don't do the things you used to do. You don't think like you used to think or talk like you used to talk or walk like you used to walk, because you're a citizen of heaven now. Your home's in heaven. This world's not your home.

I remember when I was a young Christian, we used to hitchhike to witness. It was back in the hippie days. And I had long hair and a beard, and we're all hippies and we got saved. And we'd just stick out our thumb. We used to call it "witness hitchhiking." Hitchhiking evangelism. And somebody pulls over, we'd like get in the car, and we'd tell them about Jesus. Well, my friend and I went witnessing, and we stuck out our thumb. And a guy pulls over in this old pickup truck, we jump in the front seat with him and the guy takes off. He looks over at my friend, and he goes, "Where you guys from?" My friend goes, "We are not of this world." I'm like, "Dude, that is not a good approach!" The guy kicked us out of his truck so fast it wasn't funny. Like, "Okay, you can get out." "We are not of this world." I recommend when you go witnessing you don't go up to them and say, "Hi, I am not of this world." It's not going to influence people for Jesus; okay? But as a Christian, this world is not your home. So don't get so attached to it.

And then the word "pilgrims" means that you're passing through. So you're a stranger; this world's not your home. You're a pilgrim; you're on a journey. I don't know if you've ever read the classic by John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, but it so beautifully in allegory fashion sets forth the Christian life. Christian, its main character, is fleeing the city of destruction. And he bears this burden in reading the book. He comes under conviction, and he falls at the cross. He loses his burden. And then he sees an evangelist pointing to the narrow gate, and he passes through the gate and then he starts on his journey with his friend, Hopeful, to the celestial city. What a beautiful story that is. But though John Bunyan couches it in allegorical terms, it's a reality for you and I as God's people. We're pilgrims. We're strangers. We're just passing through. Don't get too comfortable. Don't get too wrapped up.

Now, again, he's writing to Christians. The first recipients of these words were going through persecution. And he wanted them to remember that you're to witness, and submit and be a witness to them. And remember that fleshly lusts will war against your soul. Remember that you're a stranger and you're a pilgrim. And you need to be careful.

And really, that's my third point as to the reason why we should abstain; that these sins war against the soul. I didn't mention that, but go back with me to verse 11. He says, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." And the word "soul" means your whole personality, your whole being; body, soul and spirit. The word "soul" there is used for the whole person. So

you can't say, "Well, they don't hurt my body. They don't hurt my mind or my emotion; it's just a spiritual thing." No; sin affects your whole being, your whole personality. And you need to abstain. You need to be careful.

So I am loved by God, I'm a stranger, I'm a pilgrim, I'm at spiritual war. The word "war" there means "a strategy of warfare." Satan has a war room, and he's sitting there with all of his demon imps, and he's got your picture on the wall. He knows what you do, he knows where you go and he knows how to attack you. And guess what? The Devil doesn't like you. News flash: Satan hates your guts. And he wants to do all he can to destroy your life. So we need to abstain.

And here's the fifth reason: the world is watching, verse 12. He says, "Have your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas..."—notice the end of verse 12—"...they speak against you as evildoers..."—No matter how you live your Christian life, the world will still attack you—"...they may by your good works..."—there's the beautiful life, there's the admonition to living a good life—"...which they shall behold..."—look at or watch or study—"...they shall glorify God on the day of visitation." Now what is Peter saying here? Peter's basically saying that you want to live a Christian life before a watching world, because God can use that to win them to salvation. When it says, "They will...glorify God on the day of visitation," I don't think he's talking about the Second Coming or the end-time judgment. I think he's saying that if we will live the Christian life, if we will live the beautiful life—and my next point in just a second is going to be where we live that beautiful life—that the unbelievers, though they attack us and accuse us, there's going to come a day when the Spirit of God will visit them, when God will visit them in mercy and in grace and save them. And when they come to salvation, they're going to thank God for your beautiful life. Your life is either a help or a hindrance in evangelism. Your life is either helping to win other peoples to Christ, or it's hindering other people to come to Christ. You are either a stepping stone or a stumbling stone. And if you're living in love for the glory of God, you're going to want to live in such a way that you don't stumble others but that you help them to find the Lord by the way that you live.

And so he's telling these battered and discouraged and persecuted Christians, "Abstain from fleshly lusts." God loves you. You're a stranger. You're a pilgrim. "Fleshly lusts war against the soul." And people are watching you. They're watching you. Your wife's watching you. Your husband's watching you. If you're saved, and your husband's unsaved, ladies, he's watching you. We're going to get that in a couple of weeks. If you're a husband, and your wife's not a Christian, she's watching you. We're going to get there in a couple of weeks. On the job, they're watching you. They're reading you. They're studying your life.

You know, I encourage you to bring unsaved tonight to the meeting we're going to have, but if your life isn't consistent with the message, you're going to undermine the preaching of the Gospel. "Hey, come here. Our pastor's preaching tonight. You know, we're going to have a concert and you're gonna hear some music, and you can hear him preach. Come here." "Hey, after watching the way you live, I don't want to go to any church you're a part of." God, help us not to be a stumbling stone. Help us to be a stepping stone. So he's really preparing them for

the practical outworking of how they should live. The world is watching.

You know, when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned in Acts 7, and he was preaching with such power and boldness, the enemies of God rose up against him. They picked up rocks and started stoning Stephen. By the way, the name “Stephen” is “Stefanos,” which means “crown.” The first Christian martyr wore the first crown. And Jesus—the only place in the whole Bible—was seen standing in heaven to welcome Stefanos, the crown, into heaven and give him the martyr’s crown. But when the stones were pelting Stephen’s body—you know the story—it says that people were looking on, and Stephen’s face shone like an angel. And Stephen prayed for his persecutors. You know what he said? He said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” He said, “Lay not this sin to their charge.”

Now, guess who was in the crowd watching and listening to Stephen die? His name was Saul. We know him as Paul, the Apostle. And when Saul was converted on the Damascus road, the Lord said, “Isn’t it hard for you to kick against the goads?” A long, pointed stick they would use to prod the oxen in the field while they plowed. And it’s a reference to the Holy Spirit, which was convicting Saul’s heart, because Stephen had loved them and prayed for them. And he saw the witness and the testimony and the Word that he spoke. The Spirit of God was using that to convict Saul, and he was converted. And, you know, Stephen never knew. He died and went to heaven. Can you imagine Stephen thinking, you know, “Wow. I preached the Gospel, I get stoned and I die.” But God used that to begin to convict and convince Saul that he needed Jesus, and he was converted on the Damascus road. God help us to live a beautiful and blameless life.

Now where do we live this blameless life? This is my third point, and it won’t be long. The place. So the plea, the purpose and the place. And for this, we move ahead, and this is going to be our studies for the next several weeks. First of all, notice in verse 13, we’re to live out a beautiful life as citizens. “Submit yourselves...”—verse 13—“...to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme...”—verse 14 says—“...the governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, for the praise of them that do well.” Do you know that as Christians we’re to be obedient to the law? We’re actually to keep the law. The only time it’s okay for a Christian to break the law is if by obeying God, it requires you to break the law. If God tells me to pray, and the United States government passes a law that you cannot pray, I become a law breaker. If the United States of America passes a law that says you can’t read your Bible, I’m going to become a law breaker. But I have to make sure I’m obeying God rather than men. I can’t just willy-nilly go out and pick laws I want to obey in the name of serving the Lord. They have to directly conflict with the laws of God. Otherwise, we don’t riot in the street, we keep the law, we try our best to drive the speed limit. Let’s pray for ourselves right now. You read in your Bible that we’re free from the law. “I don’t have to drive the speed limit, praise Jesus!” I don’t think the police officer’s going to go for that.

So we’re going to spend a few weeks talking about being a Christian in our city, in our state and in our nation; what our responsibility is to submit to the authorities that be. We’re going to look at submission in the state. And then, secondly, we’re going to look at submission in the

workplace. Jump down to verse 18. "Servants, be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh." Now it may not be slavery on the job today, but the application is the workplace. And when you go to the job on Monday morning, you're not free to disobey your boss. You're not free to do whatever you want. You have to be submitted on the job.

And then this is the one we've really been waiting for. Chapter 3, verse 1. "Likewise, you wives, be in subjection to your own husbands." You ladies can't wait to get to that verse. "...be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the way the wife lives her life, while they see and watch and behold your pure manner of living, coupled with the reverence for God." There it is.

Jump down with me to verse 7. "Husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, because you are heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered."

So everything we've been taught in verses 11 and 12 applies to the state, it applies on the job and it applies in the home. And then chapter 3, verse 8, it applies in the church. "Finally, be all of one mind, have compassion one of another, love as brothers, be courteous and thoughtful and have pity on one another." Someone put it in a poem.

You're writing a Gospel,

A chapter each day,

By the things that you do

And the words that you say.

Men read what you write,

Whether faithful or true.

Tell me what is the Gospel

According to you.

Let's pray.