

It is my joy to minister the Word of God to you. Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Peter 2:11-12. Before we look at the text, I would like you to think with me regarding a few things. Very few people will ever have any desire to hear the gospel, much less have any desire to consider it. But in fact, millions of people will see it with their eyes every day of their life, because millions of people observe the gospel by looking at other Christians. They watch our lives. People without Christ scrutinize our responses to trials and tribulations. In fact, the unbelieving world is ever vigilant to find fault in Christians. They are very quick to spot hypocrisy. They shout it from the rooftops. There is a relentless and bellicose barrage of Christian-bashing in our American culture today. In fact, it is a culturally acceptable position in our colleges and universities. As we look at the extreme secular left of our country we quickly see that they are horrified whenever they see Christians or any kind of Christian virtue involved in politics, and certainly they do all they possibly can to marginalize Christian conservatives.

Conservative Christians are often accused of being hate-mongers, and they see and voice this especially whenever we have any concern about the moral freefall that is in our country. Hollywood loves to portray Christians as simple-minded morons and intolerant bigots. In fact, if any other group were treated as Christians today in our country, like the gays or Muslims, if they received the same kind of ridicule there would be a nuclear explosion of outrage in our country. Whenever a prominent person, one who is ostensibly a Christian—maybe he is, maybe he isn't, and most of the time they are not—whenever that type of a person falls into some type of scandalous sin, those people become raw meat for the feeding frenzy of the media.

Please understand that I am not trying to rally the troops to fight in some kind of cultural war. That is not our mandate as Christians. Our mandate is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and see men and women reconciled to God through faith in Christ. But I do believe that it's very important for us to understand and recognize that the world hates us. The world hates the God of the Bible. The world hates His Law. The world hates His condemnation of sinners. The world hates the Lord Jesus Christ. And certainly they hate the message of forgiveness and reconciliation that the gospel brings. Because of all of this, the world will always be hyper-vigilant to find fault in us and therefore justify their hatred of us and convince themselves of their own self-righteousness. This, dear friends, is just the way it is in the fallen world in which we live. How many times have you heard people say, "Oh those Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites!" If I've heard that once I've heard it a thousand times. So we must do all we can to silence the opposition, not to fuel it. Therefore I've entitled my sermon, "Silencing the Opposition."

Let me give you a bit of context so that you remember where we are in our study of the Word before we look at the text. The people of the first century, the unregenerate people of that day, were exactly like they are today in our culture. They hated the Christians, Christians that were reading this letter the first time in the first century. They were despised, ridiculed, falsely accused, and as typically is the case, the political spin of that day was able to convince the naïve populace of how bad Christians were and very quickly the rest of the people would parrot the political spin. In fact, because Christians participated in the ordinance of communion and partook of what the non-believing world perceived to be the blood and body of Christ, they were called cannibals. Certainly that was a very wicked thing to be in that day, as well as today. Moreover, because Christians greeted each other with a holy kiss in their times of fellowship, that got spun out of control and they were accused of being involved in sexual orgies.

Because Christians considered themselves to be citizens of another kingdom, they were considered to be insurrectionists, worthy of death to the Roman empire. Because Christians were opposed to slavery they were accused of undermining the social and economic stability of Rome. Because they refused to worship Caesar, they were considered rebels as well as atheists, if you can imagine that. You must understand, Roman citizens were not allowed to participate in any religion that was not sanctioned by the state. And on and on it went.

Persecution was mounting for the people of that day. First century Christians also had a problem that the Spirit of God was concerned with, one that we must be aware of as well. They did not want the Christians to start hating the very ones they were called to love. There was a real danger of that in those days, as it is in this day. So, in an effort to encourage them, first we see the Spirit of God speaking through the inspired apostle, helping the people remember the nature of their salvation. And now, in an effort to silence the opposition, as well as to be more effective in evangelism, Peter makes a very passionate plea. Here's what he says in 1 Peter 2:11-12. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. 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."

It will be helpful for you to approach this passage by examining three categories of thought. First of all, Peter is going to offer three reasons for godly living, worthy of our solemn consideration. Secondly, we will consider our inward battle against fleshly lust, an issue that your flesh will fight as you hear it. And thirdly, we will consider our outward victory of conquered lust, a sobering reminder of the purpose and power of godly living. So first of all, we will see three reasons for godly living, and this is the basis of Peter's plea to us. First he says that we are "beloved." Notice he says this in verse 11. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul." When we are truly loved by someone, naturally we will want to reciprocate with our own love. And the reciprocal expression of our love will be to serve them, to honor them. Certainly we as believers, as Christians, are the object of God's love, a love that exceeds our ability to even comprehend. Despite our hopelessly biased assessment of our own lovability, we are not a loveable people. And yet God loves us. In fact, as we look at Scripture, we discover that apart from Christ, everything that we do, everything that we are, is fundamentally offensive to God. And yet we know that Christ loved us, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. This is the love of God. So Peter uses this term of endearment to remind us of our most appropriate and joyful obligation to be obedient. So he begins by saying "Beloved." This is the first reason for godly living.

Secondly, he says that you are "aliens and strangers" in verse 11. In other words, he's reminding his audience that this world is not our home. We are merely passing through this life. So the thought would be simply this. Why on earth would you want to adopt the customs of the sinful system that is radically different and even hostile to the holiness of our heavenly home? You're aliens, strangers. "Aliens" literally means, "alongside the house," *paroikous* in Greek. It can even be translated a "bydweller." A sojourner, as opposed to a citizen. The point is that the term later came to describe one who is a foreigner, one who is merely living alongside the people he or she would be visiting. Here we understand that we are living alongside, we're not living inside, this world system. We do not belong here, this is not our home. Our citizenship is in heaven.

He also says that we're strangers, which is a synonym for aliens. It can as well be translated "pilgrim," which is a person who is visiting another land. So don't live like these people. If you spend much time

around non-Christians, you will very quickly have this feeling of, “I just don’t fit in. I just don’t belong here.” If you don’t feel that, there’s something wrong with your spirituality and you need to assess that. Don’t live like these people. You’re aliens, you’re strangers. Don’t adopt their wicked lifestyles. Don’t take on their selfish and immoral attitudes and behaviors. We see this most vividly in youth. Sometimes, sadly, we see it in Christian youth. Desperate to be seen as acceptable to their peers and craving to be part of the world, they will study some group, maybe a singing group or athletic group. They will wish to identify with them so desperately that they will adopt their looks, their attitude, their behaviors, and before you know it you see youth wearing ridiculous clothes, having bizarre hairstyles, tattoos and body piercing. They listen to the music, they learn the lingo, they start walking and acting like this. Before you know it, they’re mimicking everything that they do.

I must remind you that we are told in 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness; or what fellowship has light with darkness?” You take a dark room and put light in it and you see there is no assimilation, there’s either light or darkness. The point is, come out and be separate from the world. Don’t choose to go in and be a part of the world. And unfortunately young people become adults and that assimilation becomes ever more sophisticated and wicked. Peter’s point is simply, you’re a stranger, you’re a pilgrim. Don’t live like these people. Do not adopt their wicked lifestyles. Don’t mimic them. You have no permanent home on earth so do not devote your life to become like those who hate God. Don’t even spend your time acquiring possessions, things that will impede your journey. If I can say it a little differently, don’t allow yourself to get attached to this place. It’s not your home. Instead, maintain a deliberate detachment from this world.

So not only does Peter call us to godly living because we’re beloved by God and we’re aliens and strangers, but thirdly he says you are being “observed” by the Gentiles, as he says at the end of verse 12. “Gentiles” being a reference to the unsaved masses of the world. Think of it. These people are speaking evil of you. They are slandering you. They call you evildoers. They hate all that you stand for, all that is precious to you. They hate the One that you love and serve, the One that you long to see face-to-face, so why behave like them and give them even more reason to slander you? Instead we should live godly lives that silence the critics. That’s the point. Be a people beyond reproach, blameless, loving and kind and Christlike. How can you possibly expect people that are unsaved to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a transforming gospel, that it causes people to become new creatures in Christ, if they look at you—who claim to be a Christian—and they can see no difference between you and themselves, or the rest of the world? So in verse 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.”

Now, as we look at this text, Peter surrounds these important reasons to live godly lives by addressing two more crucial concepts. These are our inward battle against lust and our outward victory of conquered lust. Here we must all humble ourselves under the loving conviction of the Holy Spirit, for indeed we all have besetting sins whether we want to admit them or not. In fact we are told in Proverbs 21:2 that, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.” Since sin originates in the heart, it must be in the heart that we fight sin. That’s why Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

So Peter calls us to godly living in verse 11. He says, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.” Our second consideration is our inward

battle against fleshly lust. I want you to hang on here, because as I go through this you're going to find a battle ensuing in your heart. You are going to hear some things that you will not like to hear because it brings conviction to your heart, because the Spirit of God will be at work with you. You're going to have a first-hand experience of this very thing right now, just wait and see. He says, "I urge you" meaning, I beseech you, I encourage you. This is a word that was used to rally troops into battle. It's a rallying cry. We see it for example in Romans 12:1 where Paul said, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice."

I have to stop for a moment and say this is a fascinating thing, that the Spirit of God would have to urge us to do something. Why is that? The answer is very simple: we love our sin. Remember Jesus' words in John 3, "some men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." I see this all of the time as a pastor. When I see people that start leaving God out of their life, especially by not coming to church, not being involved in the church, you know how it works. Little by little you see them less and less. Whenever I see that, I know they're up to no good. There's something going on there. In fact, in John 3:20 Jesus said, "for everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

Indeed, because of sin we want nothing to do with the truth or serving the Lord Jesus Christ because we love our sin, and therefore the Spirit of God has to come along and urge us to get serious about abstaining from fleshly lusts. It's amazing. We see this same type of thing in 2 Corinthians 5 where the apostle Paul says that we have to "persuade men" to be reconciled to God. Can you imagine that? "People, you have a choice. You can spend an eternity in hell with unimaginable suffering because of your rebellion against God, or there's a free gift here that is yours if you will repent, and you can have heaven." And yet we have to urge people to make that choice? Inconceivable! Why? Because we love our sin more than we love God. That's why Jesus said, "if any man wishes to come after me let him deny himself." That's a tough one. We don't like to deny ourselves, we like to indulge ourselves. This is why Jesus also said in Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you will seek to enter and will not be able." Why the striving? Why the enormous struggle? Why the great effort? Because we love our sin.

So Peter says, "I urge you as aliens and strangers," in other words, you who are not even a part of this realm, you who are a people that is utterly foreign to this world, I urge you to abstain. Abstain means literally to "hold yourself away" from something. If you see a skunk, you know what that means. You will hold yourself away from that. It means to distance yourself. Do not indulge in fleshly lusts. What are fleshly lusts? It's those passionate desires, those carnal cravings that we have for things that will offend God and destroy our life. Can you imagine that, that we have to be urged to not do something that is going to destroy our life? Why is that? Our flesh has not yet been redeemed, even us as Christians. We remain incarcerated in bodies with sinful propensities. We have appetites that are constantly seeking fulfillment from things that are fundamentally offensive to God and violate His Law and destroy our life. Therefore, the Spirit of God comes along and says, "I want you to abstain. I'm urging you to do this. I know it's not natural for you, so I'm urging you to do this."

By the way, the very word *abstinence* is something that is almost a negative term in our culture. Abstinence of any kind seems to have a negative connotation in the world system in which we live, one that celebrates sinful indulgence. We live in a culture that says, "If it feels good, do it!" If you feel offended, react in anger. "Go ahead and make my day." If you feel a sexual feeling or arousal, seek pleasure quickly. If you feel down, get high. If you feel ignored, get noticed. If you feel guilty, blame

someone else. The unregenerate world knows nothing of abstaining, of abstinence; only immediate gratification of every sensual desire, every inclination of the flesh. Sadly, even many Christians are ruled by their emotions, not by their mind. They feel something and immediately they do it or say it, “Ready, fire, aim,” type of people, giving no consideration to how their actions might affect their family, how their actions might affect an unsaved world that is watching, not to mention how it might affect the God who loves them. Many times because of our fleshly lusts we find ourselves having a knee-jerk reaction to something. Many times it’s the reaction of satisfaction. Whatever we feel, we’ve got to have it satisfied. So Peter calls us to “abstain from fleshly lusts.”

It’s interesting when you think about it, even as Christians it’s hard for us to continue to follow the Lord in self-denial, isn’t it? When we want something, we want it now and we go after it. Very often you see this, if you look honestly at your life, it’s hard for us to deny ourselves. It’s hard for us to be disciplined. It’s hard for us to have consideration of the consequence of what we do.

So again, Peter says, “abstain from fleshly lusts.” Let me give you a list of some of them. In fact, I want you to take your Bibles and turn to Romans 1:24-32 and you will see a list there. I want you to get the flavor of what the Spirit of God is communicating to us. In Romans 1:24-32 we have a list of some of the dominant characteristics of the unredeemed, some of the things that we as people that know and love Christ should never practice. These things should never be a pattern of our life. He says, “Therefore, God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.” In other words, you’ve got cravings, you unregenerate people, and you refuse to be obedient to God, so I’m just going to turn you over to the consequences of your iniquities and it will begin to destroy you. “For they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” After the heart begins to be given over to impurity, we see how it affects the body in verse 26. “For this reason, God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” So you see, once the heart goes, the body begins to go and you see the extreme form of this in homosexuality in verses 26-27.

Then, eventually the whole mind goes, in verse 28. “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind,” literally a worthless mind, a mind that has no spiritual capacity whatsoever. “God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.” This is the opposite of abstaining from fleshly lusts. This is what happens when unregenerate people indulge themselves.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 the apostle Paul tells us, “...do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” Here again I’m giving you a list of some of those things that should not be seen in the life of the redeemed. Certainly if this is a pattern of your life then you would not be redeemed, as we will see. “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate,” those that want to look and act like a girl, “nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the

covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” In Galatians 5:19-21 we have another list. “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This is very straightforward. But unfortunately, once again, even as Christians there can be times in our life where we resort back to some of these fleshly pursuits and so Peter is telling us, “Abstain from that.”

But notice the nature of these inordinate inclinations of the flesh, back to 1 Peter at the end of verse 11. He says that they “wage war against the soul.” This statement puts into perspective the severity and the strategy of this corruptive evil that lies within us that requires the restraint of the Spirit of God as we cooperate with Him in our choosing to abstain from fleshly lusts. I want to remind you of something that we all should know, something that we’ve heard before. Never underestimate your enemy. Our fleshly lusts are a formidable foe with a potential for devastation far greater than we often are willing to acknowledge. Often I hear people describe their sin with a cavalier attitude. “Yeah, I’ve got a real problem with my temper.” Or “Yeah, I have to admit sometimes I struggle with materialism.” Usually people acknowledge these type of sins as if they are some kind of “acceptable” sin; meaning that no one really considers them all that serious. There’s usually a list that you will hear and people will maybe confess this publicly or in a little group, saying, “Yeah, I struggle with gluttony. I struggle with anger, or selfishness or discouragement or lack of faith. I struggle with stubbornness at times, ha ha, and a lack of discipline.” This elicits a bit of a chuckle from people, kind of like, “Oh boy, don’t we all.” As if somehow we can give a nod and a wink to these types of things and think that these really aren’t that big of a deal. But you must understand that sin is to the soul what cancer is to the body.

I would submit to you that if you went to the doctor and the doctor said “We’ve taken some tests, we’ve done a biopsy, and indeed, you have cancer.” You say to the doctor, “I sure hope we can get some of this resolved.” The doctor says, “Why don’t we do surgery and I’ll remove a little bit of it.” You have the surgery, and the doctor says, “Well, the good news is that I removed some of it.” Your response is, “Oh, great! I’m glad I got rid of some of that and I’m glad it wasn’t all that big of a deal.” Well of course not! You would hope that every single cell of that cancer would be removed. In fact, very often you will hear the doctor say, “We think we got all of it.” Why? Because if any of it remains, what happens? It starts coming back and it destroys.

So often I see this with parents in the disciplining of their children. The Word of God says that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child but the rod of discipline will drive it far from them. Foolishness, or those sinful propensities would be like cancer. I see parents at times who have children who are utterly defiant. The parent seems to treat the child as if he’s got just a little bit of cancer and it’s not all that big of a deal. If I can digress for a moment, if you have a child that defiantly refuses to do what you ask him to do, if you have a child who looks you in the face and says, “No!” you need to treat that in the same way you would treat that child if you took him to the doctor and the doctor says your child has cancer. Because indeed, if your child is that way, that child has a malignancy of sin that has already invaded the lymph nodes. You’d better deal with it and you’d better deal with it quick. If you think it’s kind of cute now, wait until they get to be sixteen years old. My point is, so often we as people underestimate the power of sin in our lives and in the lives of our children.

How often would you hear people publicly confess, perhaps in a small group, “I must confess that I really struggle with arrogance.” Or, “I really struggle with immorality. In fact, I have had lustful

thoughts for a particular man or woman and at times I'm involved with them." Or how often would you hear someone say, "I'm really struggling with pornography." Or, "I'm really struggling with being effeminate. I really like looking like a girl." Or, "I'm struggling with lesbianism and I enjoy looking and acting like a boy." Or, "I really struggle with being unsubmitive to authority." Or, "I struggle with being divisive. I hope you will pray with me because I am being convicted that I tend to be a gossip and a slanderer and an idolater." Or, "I must admit to you that I am a bit of a drunk at times." You see, we won't talk about those things, will we? The list could go on. Why? Because those are kind of "unacceptable" sins. The point is, there is this other group that are more "acceptable." And yet, they are all fleshly lusts as Peter reminds us here, that wage war against our soul.

"Wage war" in the original language is such a fascinating concept. It means to literally engage in a deliberate and unrelenting military campaign where victory is the only option. That is a formidable foe; to have a vicious aggressor living within us that will take absolutely no prisoners, and one that is bent on total annihilation. And you're going to kind of laugh at that? This is the goal of fleshly lusts. You think about this the next time you gorge yourself with food and refuse to abstain from the fleshly lust of overeating. You think about this the next time you explode in anger at your children because you had the fleshly lust rise up within you that you have to have your own way and if you don't this is how I'm going to treat people. You think about that the next time you yield to the temptation of watching yet the sixtieth hour of Hollywood movies or television when you've spent no time before the Lord that week.

You think about that next time you give in to the lust of pornography, or you acquiesce to the lust of slander or gossip. Or you react to spiritual authority with ridicule and resentment. Or you come along and consent to your fleshly lust to get slobbering drunk because things just aren't going the way you wish they would, and after all, nobody's going to see it because I'm in the privacy of my own home or I'm out of town. You think about the fact that those lusts are seeking to wage war against your soul and destroy your life. That's how serious it is. Whenever you give in to these lusts you offend God and you allow the enemy of sin [**should this be "enemy of God" rather than "enemy of sin"?**] to conquer your soul. Like a barbarian hoard of Islamic terrorists that are living within you, like those that are seeking to destroy the civilized world, our fleshly lusts are hell-bent on destroying our life. Our fleshly lusts want to silence our conscience. They want to pollute our memory, harden our heart, defile our imaginations, destroy our bodies and our health, devastate our families, obliterate our marriage. Those fleshly lusts want to corrupt our children and cause us to forfeit divine blessing in our life. But oh, we love our sin, don't we? Beloved, fleshly lusts wage war against our soul. Is this what you want?

I think of a well-known Christian leader that I worked with a number of years ago, one that mocked the idea of a Christian being separate from the world. This particular man came to my mind, as did many others when I was meditating upon the text. I remember him saying to me something to the effect of, "Dave, you're making way too big a deal out of some of these things." It's the idea of it's just not that big of a deal, it's just a little bit of cancer. In fact, he accused me of being legalistic. This man had a number of fleshly lusts he refused to abstain from. First of all, he was a glutton so he was morbidly obese. He was rude to his wife and he refused to discipline his children. He was consumed with his public ministry, an internationally known type of individual. On the side he loved to gamble. He wasted a lot of money that way. Over time he started drinking. Of course it was just social drinking, not that big a deal, right? He had a library of hundreds of movies and he spent every spare minute of his time allowing his mind to be polluted by Hollywood.

A couple of years after I had originally worked with him, he came back to see me. Things had gotten worse, as sin tends to do. He had become utterly addicted to pornography. He confessed to numerous affairs. There were accusations that he denied about him being involved with young girls. I remember that man, even then, refused to listen to wise counsel even though he had some degree of conviction, but it was not the conviction of real, genuine brokenness. As a result, that man's obesity destroyed his knees and his back, so physically you could see the implications of it. He ended up with a severe case of diabetes. His wife divorced him. His children grew up and they are now out of control adults who want nothing to do with Christ. He's out of the ministry now. He was disgraced, well-documented, numerous affairs, and he was caught being involved with young girls. He had to declare bankruptcy because of his gambling debts. He is to this day a full-blown alcoholic trying hard to just make ends meet. He spends most of his time still watching movies to anesthetize the pain. Chances are he's not even a believer. His fleshly lusts won the battle for his soul. He, like most people, never woke up one morning and said, "I think I want to destroy my life. I think I'm going to start choosing things that will offend God so much that He's just going to give me over to a worthless mind." He never did that. But rather what he chose to do was to systematically refuse to abstain from fleshly lusts. He never saw the severity of the battle. He underestimated the enemy. He refused to refuse his carnal desires. Whatever his flesh craved he fed it and eventually he fell in love with the world. Sadly, that type of story is played out all too often.

Child of God, we must learn to abhor the world. We must see the toxic corruption of the world and hold ourselves away from it. It begins by how we deal with our heart. We should perceive the temptations of this world the same way we would if we were diagnosed with cancer. That's why in 1 John 2:15-16 we read, "Do not love the world nor the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

The question is, "How can I have victory over my flesh?" If I can digress again, I know some of you are bound to be asking this. How can I have victory over my flesh?" The answer is that you must fight it at its source. It is in your heart, it is in your imagination, those things you think about. You have to learn to starve your imagination and mortify the flesh, to put those things off and to put on the things that are holy and pure and righteous. All of this begins with repentance. You've got to identify the lust and the habitual way of fulfilling that lust and then you must repent. I must hasten to add that this is not a repentance like maybe you've done before where you give lip service and say, "Oh God, forgive me. I've done it again." Because friends, talk is cheap. But genuine repentance is a heartfelt brokenness where you come before a holy God and you say, "Oh God, I have offended You first and foremost and my heart is breaking because of my offense to Your Law. I long to have fellowship with You. Likewise, because of my sin I have offended my wife or my husband or my children or my parents. In the brokenness of my heart I come before You and plead Your mercy and Your grace. I will change my behavior. I will turn and walk in a different direction if it takes me to a cross." And then you begin to set into place accountability. You begin to fill your mind with the truth of the Word of God and you stay on your face before the Spirit of God as He gives you power to have victory over the flesh.

In fact, if we look at 2 Corinthians 7 we see that there's a huge difference between a worldly sorrow and a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. The worldly sorrow is the typical one where people shed a few tears and say "I'm just so sorry." The reason they're sorry is because they got caught and their life

is now a mess. They feel some level of guilt, but that is not a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. That is something altogether different. In 2 Corinthians 7:10 we read, “The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret.” If we study that passage in 2 Corinthians 7 we will see that genuine repentance, genuine brokenness over some life-dominating sin will always include things like a longing to be reconciled to God, a longing to have that fellowship restored. There will be a mourning over sin and the breach it has created. There will be a zeal to love and even defend the one who has confronted you and certainly defend God and His justice.

There will also be an earnestness and an aggressive pursuit of righteousness in that person’s life. There will even be a desire to vindicate your name and your reputation and to establish a whole new character. There will be a constant sense of forgiveness that comes by the grace of God and yet a feeling of undeserved mercy. That’s the stuff of genuine repentance. That’s where you begin. Then you rehabilitate your thinking. You fill your mind with truth. You seek accountability. You decisively commit yourself to a totally new direction in your life. And when you do you will begin to see the fruits of the Spirit manifesting themselves in your life. If you say you repent, then show me the fruit of your repentance. We all have the capacity to choose. Therefore, the Spirit of God tells us to choose to “abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” This is how we engage the enemy of our souls, those fleshly lusts. This is the inward battle.

Finally, we see the concept of our outward victory of conquered lusts in verse 12. He says, “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.” Keep your behavior excellent: it means admirable, superb, exceptional, distinguished, meritorious, top-notch as we might say. Keep that behavior excellent among the Gentiles, those unsaved people that live around you and watch you that despise Christ. I ask you, is this how your co-workers see you? Would this be the testimony of your wife or your husband or your children or your parents? Or would they say, “There goes another hypocrite,” rather than saying, “I don’t like that Christian stuff but as I watch that guy I have to admit, there goes a guy without any guile, he’s the real deal. That woman is a woman beyond reproach.”

Or, do they have ample ammunition because of your hypocrisy to slander you as an evildoer? “Yeah, that guy calls himself a Christian but look at him, he’s no different than anyone else. That guy calls himself a Christian but he’s a hot-headed control freak. He yells and screams at his wife and kids. That guy’s a Christian over there but he’s a lazy slob. Or that guy over there calls himself a Christian but he’s nothing more than an immoral playboy like all the rest of us.” Or wouldn’t it be sad if somebody found out that you’re a Christian and said, “You’re a Christian? I didn’t know that. You cuss and drink and party and carry on just like all the rest of us.” What a tragedy. What type of testimony would you have to that person? “Oh, I want you to come to Christ and watch how He transforms us.” You’ve lost it, dear friends. You’ve lost the moral high ground.

Or somebody looks at you and says, “I wouldn’t trust that guy as far as I could throw him. He’s crooked as a dog’s hind leg and yet he goes to church up there all the time. Yeah, I know that woman. She says she’s a Christian but she just moved in with her boyfriend.” Folks, you get the idea. What a tragedy. What reproach we bring to the cause of Christ. Again, do you realize that for most people, your life is the only gospel they will ever see? This is Peter’s point. Don’t give unbelievers additional ammo to discredit you in the Lord, but rather, “keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.” Why? “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.” Not only will your good behavior silence the opposition, but it may be used by the Spirit of God to cause other people to come to a saving knowledge of Christ! The day of visitation can refer to divine judgment as well as to a time of divine blessing. Both are used in Scripture, but I believe the context here argues for a day when Christ will come and visit a non-believer with saving grace, thereby causing them to glorify God.

So here’s the thought. God uses our excellent behavior to glorify Himself because other people will see that behavior and say, “There is something different about that person.” Others watch us, and when they see us, hopefully they get convicted. By the way, this is why I have written in the “Getting Acquainted” letter that we have on our website, that at the very core of our worship services we don’t want to be like the world. We want to be separate from the world. There I say, “In a society that applauds compromise and prefers tolerance to truth, we believe it is our duty to remain distinctively the church of Jesus Christ. We believe it is our difference from the world that attracts people to Christ, not our similarity with it.”

What an enormous privilege we have to live godly lives—not only to silence the opposition when they speak evil against us, but to be a living, breathing demonstration of the transforming power of Christ. I want to close with a testimony that I heard a number of years ago. It had a profound impact on my life. It left an indelible mark upon my heart about this very issue of the importance of living a Christlike life because others are watching, and God can use this to win people to Himself. I found this in something that John MacArthur had written.

“A stirring twentieth-century example of how godly living can influence the salvation of unbelievers comes from the events in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in the Philippines during World War II. American missionaries Herb and Ruth Clingen and their young son were prisoners of the Japanese for three years. Herb’s diary told how his family’s captors tortured, murdered, and starved to death many of the camp’s other inmates. The prisoners particularly hated and feared the camp commandant, Konishi. Herb described one especially diabolical plan Konishi forced on the Clingens and their fellow inmates near the end of the war.” This is a quote from the Clingen’s diary.

“Konishi found an inventive way to abuse us even more. He increased the food ration but gave us palay—unhusked rice. Eating rice with its razor-sharp outer shell would cause intestinal bleeding that would kill us in hours. We had no tools to remove the husks, and doing the job manually—by pounding the grain or rolling with a heavy stick—consumed more calories than the rice would supply. It was a death sentence for all internees.”

MacArthur then goes on to say, “But divine providence spared the Clingens and others in February 1945 when Allied forces liberated the prison camp. That prevented the commandant from carrying out his plan of shooting and killing all surviving prisoners. Years later the Clingens ‘learned that Konishi had been found working as a groundskeeper at a Manila golf course. He was put on trial for his war crimes and hanged. Before his execution he professed conversion to Christianity, saying he had been deeply affected by the testimony of the Christian missionaries he had persecuted.’”

What an amazing story. Dear Christian, I pray that because of your battle with inward lusts, with fleshly lusts, that your life will manifest the outward victory of conquered lusts, and thereby silence the opposition and allow others to see Christ in you, the hope of glory.

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