

A Plea for a Blameless Life

1 Peter 2:11-12

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I want to back up. I like to do that a lot because I want to get the context, and it introduces us to the text. Go back with me to 1 Peter 2:9, and we'll get a running start on verses 11-12. Peter says, "But ye are a chosen generation,"—notice he's going to be speaking to the believer, "But ye" talking to the believers there. They were probably mostly Gentile believers who had come to faith in Christ. He describes them in four ways: ". . . ye are a chosen generation," he's talking about the Church; "a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,"—that's God's very own special people. The reason God has chosen us as the Church, "that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." I love that picture of us as the believers, we're ". . . called you out of darkness into his"—God's—"marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people,"—so the believers were not the people of God, which was Israel—"but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy,"—in their preconverted days before the Church—"but now have obtained mercy."

Notice our text begins in verse 11, "Dearly beloved." The description that he just gave, verses 9-10, is now he's speaking to them as they are believers, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims,"—that's the theme—"abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul: 12 Having your conversation"—which means the way you live—"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." I want you to notice that Peter describes us as ". . . strangers and pilgrims," and we're going to come back to that.

I remember when I first got saved in the early 1970s, that we used to do what we'd call evangelistic hitchhiking. How many of you old people remember when you could hitchhike in America? Remember that? Remember what was called "hitchhiking"? How many of you have no idea what hitchhiking is? Just think about that. You don't see that anymore, right? People stand out on the street, stick their thumb up, and a total stranger pulls over, picks you up and gives you a ride. What a different world we live in today. We thought, You know, what a great way to witness to people, to connect with people, so we used to just grab our Bibles and stick our thumb out and go hitchhiking. We'd jump in a car and share the gospel.

I was with this one guy who was a baby Christian, and he'd just heard teaching on the idea that we as Christians were not of this world, that we were "strangers and pilgrims" and sojourners and that this world is not our home. We went out to "hitchhike witness." We stuck our thumb out, and this guy pulls up in this cool, old pickup truck. We jump up in the front of the pickup truck with him. He takes off and says to us, "Where are you guys from?" My friend, this baby Christian, said, "We are not of this world." I'm thinking, Oh! That is not the best way to start your witness. The guy pulled immediately over and said, "You can get out right now." He said, "We're not of this world," and it's like, "Dude, that's not the way to open a witness to a nonbeliever. They don't understand that concept."

Peter is going to be telling us as believers that concept that we are “. . . strangers”—or foreigners—“and pilgrims,” that we are journeying through this world. But we’re like Abraham who “. . . looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God.” I know we hear that and we understand that, but we never really think about the reality of that and let it impact or influence our lives and the way that we should live. Peter is writing to Christians who are going through a time of suffering and persecution. They were facing what Peter called “a fiery trial.” Peter pleads with them that the best way to answer the persecution and opposition of the world is by living an unimpeachable, blameless life.

We’re coming in Peter’s epistle to a new division. Think about the first division. He’s talking about the salvation of their souls, and he described them as being chosen, being those who are born unto a living hope, those that are actually saved by God’s power, and that they were a new people. As I mentioned back in verse 10, “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” Back up into verse 9, too. He says, “. . . that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” He’s been talking about our salvation, we’re chosen, we’re saved by God’s grace, and now we are no longer of this world but we are children of God, our true citizenship is in heaven, so we want to live on earth as citizens of heaven in a way that will be unimpeachable and blameless before a watching, persecuting world.

Now, I’ve already mentioned we come to a new division in the book of 1 Peter, and we move from the doctrinal section to the practical section. By the way, in Paul’s epistles and Peter’s epistles, in all of the Scriptures the Bible always has the doctrine first, then the duty, or the principles, then the practice. A lot of preaching today, when the preacher doesn’t go systematically through books of the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and you get the text in context, they sometimes like to jump to the practical sections and they skip the doctrinal sections. You can’t really put into practice—listen to me very carefully—you can’t put into practice what you don’t know is true of you as a believer. You live based on what you believe. Your belief determines your behavior. This is why doctrine always comes first. What you believe determines how you behave. Sound doctrine brings sound living. It’s a sad tragedy that a lot of pastors in a lot of churches are just getting right into the practical—how to be a better husband, how to be a better wife—and that’s good stuff, it’s important; but you need to know who you are in Christ. You need to understand your position in Christ before you can live out your practice. You must first stand before you can walk, so that’s the logical and theological and biblical sequence that you find in the Scriptures.

Peter now moves from the grace of God in salvation is the grace of God in submission. I’ll point these verses out a little later tonight, but the area that we are to submit is in our citizenship, we’re to be obedient to government, 1 Peter 2:13. We’re to be submitted in our work as servants to our masters. In the context it’s slaves to their masters, for us it would be employees and employers, 1 Peter 2:18. Then, in our marriage, and I really encourage you not to miss that when we get to chapter three and we study verses 1-7. It’s one of the great passages in the Bible on marriage, and we’ll break it down.

Fourthly, as members of the Christian assembly or the Church, 1 Peter 3:8, and that runs all the way down to verse 12, but first Peter pleads with us to live a life of purity and blamelessness. It's a brief summary and admonition, a preamble as it were, to the specific relations that will follow. Again, our relationships with others must flow out of our relationship to God.

There are three main things I want to point out tonight, if you're taking notes, and then I'll break them down. The first is we have the plea for a blameless life, and notice two things about this. First of all we are to verse 11, “. . . abstain from fleshly lusts.” That's the first aspect of this plea for the believers. He's pleading with them, “I beseech you,” I beg you, please, verse 11. The word “beseech” means to urge or to plead. It means to beg or employ. Peter is on his knees saying, “Please live a holy life. Live a life where you,” verse 11, “. . . abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

That phrase “abstain” is in what's called the present tense. What does that mean? It means continually, ongoingly, habitually keep resisting sinful, fleshly desires, “. . . abstain from fleshly lusts.” The word “abstain” literally means to hold oneself off. It means to refrain. So, what do we hold ourselves off from or refrain from? Verse 11, “. . . fleshly lusts.” This is a general term in the New Testament to designate all the desires of man's sinful nature. It's not just speaking of sexual sins, which often we equate it with, but to any strong desire that is inconsistent with the will of God. We are to be careful not to partake of “. . . fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

Do you know that as a believer, even though you've been born again—I'm opening up an important doctrinal truth—and you get a new nature, which is a capacity to live a life to please God, you still have a sinful nature. Now, in Christ, it's been put out of business. In Romans Paul says it's *katargéō* in the Greek. It means to render inoperative. It's like plugging in a vacuum. It's working fine, roaring loudly, but when the cord pulls out of the wall, it turns off. So, that's to render it inoperative. You disconnect it. Your old sinful nature, which is just a capacity you're born with, it's also known as the Adamic nature, still does exist.

Now, you'll find difference of opinion on this with preachers and teachers and Bible students today, and I basically believe, and some would disagree with me but I'm right and they're wrong, that even though you've been regenerated, you still have the capacity to sin, right? How many of you would say, “Since I was born again, I never sinned again.” I mean, if you say that, you're a liar and the truth is not in you. That's not me, that's a Bible verse, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So, we do still sin, but we have a new capacity, a new nature. I like to use the word “capacity” for nature. We also have still the old sinful flesh that we're to abstain from. Now that we're Christians, we're not supposed to yield to our sinful appetites the way we did when we were non-Christians.

You know, before you were saved you had one nature and it was a sinful nature and you did quite well following that. You'd just sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, and it just came natural. Once you became a believer, now you have a new nature, “. . . the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other,” and Paul said in Romans 7, the things that want to do, I don't do; the things I don't want to do, I do. You

get up in the morning, “I’m not going to do it. I’m not going to (huff huff) do it. Aww! I did it.” Or, “I’m gonna do it. I’m gonna do it,” and then you don’t do it. But if you yield to the Spirit, if you, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” You have a new nature, which you didn’t have before your salvation, but the goal is to see yourself as crucified with Christ, that the old nature is dead in Christ, that you yield to the new nature and you are filled with the Holy Spirit and that you walk in newness of life with victory.

I love Galatians, we’re going to peek at it in just a moment, where Paul says that if we, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” How’s that for marriage counsel tonight? If you’re married here tonight, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh,” okay? That’s my marriage counsel. You don’t have to come see me, just do that. Get born again and Spirit-filled and put it into practice in your lives.

Paul said in Romans 7 that he still struggled, even after conversion, with the flesh, which is again the different terms for the Adamic nature, the sinful flesh or the impulses of the flesh or sin that lieth within me. You know, it’s oftentimes of persecution that we get discouraged and we want to give up and just yield to the old sinful impulses. By the way, no matter how long you walk with God, the flesh will continually want to take dominance of your life, so you’re never going to reach a plateau where you go to victory and no more war. I just thought I’d encourage you. You can’t have some experience with the Holy Spirit that lifts you to some plateau that you’re just going to plane way up here and you’re never going to yield to the flesh again. You must constantly battle that and continue to “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

Peter knew from experience—did he not?—the danger here. Remember when Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is,”—what?—“willing, but the flesh is weak.” Peter denied three times that he knew the Lord, and he cursed and swore and said, “I don’t know Him,” and he surrendered to the flesh and denied his Lord. So, we must, “Watch and pray,” and rely upon the Spirit.

Now, just a real quick peek, hold your place here. I don’t often have you turn in your Bible, but turn to Galatians 5:17 where Paul actually lists the works of the flesh. If we are exhorted in Peter to “. . . abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul,” let’s be clear on what some of these lustful desires are that the old sinful flesh in the Adamic nature brings into our life. Beginning in Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Again, this is the biblical teaching of the war that we have going on as believers. Verse 18, “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these,”—look at this horrible, horrible list of sins of the flesh that we should abstain from or run from—“Adultery,”—which is just a general term for sexual immorality—“fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” By the way, that’s which those who

habitually practice these things showing evidence that they are not truly born again.

It doesn't mean that if you fall into one of these sins that you are lost and you're going to hell. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But if you are habitually practicing this kind of lifestyle, it is an indication that you are not a true child of God.

I encourage you to read that passage, by the way, in the NIV. There are some 17 works of the flesh in this text listed for us to avoid, and I like the NIV's rendering of some of these words from the King James Bible in the old English that are a little different or difficult to determine what they mean. "Variance," by the way in the NIV is described as discord. "Emulations" is jealousy; "wrath" is fits of rage; "strife" is selfish ambition; "seditions" are dissensions; and "heresies" is factions. Then, "murders, drunkenness, revellings," in the NIV are translated orgies. So there are sexual sins, there are other sins. There is anger, wrath, bitterness and all these things that are listed there for us and made clear in verse 21, we " . . . shall not inherit the kingdom of God," if we're living this kind of a lifestyle.

Remember the sower and the seed that landed on the soil that had the weeds, it choked out this seed and did not produce fruit, so there was no genuine salvation or conversion.

Go back with me to 1 Peter 2. First, and by the way, verse 11, if you're taking notes, is the negative appeal, and verse 12 is the positive appeal. It starts with the negative in verse 11, and then it goes to the positive in verse 12. Secondly, it goes to verse 12, and the plea to live honestly before the unsaved world. The twofold petition or plea: 1) abstain from fleshly lusts; 2) live honestly before the watching, unbelieving, unsaved world around you. Look at verse 12, "Having your conversation"—manner of living. The word "conversation" in my Bible is old English for how you live. It's not how you talk, it's about how you walk. So, the way we live should be " . . . honest among the Gentiles,"—which means the non-Christians, the unbelievers when they look at us—"that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers"—and these first-century believers were attacked in so many ways, in so many levels for their faith, and we are as well today—"they may by your good works, which they shall behold,"—which is your "honest conversation," here they're called "good works"—glorify God in the day of visitation."

So, two things, we are to " . . . abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," and I'll talk about that in a minute; and we are to live honestly before the unsaved, unbelieving, watching world. Not only will you exercise discipline in the area of fleshly indulgence, but we must also maintain a conduct that is honorable. This phrase means live a lovely life, literally translated, or beautiful life. Some have honest life. It's the same as verse 12, "good works." If you are a Christian, your life should be marked by honesty, by integrity, by beauty, by good works. You should have a beautiful life. This is a plea for a beautiful life. Why? Because unbelievers are watching.

Now, we move secondly, if you're taking notes, to the purpose for the blameless life. So, the plea: live blamelessly—don't get involved in physical, sexual, fleshly appetites. Secondly, live

beautifully before the watching world. Notice the purpose behind this blessed life. Why live a blessed life? I'm glad you asked. Let me give you four reasons. I want you to write them down. First, we are "dearly beloved" children of God, verse 11. I'm going to skip back and forth between verses 11 and 12. Go back with me to verse 11. Why should we live a blameless life? Notice what he calls them, verse 11, "Dearly beloved."

You know, I wish we could revive this in the church. I know it's kind of mushy—it might be a little too mushy. It might be difficult for some to use, but we say, "Bro, how you doing, dude?" and stuff like that. Why don't we say, "Beloved"? Because here's what it reminds us of, and I've always loved this, it reminds us that God loves you. If I say to you, "Beloved," I'm reminding you, reminding us, God loves us. Secondly, it also reminds you that I love you, and what a beautiful thought—God loves you, and I love you. We should be using this in the body of Christ, "Beloved." He says, "Dearly beloved." I love that. It's just such an endearing term, so Peter's love for them. This is the first reason why we should live a blameless life—God loves me. I don't want to grieve Him. I don't want to offend Him. I don't want to wound His sensitive heart.

The second reason, verse 11, we are " . . . strangers and pilgrims." There's our terms. We're loved by God; we're strangers and pilgrims in this world. These two terms many Greek scholars believe are kind of synonymous, but they have a little different focus or emphasis though they are very similar. "Strangers" conveys the idea of aliens, aliens, that we are not of this world. This world is not our home. We hear a lot about needing to have a secure border in the United States and that we have illegal aliens, that this is not their home, this is not their country. They're strangers. Well, this is spiritually speaking for us as believers, and we need to let the reality of that grip our lives—how we live our lives here on earth. Let your contact with the world be as light as possible. The word "pilgrims" speaks of the fact that we're only here for a short time. So, two things, this world is not my home.

If you're a believer, the older you get, the longer you walk with God, the more your body starts to unwind and go downhill...I'm just giving you a promise from God that that will happen. You can eat good, you can exercise and you should, but if the Lord tarries long enough, it's going to happen. You know what? That reality is all the sweeter of going to heaven. That's my home. I'm going to get a new body.

I have friends in the church here and they're getting older and their bodies are starting to fall apart. Sometimes when the old folks get together it's kind of like having an organ recital, "What's not working on you right now?" It's all you talk about. The other day I was with a group of guys and we're talking about all our aches and pains. I thought, We are getting so old that this is what our conversation's about. You realize all the more that this world is not your home, that your treasures are laid up in heaven, that's your home. That's a very precious thought, and it motivates the way you live.

The idea as well that we're only here for a short time. This is not our home, it's a short time. "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Life is like a vapor of

smoke that appears for a time and then, (whoosh) it vanishes away. It's like a flower that springs up fresh in the morning, and it's withered by the noon heat. Life is so brief. The Bible teaches the certainty of death and the brevity of life.

In the Old Testament Abraham is such a great picture of this, "For he looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God," and the two things that marked Abraham's life were a tent and an altar. I love that. He was a stranger and a pilgrim. He was a man who worshiped God. So, don't live for the lusts of the flesh. Matthew 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God."

Here's the third. So, the first, why should we live a blameless life? We're "dearly beloved," verse 11; secondly, we're "strangers and pilgrims;" thirdly, verse 11, because they " . . . war against the soul." We missed that in verse 11, and I wanted to go back. Notice the word "war." By the way, this "war" is in the Greek, again, the present tense. It means what I said earlier that it's not just a battle, it's not just an attack, it's a constant war; and as a believer, you're always warring against the devil. He never takes a vacation. He'll never leave you alone, so it's a constant, continual battle—present tense. It's not just a battle, it's a strategy, a warfare.

You've read Ephesians 6, no doubt, where it says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers . . . against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God . . . that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." That word "wiles" means strategies, plans, plots. He strategizes how he can attack you. We're in a battle. We're in a spiritual war. It's so important that we stand against the wiles of the devil.

Here's the fourth as to why we should abstain from fleshly lusts because the world is watching, verse 12. Notice in verse 12 he says, " . . . the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers." Again, this is one of the warfares that we're in, Satan using unbelievers to accuse us, to malign us, to attack us and to oppose us and come against us. But the truth is, if we live blamelessly, and we resist fleshly lusts which war against our soul, by living with, verse 12, " . . . good works, which they shall behold," and God will be glorified, "glorify God in the day of visitation." They speak against you. Again, he's writing to believers that were being persecuted, but they were living blameless lives.

Do you know the best way to silence critics is to live a blameless life. Live above reproach. Do you know what that phrase means, by the way? That's one of the qualifications for a pastor—above reproach. It doesn't mean perfect—praise God for that—but what it means is if someone were to accuse them...this is what the word literally means okay? the etymology of the word, that the accusation cannot stick. It means it can't stick. That his life is lived so above reproach that any accusation just bounces off or cannot stick. It carries the idea that there's nothing that they can grab ahold of in that man's life. Even though that word is used for the qualification of a pastor, it also is used for all believers, so you're not off the hook. Live in such a way, any accusation comes, there's no possible way that it could even stick because you're living a life above reproach. That's so important. The world is watching.

I didn't finish reading verse 12. It says, "... they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which"—here's the phrase—"they shall behold." Look at that, "... they shall behold," so they're going to see us...they're not listening to what you say, they're watching how you live. They're watching the way you...you can't win someone to Christ with words if your life doesn't back up what you say, so we need to live lives that are unrepachable.

What does he mean by "... glorify God in the day of visitation"? It's a little bit challenging to understand, and there are two ideas. One is that they will be judged by God, "... the day of visitation," meaning the judgment of God, and when they're judged by God, that God will be glorified. But perhaps, and I lean this way but I can't be sure, that the phrase that they will "... glorify God in the day of visitation," it's used repeatedly and primarily for, both Old and New Testament, the idea of God visiting with blessing and salvation to a person's life. It's talking about God visiting them in saving them. So, what it very well could be saying, and I tend to lean this direction in interpreting it, is that if you live an unrepachable life, that there's a good chance that they will come to glorify God when they get saved, the day God visits them, the day God comes to save their souls. How many times have you heard a testimony of someone that said, "Yeah, a Christian was witnessing to me, but I just watched their life. I watched the way they lived, and I wanted what they had. I wanted to get what they had, so I inquired about Jesus and I came to faith Jesus Christ," and they glorified God because God came to them and visited them.

You know, in the book of Acts, chapter 7, there's the first Christian martyr. His name was Stephen, Stéphanos in the Greek. That word Stéphanos, Stephen, means crown. It's a beautiful name, by the way. Isn't it fascinating the first Christian martyr Stéphanos wore the martyr's crown, the first to wear the martyr's crown? And, you know when they were stoning Stephen, and he looked into heaven and saw the heavens open and saw the Lord? Guess who was in the crowd watching this martyrdom? Saul of Tarsus, who became—what?—Paul the Apostle. Then, on the road to Damascus, when he was converted, the Lord spoke and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? Isn't it hard for you to kick against the goads," resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Could it be that when Saul watched Stephen die with the glory of God on his face and a prayer on his heart, "Lord Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge," and he died or fell asleep the Bible says that it so convicted Saul. He never could escape that, "Why do you resist the goads?" the Holy Spirit's conviction. Even when you're opposed and persecuted, if you live a blameless life and you glorify God, people can come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior on this "day of visitation."

Here's my third and last division, that is, the place we should live a blameless life. This whole teaching tonight is just introduction to our new section, so I just want to spot point them out. Where should we live the blameless life? Well, we're going to find in verse 13 that we should live a blameless life in our city and nation, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme." Look at verse 14, "Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." So, first sphere of living our blameless life is before the government around us.

The second sphere is in verse 18, in our place of work or employment. “Servants”—or slaves—“be subject”—notice I said that this section starts the stand in submission. So, verse 13, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man;” verse 18, “Servants”—submit yourselves—“be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. 19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.” Then, it just goes on, “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God,”—God is glorified.

The third place that we should live a blameless life is in our homes. Again, I can’t wait, this is so practical. We’re going to get there. Look at 1 Peter 3. He speaks to wives in verses 1-2, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection.” So, 1 Peter 2:13, submit; 1 Peter 2:18, submit; 1 Peter 3:1, “. . . wives”—submit yourselves—“to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word,”—so, they’re unbelievers—“they also may without the word”—without preaching—be won by the conversation”—the way that you live—“of the wives; 2 While they behold your chaste”—or pure—“conversation”—or living—“coupled with fear”—reverence for God.

So, in the city, in the nation, in the workplace, in the home, and don’t miss verse 7, the husbands, “Likewise, ye husbands.” When it uses the word “likewise” in verse 7, it ties into verse 1, submission as well. There’s a sense in which husbands are to be submissive. Husbands are to “dwell with them”—their wives—“according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker”—it’s comparative—“vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.” We’re going to go deep into those two categories—for the wife and for the husband—on Wednesday night.

The fourth area after we leave the home will be in the church, 1 Peter 3:8-12. You got that? So, in the nation, in the city, in the workplace on the job, in our homes—husbands and wives, and in the church, 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Now, you say, “Well, I don’t know about being able to live a blameless life.” You have a new nature. You have the Holy Spirit. You’re “. . . a royal priesthood, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the”—works and the praises of God. Amen? We should be shining in the dark world. Let’s pray.