

*The War for Mansoul*

1 Peter 2:11-12

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Last Sunday, we talked about how God laid the foundational Cornerstone for the Christian's spiritual house in Christ. What this means is that that Christ is the Cornerstone of all of Scripture. This means He is the point of all of Scripture. He is the heart of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Everything in Scripture points to Him and centers on Him. He is the center of the solar system of the word of God.

It also means the church stands on the person and work of Christ. The spiritual house of the church is built on the Foundation of Christ. In Peter's letter to the churches, vv. 11-12 serve as the threshold of the doorway that we pass through for the remainder of the letter. As we walk through the front door, we are walking into the application of rich theology and doctrine that teach us how to live as sojourners in the world.

The title of the sermon is *The War for Mansoul*. That may sound like a strange title for my sermon, but I based the title on the book by John Bunyan, called *The Holy War*. Ethel Barrett retold the story in modern English and retitled it *The War for Mansoul*. It is allegorical like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Most people have not heard of this little book by Bunyan because it gets overshadowed by *Pilgrim's Progress*. Nevertheless, it is an excellent read, and I commend it.

One more observation about vv. 11-12. These verses serve the same purpose as Romans 12:1-2. After the Apostle Paul had unpacked gospel doctrine in chapters 1-11, he moved into application in the remainder of the letter. We might call chapters 12-16, what it means to live in light of the gospel. Listen to Romans 12:1-2 and how it serves as the threshold of the application of Romans.

*"I appeal to you; therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

Now listen to 1 Peter 2:11-12 one more time:

*"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> 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."*

Do you hear the similarities? These verses mark the transition into the application that has been built on the person and work of Christ.

When it comes to applying Scripture, we must always be taught the *why* before we are taught the *how*. All of Paul's letters and Peter's letters use this approach. They lay a *doctrinal gospel foundation* and then show us how-to live-in light of it.

Let me do a little church history with you because good sermons should take the same approach. They lay out the biblical gospel foundation and then move to application. However, back around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, preaching began to overemphasize application in the sermon. It became *application-driven* and therefore *driven by topical preaching* instead of verse-by-verse exposition.

Here is what happened. Preachers and teachers began to simply tell people what to do and how to live without explaining the text and how it relates to the gospel and the doctrine from which conduct and behavior flow. Preachers simply began to tell people what to do instead of what to believe. Sadly, that is still a very popular method today, and many people crave it. I grew up on this kind of preaching, and it is difficult to unlearn and learn how to crave the pure spiritual milk of the word of God.

When I first came to Grand, and after I had preached for a few years, someone came to me after a sermon and said, "*You preach and explain the gospel all the time. I know the gospel—just tell me what to do.*" I understand where they were coming from because if you become accustomed to *application-driven preaching*, then you will not know what to when the riches of the grace and the glory of God is explained to you from Scripture and it hits you in the face. You will not marvel at the riches of the person and work of Christ as you ought. You will not know what it means to be stunned by the glory of God when you see how He has woven every text in the Bible to reflect His glory that is seen in the salvation accomplished by the Son of God. You will not be driven to your knees by the holiness of God. You will not see your sin as an offense to the Holy King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

If you are accustomed to *application-driven* preaching, it will take time for you to recover the gospel. It will take time before *gospel-driven* preaching is applied in your life. You see, *gospel-driven preaching* addresses the heart first and then makes application to conduct.

The Apostle Peter is saying in vv. 11-12, in light of the gospel, *beloved, for the glory of God, wage war against your sin*. I want to point out three things from these two verses: *Beloved Wage War for Your Heart, Beloved Wage War for Your Conduct, and Beloved Remember the Battle Cry is Live for the Glory of God*.

I. Beloved Wage War for Your Heart (v. 11)

*“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”*

Let’s consider the first word — “*Beloved*.” The word *Beloved* is like a two-edged sword in the original Greek. The first edge is a term of endearment. Peter loves his brothers and sisters in Christ. He cared for them and wanted them to know and love Jesus and to live in light of the gospel. He wanted them to see their identity in Christ.

The second edge teaches them that their identity is in Christ and carries with it a sense of *responsibility*. Because they have been adopted into the family of God, they should live lives that display the glory of God—living for God’s glory is the aim of the Christian life. *Someone tell me the answer to the first question of the Westminster Catechism: What is the chief end (purpose) of man?*

Notice what he says next, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles*.” He reminds them that while they are in God’s family, they are still not at home in this world. They have been born again into this world but are living for the world that is to come. This is their marching orders for life in this world.

When Peter *urges* them, he was calling them (and us) to action and to continue on until Jesus returns. *Urge* means to *appeal, implore, exhort, plead, and even beg*. Peter’s exhortation is strong, and his urging is not just for these two verses but is to be applied to everything that follows in the letter.

Look at what he *urges them to do* in the last part of v. 11, “*abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul*.” First, he reminded them who they are: *Beloved, sojourners, and exiles*, and then he addressed the desires of their hearts as the means for waging holy war against sin. Their lives were to flow out of their identity as God’s beloved children.

Next, he called them to abstain from the *passions of the flesh*. He was not strictly talking about sexual sins. He was talking about the desires that rule our hearts. Sexual sins were undoubtedly included in his exhortation, but it was not limited to that exhortation. He was talking about any sinful desire that ruled the heart. It might be from materialism, pleasure, lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, drunkenness, or gluttony. These desires begin in the heart and then are carried out in our conduct. *Bottom line: We do what we do because, from the heart, we love what we love.*

The condition of the heart is most important because it is the desire-factory of our lives. It is where our passions, motives, desires, longings, and treasures reside.

Listen to what Jesus said about our hearts in Mathew 6:21, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*.” He also said in Matthew 15:18-20, “*But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person.*”

If the heart is dead in its trespasses, then the desires of the heart will be wicked and sinful. The heart must be changed before it will fight against the passions of the flesh. *That is why Peter emphasizes that we born again*. When we are born again, we are given new hearts that are alive to Jesus.

Jesus’ death on the cross was to pay for the sins of the dead heart and purchase new hearts for God’s people. He died to give us new birth, and when the heart is given new life, it is given new desires, passions, craving, longings, and a new treasure—Jesus.

Yet, even though Jesus gives us new hearts, we still struggle with sin. We still struggle with sin, and we will until Jesus returns. Because we still struggle with sin, Peter calls Christians to go to war with *the passions of our flesh*.

Think about it this way. Have you ever been in a conversation and then asked yourself, “*Why did I do that?*” or “*Why did I say that?*” You know what I mean, you’re in a conversation, and you say too much about someone, or you’re are trying to share a concern, and you slip into gossip. I’ve been there.

I have a friend in Texas who was a banker, and then he went into ministry for a few years. He was an excellent Bible teacher. He was the Administrative Pastor of a large church in north Houston. Because he lived close to the church, he would ride his bicycle to his office every day.

Just so you understand, Texas is not friendly to people who ride their bicycles on the highway and city streets. Riding a bike on the road in Texas is not like Iowa. Texans do not defer to bicycles as they do here in Iowa. Drivers expect bicycles to get out of the way, and if they don't, they will let them know about it.

Anyway, my friend was riding his bicycle to the office, and people kept blowing their horns at him to get out of the way. He said he had had enough, and then the next driver came up behind and blew his horn, and he stuck his arm back behind him and gave them the middle finger. Then when the car passed he blew his horn again and my friend turned to see it was one of his deacons simply saying *hello*. Needless to say, he realized he had made a big mistake for which he apologized. Have you ever done something like that? You get overwhelmed and overcome, and you just lose it. Then boom your sin is broadcast to the world.

I am not telling you this because it is okay to lose it and then simply apologize. My point is that we still struggle with sin. We get angry, we get anxious, we gossip, we fudge on the truth, and shade a story and paint ourselves in a better light than we should. Bottom line: we still bear the marks of sin. Therefore, the heart must continuously be transformed and shaped into the image of Jesus.

Here is what else I want you to see in v. 11. Peter says our passions *wage war against our soul*. The phrase *wage war* is the imagery of armed conflict, and yet this is going on in our *souls*, or we might say *our hearts*. So, again, while we are born again, there is still a war going on in our hearts.

If we are not fighting the war against our sin, then we have to ask ourselves if we are born again. We begin to fight this war in our hearts. If there is no fight against your sin, then you may not be Christian.

*"In 1993 Donald Wyman was clearing timber in a remote Pennsylvania forest. Tragically, a tree fell on him, pinning his left leg. For an hour, he screamed for help, but there was no one to rescue him. Realizing that he would die there, Mr. Wyman tied off his left leg with a tourniquet from a leather bootlace, took out his pocket knife, and cut off his leg about six inches below the knee. He then crawled back to his truck, drove to get help—lived to tell the tale.*

*If you have to choose between living with one leg and dying with both legs—if you have to choose—is there any choice? Isn't living better than dying?*

*What gave Mr. Wyman the courage to cut off his leg was the realization that he could not keep it and live. It was either his leg or his life.*

*One of the reasons Christians are too soft on our sins is that we think we do have a choice. We believe we can coddle our darling sins, rather than cut them away, and it will not make that much difference. But Jesus taught us otherwise. He said, 'If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'*" (Mark 9:47-48).<sup>1</sup>

In this life, the passions of our flesh must be killed. The Bible calls this *mortification of sin*. God calls us to be relentless in killing the sin in our lives. It says we must put to death the deeds of the flesh. These deeds are passions that begin in the heart, and then those passions are evidenced in our behavior. The heart is where the battle begins.

In order to win the war for Mansoul, you must be born again. Then you must be fed the milk of the word of God by the Spirit of God in and among the people of God.

The heart is changed with new birth, and it continues its transformation as it feeds on the word of God. When the Spirit of God takes the word of God and applies it to the heart, it is like steroids is to muscles. Strength and power begin to be formed in the heart. The Christian begins to win the war for Mansoul.

The transformation of the heart results in the transformation of our conduct and behavior. This leads us to our second point and the first part of v. 12.

## II. Beloved Wage War for Your Conduct (v. 12)

*"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable."*

As the heart changes, our behavior changes. We are transformed from inside out and not the other way around. Christianity is not behavior modification.

So, don't get confused. It is not the external taking in of the word of God that changes behavior and then the heart. The taking in of the word of God is the internal feeding of the heart so that it hates of sin and loves Jesus.

So, let's get specific about our pursuit of holiness. Many people struggle with pornography. You may be one of those persons. How does the Holy Spirit change a man or a woman who looks at porn? How is that sin defeated in the heart and then in conduct so that our conduct is seen as honorable to the outside world?

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Ortlund Jr., *Supernatural Living for Natural People: The Living-Giving Message of Romans 8*, 61-62.

First, your flesh will lie to you and tell you that porn is not a big deal. Porn is a big deal. It abuses women and degrades men. So, first, we must agree with the Holy Spirit and then go to war against the sin of porn.

Second, we need hope that the Holy Spirit will sustain us and kill this sin. So, the second step is not to beat yourself up but believe the gospel. *You see, self-condemnation does not kill sin.* Romans 8:1 teaches us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ because Jesus has taken our condemnation on the cross. We must believe that the Spirit of God wants to restore you and renovate your heart.

Third, we must repent. By faith in Jesus, we must go to the cross, where the passions of our flesh were crucified in Christ. We must look at the tortured flesh of our Savior, who was humiliated on the cross for us. We must look at the blood flowing down from the cross. We must see His blood-stained brow, the crown of thorns, the sweat, and the tears He shed. We must hear the crowd mocking Him and look into His eyes and see what our sin of porn has done to Him. We must look in His eyes and know that He loves us. We must keep repenting and know that He purchased every drop of the grace of repentance He gives us. As you keep believing the gospel, keep repenting, and taking active steps to kill sin in practical ways, you will find that the passions of your flesh will begin to die.<sup>2</sup>

This is what it means for us to *keep our conduct honorable among the Gentiles so that we live for God's glory* and is my final point this morning. This leads me to my last point.

### III. Beloved Remember The Battle Cry is: Live for the Glory of God (v. 12)

*"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."*

There is much debate about what this verse means when it says, *"when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."* Some scholars think it means to glorify God right now, and others think it means on the Day of Judgment.

I think it means on the Day of Judgment. As I read Scripture, I don't see anywhere that ALL unbelievers believe that Christians' lives are honorable and good. There are some unbelievers who observe Christians' lives, and it is a witness, and they trust Jesus. There are some unbelievers, and they observe Christians' lives, and it makes no impact at all. They just ignore that people love Jesus and therefore ignore Jesus. However, other unbelievers believe that they are doing God's will by killing Christians. They have no intention to glorify God. Finally, there are others who hate God or follow a false god. So, I do not see where our good, honorable conduct always results in glorifying God except in this way.

On the Day of Judgment, there will be a time when the knee of every unbeliever will bow on the earth and under the earth, and they will acknowledge that the conduct of Christ's followers was to the glory of God. Therefore, they will glorify God for the holy lives of the saints.

### Conclusion

Let me close by telling you a war story. In late 1944 Second Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda of the Japanese army was sent to the Philippine island of Lubang. His mission was to resist the American advance, and he was ordered to fight on indefinitely. The Americans defeated Japan in August of 1945, but Onoda never got the word. He kept fighting. For thirty more years, this man kept on fighting World War II.

Eventually, the Philippine government realized there was a Japanese soldier who didn't know the war was over. So, they dropped leaflets into the jungle where he hid out, telling him the war was over. They eventually dropped letters and photographs from his family, asking him to come on out. They brought loudspeakers into the jungle and shouted, "Onoda, the war is over."

One day his brother stood at the microphone and begged him to give up, but he didn't believe it. He thought it was a trick. He fought on until 1974 when the Japanese government finally sent in his old commanding officer, Major Taniguchi, who ordered Onoda to surrender.

That man lost 30 years of his life fighting a war that was over. His mind was trapped in 1945, he shut out the good news of peace and lost 30 years of his life on his crazy lost cause.

Two thousand years ago, the King came and won the war for Mansoul. The night Jesus was born, the angels stepped up to the microphone and shouted, *"Peace on earth"* (Luke 2:14). God has been dropping leaflets of the good news ever since. Isn't it time you stopped fighting the war for Mansoul in your strength and surrender to Jesus and let him fight the battle for you?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Ray Ortland's sermon: *God's Grace Better than We Think: Romans 8*. Given at Immanuel Church Nashville, Tennessee, Feb. 10, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Jared C. Wilson, *The Imperfect Disciple: Grace for People Who Can't Get Their Act Together*, 179-180.