

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

1 Peter 2:11-12

Intro: If you will reflect with me for a moment over the first part of this epistle which we have been considering, I think that you will see that up to this point the Apostle Peter had been emphasizing our relationship to God, at this point he begins to emphasize our relationship with people – both unsaved and saved. The exception to this contrast in the first part of the epistle (up through 2:10) was what Peter had to say in 1:22 to believers about loving “each other with a pure heart fervently.” But otherwise, Peter had been stressing matters that had to do with their relationship with God.

As an illustration of this difference we have in the first part which we have just covered, a statement which is very similar to what we have in the two verses I have selected as my text for today. Cf. 1:14-16 with 2:11-12. (Read both passages.) I think you can see that Peter’s words in 1:14-16 have to do with being what we need to be in our relationship with God. And his emphasis can be summarized in the statement, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” If we are going to be pleasing to God, we must seek to become like Him. But when we come to our text for today, the same emphasis on not fashioning ourselves according to the ways of the world is made, but it has reference to the way godly living can and does affect the people of the world. So this brings out a different emphasis from 2:11 onward, as compared with the emphasis Peter had made up through 2:10.

The contrast I am pointing out does not mean that Peter leaves the Lord out of the latter part of his epistle, but as a general difference, I think that even a brief examination of the text of Peter’s epistle, will show how these two parts of the epistle differ.

To illustrate this difference further, notice that beginning with verse 13 of chapter 2, Peter spoke of our relationship to governments and governmental leaders. Then he spoke of what servants should do beginning with verse 18, and going to the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3 verse 1 introduces Peter’s comments to wives. This is followed in verse 7 with one verse to husbands.

In verse 8 of chapter 3 Peter began a section, a long section, which was addressed to believers irrespective of their personal status in society in which Peter intermingled matters that had to do with people and matters that had to do with their relationship to God. This really goes to the end of chapter 4.

Beginning with chapter 5 and going down through verse 4 of that chapter we find Peter's words to the elders.

Then in 5:5 he addressed himself to the younger believers, encouraging them, as he had before to other groups, to be submissive and humble. And with this he concluded the main messages of this epistle. Verses 12 through 14 give us the conclusion.

So the divisions of Peter's letter are quite obvious. The order would certainly indicate that our relationship with God is primarily important, but an obedient life does not overlook the human relationships which we all have.

As we look, then, at verses 11 and 12 of chapter 2, making whatever comparisons we can with chapter 1, verses 13 through 16, I would call your attention to:

I. THE TONE OF PETER'S EXHORTATIONS (1 Pet. 2:11a).

In our text for today, Peter said, "Dearly beloved." In 1:13 he said, "As obedient children." Both are terms of endearment. He was not speaking down to them when in chapter 1 he called them children. Instead, he was addressing them *as children of God*. In addition, he was recognizing that there were seeking in their lives to be obedient to their heavenly Father. And so, in one way, he was encouraging them to continue on in their pursuit of holiness because that was the purpose for which the Father had redeemed them.

The same is true when we get to chapter 2, verse 11. Paul was not scolding them, but he was encouraging them to continue to beware of what "fleshly lusts" could do to their souls. And we can be sure that in both instances Peter was living the way he was encouraging them to live. True salvation means a real break with the old life, and a major transformation into an entirely new way of living.

Peter himself had been through a lot. He had experienced his failures. He knew what disastrous effects self-confidence could produce in the life of a child of God because he had failed the Lord at a most crucial time in the Lord's life on earth.

Yesterday at our men's prayer meeting I read to the men from our morning reading for that day. The passage was a part of Mark 14, and the story of Peter's denial of the Lord. But you may remember that hours before that denial, the Lord had taken Peter and James and John with Him into the

inner part of the Garden of Gethsemane, and had asked them to “watch with Him.” This meant that He wanted them to *watch in prayer*. Peter had no way of knowing exactly what was ahead, but the Lord had told him earlier that he would deny the Lord three times before the rooster crowed twice. Peter strongly objected by saying that he would never deny the Lord. The Lord even explained to him that while his spirit might be willing to be faithful to the Lord, *his flesh was weak!* And at that time Peter did not know how weak his flesh was. Consequently he was sleeping when he should have been praying.

With this background, how significant it is that Peter said in chapter 4, verse 7, of this epistle:

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

It was Peter’s failure that would produce in him more of a sympathetic and humble attitude toward other believers. I am sure that conditions were not completely right in the lives of those to whom Peter was writing, but he recognized what they were seeking to do, and spoke humbly to them remembering how far he had had to come in his relationship with the Lord.

This is an important lesson for all of us to remember in our dealings with each other. Solomon warned all of us in his Proverbs not to repeat the failures of others. We are always more of a blessing to people when we encourage them for the ways they are seeking to please the Lord, than we will if we denounce them with criticisms. And so those words which we find at the beginning of verse 11 are very, very important for all of us to notice: “Dearly beloved.” Peter had a deep love in his heart for the Lord’s people, and he did not hesitate to express his love for them.

But there is more that can be said along this line.

He also was urging them to live in a way that was pleasing to God by recognizing with them that they were “strangers and pilgrims” in this world.

Peter had begun this epistle on this note, and here, if anything, he intensified the position of alienation they had in this world. And this is true of all of us. When the Lord saves us, He not only changes our hearts, but He makes some great changes in the way we live. And we soon realize that this makes a difference to the people in the world. We sense that there are barriers between us and them which did not exist before. We learn that the world is not a friendly place for the Lord’s people, a place where we find encouragement to live in a way that pleases the Lord. Peter had learned this, and he was very sympathetic to the people of God because he knew what difficulties they were facing in their lives.

So the words that Peter used here would be the kind of words which would cause the Lord's people to want to hear what he had to say to them. Even apostles had to win a hearing for their message.

Well, what did he have to say to them?

II. THE APOSTLE PETER'S EXHORTATION (1 Pet. 2:11b-12a).

Peter was not just making a suggestion, but he was telling them specifically what they needed to do, and why.

This was his exhortation: "Abstain from fleshly lusts."

Now this recognizes that even though they were believers in Christ, they had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and had been born again, *it was still possible for them to sin*. The old bondage to sin which had been such a curse in their lives before they were saved, had been broken, but nevertheless they still had their old sin nature, and so they had to be on their guard against sin in all of its forms.

By *abstaining*, Peter meant that they were to hold themselves at a distance from "fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Lenski suggests the word "aloof." They were to keep their distance from the practice of any and all of those desires which came from within their own sinful hearts. The temptations might be outside in the world, but the desires came from within.

What was Peter talking about? To answer that question, let me ask you to turn to a passage written by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the churches of Galatia – Gal. 5, beginning with verse 16. This is how Paul described the lusts of the flesh, or fleshly lusts:

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

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.

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; Adultery, 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 (Gal. 5:16-21).

Let me call your attention to words which the Lord Jesus Christ spoke along this line. You will find them in Mark 7:21-23:

- 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,
- 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
- 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Now if we are to “abstain” from these, it means that we must not only not commit them, but we need to stay away from all situations which would become a temptation to us. We need to distance ourselves from every form of sin. Why?

Because sin within us, and temptations in the world around us, are constantly carrying on a campaign against our souls. We are constantly engaged in a SPIRITUAL WARFARE whether we want to be, or not. But, as the Apostle Paul brought out in that passage in Galatians which we read a moment ago, the Holy Spirit is present in the life of every child of God to strengthen us against the lusts of the flesh. It is not a battle which we have to fight by ourselves. In fact, if we try to stand against the flesh by ourselves, we will fail. But if we trust in the Holy Spirit, strengthened by the Word of God, living as God wants us to live, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. That is truth we can depend upon.

And, as Peter said in that first statement in verse 12, this is the way to have our conversation, our conduct, “honest among the Gentiles.” Now this does not mean that unregenerate, godless Gentiles will approve of our lives, but they at least will be forced to admit that our conduct is consistent with the faith in Christ which we profess.

This is a very interesting point that the Apostle Peter was making in the light of what is being taught by many people today who profess to be Christians. We are taught that if we are going to win people to Christ, we need to compromise a little with the way they live so they won't feel that we are so strange, or so different from what they are. So we find a great deal of worldliness among professing Christians today, and even in many of our churches there is definite influence that has come from the world outside. Dr. Mitchell used to say that the church has become worldly and the world has become “churchy” so that it is hard to tell the difference between the church and the world. Perhaps today the world is not as “churchy” as it used to be, but the church has certainly become more worldly.

Now when you read a passage like this you have to admit that the Bible does not teach the way of life that is so popular among professing Christians today. But what did Peter say would be the effect of the kind of a life which he was exhorting the believers in his day to live? Let us notice what he said in the latter part of verse 12.

III. THE PROMISED RESULTS (1 Pet. 2:12b).

You certainly can't say that Peter was unconcerned about reaching people with the Gospel. Read of his ministry in the book of Acts, and you will see that he was a man greatly used by God in reaching people with the Gospel. He saw many people saved during his ministry. What prospect does he hold out to us that, if we live to please the Lord instead of living to please people, that such living will be used by the Lord to turn people to Christ and salvation?

Read what Peter said here beginning with the words, "that, whereas . . ." (Read the remainder of the verse.)

One of the main reasons we are left here in this world after we are saved, is that we might tell others about Christ. So we want to be sure that we are doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. If our ways are different from the Lord's ways, we are not going to have the Lord's blessing. Some may be saved because God is going to see His purposes fulfilled, but, if we want to see God's richest blessing upon us, we must do His work His way. And we know that not everyone is going to be saved. There never has been a generation since creation where everyone has been saved, and there never will be such a generation. But what did Peter say here?

First he said that even though we seek to please God in our lives, the people of the world are still going to charge us as being "evildoers" just because we don't live the way they want us to live.

BUT, at the same time, if we are doing what we should be doing, living as God wants us to live, the way we are told to live in the Scriptures, they are going to notice how we live. Peter said, that "they may be your good works, which they shall behold." People don't have the answer for a life that has been transformed by the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They see the difference, and they need to see the difference.

What will be the ultimate result for many? They will "glorify God in the day of visitation." What does this mean?

Well, "the day of visitation" is used of two different days in Scripture.

And the context will reveal the difference. With some, “the day of visitation” is the day when God visits His judgment upon them for their sins, and because they refuse to repent of their sins. But with others, “the day of visitation” is the day that God in mercy and grace visits them with the gift of salvation. And this is the meaning here.

It is not by compromise that our lives will be a testimony to the people of the world, but it is by abstaining from fleshly lusts, and by walking in the Spirit, living a life of obedience to the Word of God, a life that is pleasing to the Lord. We never know who is watching us, but we can be sure that there are people who are doing just that. They may have even been critical of us, but the day may come when they will thank God for the way He used us to make them realize what it really means to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

This is what Peter was saying; this is what he was teaching. We had better do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way, and not follow those people who think that they have a better way. The best way is the Lord’s way because the way of obedience to the Lord is the way that points people to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: We are all engaged in a SPIRITUAL WARFARE, a warfare in which our old nature within us and world and the Devil outside of us, are seeking to draw us back into sin and the ways of the world.. The victory is ours, not by compromising with a godless world, or with the sins of the flesh, but the victory is ours as we faithfully seek to please God in the way we live, and as we trust Him to use us by our lives to point others to Christ.