

**The Christian's Warfare**  
**1 Peter 2:11**  
**May 7, 2023**

**I. Introduction**

- A. The Kentucky Derby and the commercials leading up. What were they selling? Ease and comfort . . .
  - 1. Cars that make your life easy and comfortable
  - 2. Financial services that make your life easy and comfortable
  - 3. Bourbon that makes your life easy and comfortable
- B. This, of course, is what sells: everyone wants an easy and comfortable life. And if I can get it through a new car or clothes or money or bourbon, I'm all in. At heart far too many evangelicals are like Bunyan's "Mr. Worldly Wiseman," the character in *Pilgrim's Progress* who tries to entice Christian away from the difficult and dangerous journey toward the Celestial City and instead "settle down" in the quiet town of Morality, a town of relative ease and comfort. (It's scary how convincing Mr. Worldly Wiseman is. In reading it you *almost* want to go there.)
- C. Into this worldly lie comes the truth of **1 Peter 2:11** and the apostle's talk of warfare. And if we're not careful, we'll tune him out given the dissonance he creates in our minds. (Peter is gloriously out of step with Mr. Worldly Wiseman.) But listen we must, because Peter, unlike Madison Ave., has our best interests at heart.
- D. This sermon is an exercise in "basic training" for living the Christian life. And it begins with a realistic assessment of what we're up against and called to.

**1 Peter 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. [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."

**II. Context**

- A. Up to this point Peter has been primarily concerned with how we relate to each other—our relationships within the church. But now the emphasis shifts to how we relate to those outside the church. How should Christians relate to the world, particularly when that world is not friendly or even neutral to the church but opposed to its very existence? How relevant is the apostle's letter for our time?
- B. Peter is opening a new front in the Christian life with this section of the letter (that runs through **4:11**). As he considers our witness to the world, Peter is urging us to wage war against one of our great enemies. In (**v. 11**), Peter not only names the enemy, but helps us develop a battle plan for resistance.
- C. The Outline:
  - 1. Who is this enemy? ("the passions of the flesh")
  - 2. What is this enemy doing? ("wage war against our soul")
  - 3. How do we defend ourselves? (we "abstain" from them)

### III. Who Is the Enemy?

- A. (v. 11) “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the *passions of the flesh*, which wage war against your soul.”
- B. Before we meet this enemy head on, notice what Peter is doing to prepare us. Peter has just dropped on his readers some incredible categories of *identity*, who they are in Christ . . .
  - 1. (vv. 9–10) “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession . . . Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”
  - 2. And what do God’s people do? (v. 9) “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”
- C. (v. 11) “Beloved” . . .
  - 1. Peter summarizes all the identity statements he’s given—all of the OT images he’s applied to Christians—in one glorious word: **Beloved**. Loved of God. That’s what you are. God’s dearly loved people.
  - 2. He’s trying to instill in us confidence, by reminding us of our status before God as “Beloved.” Why would he do this? Because he’s about to call us to war and he is determined to help us go to battle as “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (**Romans 8:37**). Indeed, the exhortations to godly living Peter is about to give are built on the almighty back of God’s grace that is ours in Christ. (cf., **Philippians 3:12** “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”)
  - 3. N.B. Peter is not casually suggesting something. He’s *urging* us onward. He is rousing us to action like a great General inspiring his troops before a major battle. That Peter is urging us speaks to the gravity of the threat. In other words, if this wasn’t a matter of grave concern there would be no *urging*. (No one “urges” you to go to Coffee Crossing; but you are urged to take shelter from the storm. When that tornado is bearing down on you, you better get in the basement.)
- D. We are now ready to meet the enemy. Of course, each of you has already met this enemy. In fact, you’ve known this enemy your whole life. How do I know this? Because the enemy is *you*. Not the culture; not unbelievers; not the government. YOU.
- E. Peter identifies the enemy as “the passions of the flesh.” In other words, ‘sinful desires’ or ‘indwelling sin’ or what Peter had earlier (**1:14**) called “the passions of your former ignorance.” It is our God-dishonoring, faithless, evil desires consistent with our old nature apart from Christ. It is our willing conformity to the fallen pattern of this world. And Peter hasn’t left us to wonder what some of these sinful desires are . . .
  - 1. (**2:1**) “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”
  - 2. (**4:3**) “For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.”

3. All *actions* and *attitudes* contrary to Christ and his holiness.
- D. What Peter calls “the passions of the flesh” is echoed in Paul’s talk of a “law” at work in us . . .
  1. **Romans 7:21–23** “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law *waging war* against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”
  2. (v. 21) “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.” (Cf., v. 23 “I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind . . .”).
    - a. By ‘law’ Paul means a ‘principle’ or ‘operational principle’.
    - b. Sin is a *contrary law* to the inclination to do good (vv. 21-22).
    - c. This ‘law’ or ‘principle’ “dwells in my members,” Paul says—which means that it’s *always with me*.
- E. **APPLICATION:** Everywhere I go, this enemy is with me . . . In the car, he’s with me; at home, he’s with me; at Southern, he’s with me; at Oak Park, he’s with me; on vacation, he’s not . . . *the passions of the flesh go where you go*.
  1. (1:13) “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded . . .”
  2. **1 Thessalonians 5:6** “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.”

#### IV. What Is This Enemy Doing?

- A. (v. 11) “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which *wage war against your soul*.”
- B. This should shock us: Peter says believers—those who have the Spirit—are not exempt from fleshly desires. Christians are in a war.
- C. Notice what Peter does *not* say about this enemy’s tactic: it ‘opposes’ you; it ‘fights’ you; it ‘bothers’ you; it ‘annoys’ you; it ‘frustrates’ you; it ‘inconveniences’ you; it ‘hurts’ you—all of which is true at some level. Peter says this enemy is “waging war” against you. It is seeking to utterly destroy you—and will succeed if left unchecked.
- D. Indwelling sin is vicious and will bring the war against you at any time and in any place. Indeed, the drone strikes of temptation come from all angles and at times when we least expect them. (**Illustration:** Coming into the office on Friday and how “the passions of the flesh don’t care about the weather.”)
- E. **APPLICATION:** Herein is exposed one of the great fallacies of modern evangelicalism: the idea that our sin is not that big a deal. (I’m still waiting on the TGC National Conference on the “Sinfulness of Sin” or the Christianity Today series on human depravity—sin doesn’t sell. But it will kill you.)
  1. **Romans 8:13** “For if you live according to the flesh you will die . . .”
  2. **Galatians 5:19–21** “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

3. **Mark 9:43–48** “And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”
  - a. Oh, Christian, you are in a war. Therefore, the church needs a wartime mentality! (**Illustration:** After the battle at Shiloh in 1862 when Lincoln had to fend off demands for Grant’s removal, famously and prophetically said, “I cannot spare this man—he fights.” Would I have an Army of the Potomac with me at Oak Park who settles for nothing less than the unconditional surrender of our sin!)
  - b. John Owen: “Sin not only still abides in us, but is still *acting*, still *laboring* to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone” (*Temptation and Sin* vol. 6, p. 11).

## V. How Do We Defend Ourselves?

- A. (v. 11) “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to *abstain* from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”
- B. To “abstain” literally means “to distance” oneself. Peter is calling us to distance ourselves from the passions of the flesh—to resist them, to separate from them, to not associate with them at all.
- C. He grounds this “distancing” in our identity as “sojourners and exiles.” As “strangers and aliens” on this earth, we do not conform to the pattern of this world (**Romans 12:2**). As pilgrims, we don’t adopt the customs of this culture. After all, our citizenship is in heaven. Therefore, we take on the culture of Christ and his kingdom.
  1. (**4:1–2**) “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, 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.”
  2. **Hebrews 11:24–26** “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”
- D. How do we distance ourselves? What does the resistance look like? Consider these specifics of the battle plan . . .
  1. **Aim at the heart**
    - a. Sin is a heart matter not merely a behavior problem
    - b. **Luke 6:45** “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” (

- c. **Psalm 139:23-24** “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”
2. **Practice Self-Denial**
    - a. The world says, “You just need a little *me* time.” If you said this to the apostle Peter he would look at you a bit bewildered or confused. Because at the heart of the gospel is exactly the opposite message . . .
    - b. **Mark 8:34** “If anyone would come after me, let him *deny himself* and take up his cross and follow me.”
  3. **Accept that the battle never ends in this life**
    - a. **Rom. 8:12-13** So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. [13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you *put to death* the deeds of the body, you will live.
    - b. All the verbs in this passage emphasize an *active, ongoing effort*.
    - c. There is no cease-fire in this war against the passions of the flesh.
  4. **Know there can be great victories**
    - a. Some sins in this life can be eradicated. The gospel is that powerful!
    - b. **2 Corinthians 5:16-17** “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (cf., **Romans 6:4** “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”)
  5. **Make no provision for the flesh**
    - a. **Rom. 13:14** “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”
    - b. Know yourself and do not put yourself in a position of weakness.
  6. **Use your spiritual sword**
    - a. **Ephesians 6:17** “and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”
    - b. **Matt. 4:1-11**
    - c. **Psalm 119:9-11** “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it *according to your word*. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your *commandments*! I have stored up your *word* in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”
  7. **Stay in community**
    - a. No Christian is an island. You were saved to live in community.
    - b. **Hebrews 3:12-13** “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”
    - c. Would you rather go to war alone or with an army? Safety is in (godly) numbers.
  8. **Look to the cross**

- a. We put sin to death only in the context of Christ's ultimate victory over sin at the cross. Provision for our victory has been made in his victory.
- b. **Galatians 6:14** "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

**VI. Close**

- A. O, Christian, let us hear the battle cry of Peter: "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against our souls." Indeed, we are in a war and the stakes couldn't be higher.
- B. The world will want you to think otherwise—the siren song of Mr. Worldly Wiseman is always in earshot. But with headphones of grace let us press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus—a prize that will make every battle not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us!