

# 1 PETER 2:11-12

## The Alien's Battle Against Carnality

**(2:11-12)** *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (ESV)*

### A SUMMARY OF PETER'S 2<sup>ND</sup> MAJOR SECTION:

In this 2<sup>nd</sup> section, Peter deals with how we are to live as “a people for God’s own possession” in a world that is hostile toward Him, and basically covers the gamut of human experience and the Christian experience to do this. In the first section, Peter really taught us about who we are as God’s people and how that should affect the way that we live before God first, and the way we live with His people second. Now he turns his attention to the way we should live in and with those who are not necessarily part of God’s chosen race; those who the Bible would classify as “pagans”; those are of the world.<sup>1</sup> Let’s take a look at all the different relationships and scenarios Peter touches on here to equip us to live as God’s chosen race in this world.

1. 2:13-17 – Living as God’s chosen race in relation to our *governing authorities*.

*Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good...Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (2:13-14, 17 – ESV)*

2. 2:18-25 – Living as God’s chosen race in *servant/master relationships* as well as in *relationships where we are treated unjustly*.

*Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. (2:18 – ESV)*

3. 3:1-7 – Living as God’s chosen race *in our marriages* (counsel for wives and husbands, including principles for those living in an “unequally yoked” marriage).

*Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives... (3:1 – ESV)*

4. 3:8-12 – Living as God’s chosen race *in the way we treat all people*.

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly there will be principles here for us to apply to the way we live before God and the way we live with the body of Christ, but Peter’s focus here is primarily on our relationships with those who have not yet been “called out of darkness and into His marvelous light” (2:9).

*Finally all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. (3:8-9 – ESV)*

5. **3:13-17** – Living as God’s chosen race ***in our radical pursuit of goodness*** (i.e. pursuing goodness despite the certainty of suffering).

*Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed... For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will than for doing evil. (3:13-14, 17 – ESV)*

6. **3:18-4:1a** – Living as God’s chosen race ***by following the example of Christ*** in suffering for our pursuit of goodness.

*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking... (4:1a – ESV)*

7. **4:1b-6** – Living as God’s chosen race ***by embracing suffering*** for our pursuit of goodness.

*...for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (4:1b-2 – ESV)*

8. **4:7-11** – Living as God’s chosen race ***by ministering to one another wholeheartedly*** according to our spiritual giftedness.

*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (4:8 – ESV)*

Hopefully you can see the effort Peter has put into equipping us to live as God’s chosen people in whatever situations we might find ourselves in as we live in this world, from our relationships to those who govern us, to our marriages, and again to our relationships with one another. This is where Peter is headed, but before he looks at all of the different scenarios and relationships we may find ourselves in as we do life in this world, he summarizes his point first, in verses 11-12 of chapter 2.

*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (i.e. “pagans”) honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (2:11-12 – ESV)*

### THE BASIC MESSAGE OF 2:11-4:11

Here is what I want all of us to keep in mind as we work our way through this section of Scripture, as it is the basic message of this section.

***Believers in Christ are called to live pure and righteous lives, so that sinners might be saved and God might be glorified on Judgment Day!***

This is the message in 2:11-4:11: God uses our conduct, to lead unbelievers to salvation and to bring glory to Himself! “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (i.e. “pagans”) honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

The message is the same as the message Jesus gave in Matthew 5.

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16 – ESV)*

Referring to Peter’s message here in 2:11-12, one commentator put it this way:

*Peter’s hope was that unbelievers will be compelled to admit that the lifestyle of believers is morally beautiful, and this admission will bring them to saving faith so that God will be glorified on the day of judgment. The introductory verses of this section show, then, that the good works of believers are intended for mission, so that those who are unbelievers will have the same experience Peter described in 1 Peter 2:9-10. They will be “called out of darkness” and “into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). They will praise God’s saving mercy and proclaim his praises for rescuing them from the dominion of sin...he summons believers to holiness with the confidence that some unbelievers will be brought to faith as they see the transformed lives of believers.*  
(Thomas Schreiner – 1, 2 Peter, Jude – NAC)

This is the basic message of these verses. Just as Jesus calls us in Matthew 5, so we are here called to “let our light shine before others” so that unbelievers who watch our lives might be *so* intrigued by the inherent goodness and beauty of our lifestyles, that they will be drawn to the God whom we are living for. This is the command. This is the call. This is what we will consider over and over again, as we work through 1 Peter 2:11-4:11.

But let’s consider the way Peter puts this call in our verses for today. To begin, take a moment with me to consider the way he addresses his readers.

### ***Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles... (2:11a – ESV)***

What Peter does here is remind us again of our identity; saying an awful lot in very few words.

First, He reminds us that we are God’s own people, by calling us “beloved”. That is, we are the object of the Father’s affection. He loves us in a way that does not apply to the rest of the world and has chosen us according to His foreknowledge (His foreordained plan to lavish His covenantal love upon us in Christ). What sets us apart from the rest of the world is in large part the way we experience the love of God as His chosen people, which is an especially prominent reality in the OT.

*The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:6b-8 – ESV)*

*Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. (Deuteronomy 10:14-15 – ESV)*

What sets the church apart from the rest of the world is the same thing that set Israel apart from the nations; God's choice to lavish His love upon them. Calling his readers "beloved" especially after describing them in a way so similar to OT Israel, would have been a powerful thing. To be loved by God as His own treasured possession, is something great! What it does is remind us that we are who we are, not by any goodness in ourselves; but strictly because of God's great and unsurpassable love. We owe our lives to Him!

Second, because we are God's own people, set apart from the rest of the world by God's own love, Peter reminds us that we are temporary residents of this world. *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles...*

Peter's point here in using these two words is to remind us we no longer belong to this world's system. We ought to no longer think like the world. We ought to no longer live like the world. We ought to no longer make decisions like the world. We ought to no longer work like the world. We ought to no longer speak like the world. We ought to no longer look nor act like the world because in a very real sense we are no longer citizens of this world. Like Paul wrote in Philippians 3:

*Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ... (Philippians 3:20 – ESV)*

Or like the writer of Hebrews put it:

*For this world is not our home; we are looking forward to a city in heaven, which is yet to come. (Hebrews 13:14 – NLT)*

But what does this mean? What does it mean to be a citizen of the New World? How do we know what citizens of the New World ought to live like? One way we can answer these questions is to look at what the New World will be like (in passages such as Isaiah 11; Isaiah 60; Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21-22; etc.) and infer from those passages what it's citizens must then live like.<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully for us, though, Peter goes on to explain in a fundamental way how it is that we, as aliens and sojourners; as citizens of the New World must live in this world. Look at what he writes.

***Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (i.e. "pagans") honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (2:11-12 – ESV)***

There are really 2 commands here; the first is directed at our hearts which we will focus on heavily tonight, and the second is directed at our actions which we will focus on next week as we get into 2:13-17. The first command is "to abstain from the passions of the flesh".

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<sup>2</sup> For example, if the New World is a place where Christ reigns and rules (Isaiah 11:1-5), then its citizens must be people who happily and willingly submit to the reign and rule of Christ.

**Question for Discussion:** When you hear the phrase “passions of the flesh”, what immediately comes to your mind?

How many times in 2:13-4:11, do you see Peter dealing with sexual immorality or drunkenness or lust or any other “big” sin? The answer to this question for me was staggering; not once! Not a single time in this section do we see Peter dealing with any kind of sin that we immediately think of when we hear the phrase “passions of the flesh”. How many times leading up to these verses has he mentioned these things? Again, not a single time! So if by “passions of the flesh” Peter is dealing with the “big sins” that we immediately think of, then it seems pretty odd that when he goes to elaborate on this phrase and apply it to everyday life that he does not once mention these kinds of things. This is something we need to take serious note of.

Now, it could be that Peter doesn’t think that these kinds of sins are really that bad. Maybe it is that Peter doesn’t have a problem with his readers sleeping around or drinking themselves into oblivion or talking like sailors or lusting after one another. Maybe he doesn’t see the harm in these kinds of things and so just doesn’t mention them. Or perhaps there is another option.

Perhaps, Peter is assuming that these kinds of sins are so obviously harmful to our witness to the watching world, that it would be foolishness and pointless to elaborate any further on them. Perhaps he is assuming that we, as believers in Christ, have the “big sins” under control. Perhaps he is thinking that if we are foolish enough to wonder whether or not these “big sins” apply, then we are not sojourners and exiles in the first place, but instead are the ones that need to be saved! Perhaps the “big sins” are unquestionably assumed.

So then, what does he mean by the phrase “passions of the flesh”? One commentator puts it this way:

*These are the natural desires that human beings have apart from the work of the Spirit.*  
(Thomas Schreiner – *1, 2 Peter, Jude* – NAC)

This is basically the same thing Paul means by “desires of the flesh”<sup>3</sup>; *whatever* desires in us that are not led and directed and informed and energized by the Spirit of God. Certainly this applies to the “big sins” we have discussed; but Peter’s concern is much more detailed and much more specific and much more internal than these things. Let’s walk through the first half of this section again together to try to get a feel for where Peter is going with this.

1. 2:13-17 – Living as God’s chosen race in relation to our ***governing authorities***.

**Question for Discussion:** What is the natural human response to unfair treatment by the government here in America? FIGHT BACK. FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS. FIGHT FOR YOUR FREEDOM. This is a response that many Christians have to various forms of “religious discrimination” in our country. But is this a desire led and directed and informed and energized by the Spirit of God; or simply by good old American pride and equality? **“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution...”**

2. 2:18-25 – Living as God’s chosen race in ***servant/master relationships*** as well as in ***relationships where we are treated unjustly***.

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<sup>3</sup> See Galatians 5:16-21

**Question for Discussion:** What is the natural human response to anyone who treats us unjustly? FIGHT BACK. RETALIATE. REPORT IT TO THE AUTHORITIES. REBEL. These are not desires that Christians are exempt from, but are they desires that are led and directed and informed and energized by the Spirit of God? **“Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and the gentle but also to the unjust.”**

3. 3:1-7 – Living as God’s chosen race *in our marriages* (counsel for wives and husbands, including principles for those living in an “unequally yoked” marriage).

**Question for Discussion:** What is the natural human response to an unsatisfying marriage? DIVORCE. ANGER. SILENCE. ADULTERY. Certainly, these are desires many people (even Christians) experience in marriage, but are they desires led and directed and informed and energized by the Spirit of God? **“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives...Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life...”**

4. 3:8-12 – Living as God’s chosen race *in the way we treat all people.*

**Question for Discussion:** What is the natural human desire/response to evil acts done against us? REVENGE. GOSSIP. HATRED. APATHY. Sure, even Christians experience these desires toward people from time to time, but are these desires led and directed and informed and energized by the Spirit of God? **“All of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless...”**

### GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER...

You see, when Peter takes this command to “abstain from the passions of the flesh” and goes to help us apply it to everyday life, he doesn’t even bother dealing with “big sins” that even many unbelievers can see the destructiveness in; he deals with the kinds of sins that the world doesn’t even think twice about.

He doesn’t ask us, “Have you made any plans to assassinate the president lately?” He asks, “Have you made every effort to be respectful and submissive and peaceable toward even those politicians that you have vast disagreements with?” He takes the standard to another level.

He doesn’t ask us, “Have you been kind to those who have been kind to you today?” He asks, “Are you following the example of Christ and enduring sorrows willingly, working just as hard for your good bosses as you are for your evil ones?”

He doesn’t ask us, “Wives, are you being faithful to your husbands so long as their faithful to you?” He asks Christian wives, “Are you making every effort possible to remain faithful to your husband and live as righteous a life as possible in front of him, in hopes that he might one day convert?”

To husbands he does not ask, “Have you done the dishes this week or taken out the trash?” He asks instead, “Men, are you loving your wives like Christ loved the Church? Are you being patient with them? Are you cherishing them and nourishing them like Christ does for you?”

And to us he does not ask, “Are you simply not retaliating against those who do evil against you?” Instead he asks, “Do you seek the well being of people who hurt you?”

See, Peter is not calling us to be good humans; he is calling us to be aliens and strangers; exiles and sojourners; citizens of heaven who are waiting the appearance of their Savior to make all things new. Peter writes, “Abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”

You know what this means? It means that as long as we are living on this unredeemed, un-restored, and un-resurrected earth, we are going to have countless opportunities to live according to natural human desires, which are not led, directed, informed, nor energized by the Spirit of God. These desires are like soldiers who seek to destroy us at our core, sucking the life right out of our spiritual lungs. Please see that showing honor to our governing authorities and our earthly masters and our spouses and each other and those who seek to do us evil is not simply a matter of being good; it is a matter of defeating the root of sin in our hearts; which if fed will destroy us and lead us to judgment. The only way we will experience victory over sin is if we submit our hearts to the reign and rule of Christ in everyday, insignificant activities and relationships. That is where the battle must be fought. But until we are able to get there, the battle against sin will not really even begin.

So, to summarize Peter: *Do not settle for natural human desires and responses, but instead walk according to the desires of the Spirit of God. Do not simply act and react like any good unbeliever would. Take your thought process and decision making process to an entirely other level. Do not settle for any desire that is not led, directed, informed, and energized by the Spirit of God in your relationships and encounters with the world, because their salvation and God’s own glory is at stake!*

**In closing...a personal word on PRAYER.**

If we are going to live lives that are so inherently good and so inherently beautiful that unbelievers are attracted to our God because of them; we must take our hearts to another level by abstaining from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against our souls.” And that battle will only be won with much prayer.

*Let none expect to have the mastery over his inward corruption in any degree, without going in weakness again and again to the Lord for strength. Nor will prayer for others, or conversing with the brethren, make up for secret prayer.*

(George Mueller)