

The Christian and the Culture

1 Peter 2:11-12 (08/14/16)

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1 Peter 2:11-12 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

What does God want us to do about our godless culture? It's tempting to rail against all the corruption around us, to identify all the ungodly practices and sinful movements we are well aware of, to talk about how America is "now under God's judgment," (not to mention the world has been under God's judgment since Genesis 3). There has been plenty of time and space devoted to exposing how wicked everything is, from the hundreds of thousands of murders of unborn babies each year to defying God's design and decree of what marriage really is, plus many others. You really should read Al Mohler's book, *We Cannot Be Silent*, especially chapters 3, 9, and 10. His chapter on the "Hard Questions" should be read by every teen and college student.

So what should Christians do about the culture? Should we **avoid** it and go hide out in a Christian enclave. Should we **attack** it? There's a time to speak up, but we had better do it with compassion and calmness. Should we **adjust** to it? This is the direction of the mainline churches and it's bleeding over into evangelical churches which are changing their attitudes and actions and affirmations, more and more accepting the demands of the LGBTQ agenda. Christians must never adjust to the world's views when they clearly contradict what God has said in the Bible, which He has about gender and marriage and the image of God in every human being, including the unborn ones. Should we **attempt** to change the culture? Not directly. We should have influence, but changing the culture is not the calling of the church. Paul preached the gospel, but never organized a program to directly change the culture. It won't work, anyway. Throughout history God has used the gospel to bring revivals and reform at various times, but then the culture sinks back into its godlessness, and sometimes worse. Scripture is clear: the world culture is headed in one direction – toward the tyranny of the Anti-Christ and the horrors of the seven-year tribulation period. Then Christ will return and establish a godly and righteous culture around the world. Zechariah 14:9, "In that day the Lord will be king over all the earth!"

So how do you glorify God in the midst of our godless culture? You live in such a way that you will have the influence of your walk and your talk. Many will despise your message, but God will use you to draw some to Christ. That's what 1 Peter 2:11-12 says. These two verses are Peter's transition into the rest of 1 Peter about how to live out the gospel in society, under government, in the workplace, in marriage, with the partiers, and then under fiery persecution.

God is calling you to live right here in the middle of this godless culture as a representative of Christ so that poor, lost, and spiritually ignorant sinners can see and taste the salt and light of your life. Jesus said this same thing in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Peter gives two simple directions for how to glorify God and let your light shine in our culture.

First, the biggest and most important and most difficult war you face is not the culture wars out there, but the war going on right there in your own heart. *Vs. 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.*

Peter thinks about all those believers sprinkled throughout Asia Minor and the first word that comes to mind is, "Beloved!" This one word captures how blessed we are. Beloved, not hated. Beloved, not rejected. Not alienated and in darkness and condemned, but beloved by God and brought into His forever family. While you were His enemy He loved you and gave His most cherished possession, His own Son, to die for you. You were mindlessly running away from God, your only hope, and He loved you and

chased you down. He captured you with the gospel and claimed you as His own, beloved one. He first loved you before you loved Him. For people who have lost all hope, for people suffering in this fallen world under the scourge of pain, disease, rejection, scorn, who maybe have never known a father's true love, He loved you! Do you believe that? Isn't that what motivates all your obedience to God? Paul said it like this, "Who loved me and gave Himself for me!"

Peter urges us. He could command us, but that's not how the gospel works. God urges us, draws us. Godliness is not legislated by severe, harsh demands, but instead God appeals to us, awakening in us a heart desire. In marriage a wife who commands her husband won't get close to the results as the one who urges with gracious appeals. "Honey Cookies, would you mind cleaning out the sink after you shave?" Ah, what hubby can resist that? Contrast, "Harold! How often do I have to tell you to clean those hairs out of the sink? Now get to it or I'll clobber you with this doily!"

Then Peter adds another reminder for God's people living in a godless culture – you don't belong here, this isn't your home, you are aliens and strangers, you're in the wilderness of this world just passing through, you're headed for higher ground, your citizenship is in heaven. But while you are here, you have a responsibility to showcase the glories and beauties of Jesus! And it doesn't matter what your earthly connections are, your identity is not in your economic status, race or ethnicity, mental capacities, business position, athletic abilities. No, your identity is the same as David Boudia's – not in winning the gold but in Jesus Christ! As you go back to school, play on the team, work with others every day, your identity is Christ, period! You're a stranger and alien here.

Now we come to the war and how to fight it. Guess what? The enemy isn't out there; it's right there in you! You aren't on a campaign to clean up America, but to fight to the death those fleshly lusts that keep on campaigning against your soul!

Let's identify your enemies. They are fleshly lusts, desires, cravings, demands that are constantly assaulting your soul. They want to destroy your testimony for Christ, your walk with God, your spiritual life. Your soul is like the cockpit of a jetliner where the Word and the Spirit and your will are flying the plane. Then like terrorists, these fleshly lusts are embedded in the plane and strike at you, assault you, try to control you and hijack your life. Fleshly lusts wage war against you every day, present tense. It's not a battle but a campaign. You might win today's battle, but don't relax, they'll be back tomorrow and the war continues!

What do these lustful terrorists look like? You've seen them often: pride, selfishness, self-righteousness, arrogance, anger, impatience, sexual indulgence, pornography, bitterness, malice, lying, gossip, slandering, unbelief. Take the fruit of the Spirit, turn them around, and you'll see them. Genuine love becomes self-serving. Joy turns into self-pity, misery, and depression. Peace becomes argumentative and demanding your own way. Patience changes into easily annoyed and flying off the handle. Kindness becomes mean spirited. Goodness is replaced with grumbling, complaining, and criticizing. Faithful becomes disloyal. Humility changes to blame and unrepentance. Self-controlled turns into self-indulgent.

These are a few of the enemy forces you and I must be aware of! And what do you do with them? Abstain. Hold them at bay. Set up a perimeter around your soul with the Word of God so you can identify them as they attack and start screaming like little tyrants demanding their way. "Here I am! Feed me! Please me! Listen to me! Enjoy me! Ah, please yourself; you deserve a little sin. Please?" They are so slick. They want to rule your heart. They want to destroy your marriage by urging you to punish your spouse and be demanding and mean.

Every day is a battle, and you are called to fight and win this internal war against your own sin! How do you win? Be alert to your selfish desires and cravings. Identify them clearly. They are your enemy. If you cave, repent quickly, and go back to who you are in Christ. You are beloved and your identity is in Christ! Don't forget it. Unless you're right with God and fighting and killing those fleshly lusts, your impact for Christ in this world will be as powerful as trying to bring down an elephant with foam bullets. This is the war within that God says you must fight and win. This is the first priority in dealing with our godless culture.

Second, your outward calling in this culture is to showcase the reality of your Savior by a life filled with good, fine, attractive deeds. *12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Notice where God expects you to live. Not off in some monastery, but right there in the midst of the Gentiles, or unbelievers. This is God's plan, to sprinkle His people throughout the world as salt and light. You're in it. You're right where God wants you to be – in India, Lithuania, England, Indianapolis, Evansville, Boonville, Chandler. Among the Gentiles, which means unbelievers.

And you're not to live like weirdoes – dress weird and talk weird and live under a rock. In fact, I believe Paul enjoyed the races and the fights. He spoke of boxing and races. He knew the pagan philosophers and quoted them. We can enjoy innocent pleasures like watching a good movie or watching the Olympics. It was so neat to watch gold-winners Simone Biles and Aly Raisman, working together, winning together, then walking hand in hand together in the thrill of victory. Hearing David Boudia and his diving partner speak so clearly of Christ as their identity thrilled the hearts of all believers listening. Two respected young men sprinkling the salt of Christ out to millions of viewers was so beautiful!

But God says as you live in all kinds of relationships, from family to school to work to organizations to sports, to unsaved people's homes for a dinner, let attractive behavior in all your interactions characterize your life in every area! People are watching you, like it or not. You claim to be a Christian? People want to see what that means in your behavior. Wiersbe tells the story of an Indian chief named Red Jacket in the early days of our country. After listening to a white man preach the gospel he said, "Brother, we are told you have been preaching to the white people in this place. We'll wait and see what effect your preaching has upon them! If we find it does them any good, if it makes them honest and less disposed to cheat us, we'll consider again what you have said."

Keep your behavior – how you live, how you talk, how you react to wrongs, how you spend your money, what you praise, what you love – keep it excellent, a neat little Greek word "kalen." Thayer's lexicon gives eleven words to explain it: beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, admirable. That's the kind of behavior we are to showcase in all our dealings with the culture all around us. Others may be nasty, judgmental, arrogant, or self-righteous, but not you!

Even if you keep excellent behavior, Peter says you will be slandered – "they slander you." The world culture has always, always slandered Christians. It's just a fact. In the early church Christians were accused of being cannibals, incestuous, atheists, and especially superstitious, believing in this hair brain notion that a crucified Jew arose from the dead! They were also accused of being seditious for refusing to acknowledge Caesar as deity.

Are we being slandered today? Of course. It is going to pick up steam as the culture stampedes further away from any semblance of right and wrong. What is this world calling us? Haters. Unloving. Intolerant. Self-righteous. We must carefully reject all those labels which our culture has come up with in the area of gender and abortion. Abortion is not "reproductive health." It's murder and we must keep saying that. We have to be very careful to stand with God for truth and right and good, but we must stand with a gentle and concerned heart. We can't compromise God's standards, but we must speak the truth in love, even if we are still condemned.

Now notice, God has you and me right out there among the Gentiles so the people in our world might see our good deeds and observe how we live. And as we go further and welcome people into conversations about the gospel, some will be saved! We'll get to 1 Peter 3 in September, but the same word for "observing" is used where the believing wife wins her disobedient or unsaved husband without a nagging word as he observes, watches, notices her loving, gentle, respectful, submissive spirit lived right out in front of him and maybe he'll be saved. Dr. Ed Wheat, author of *Love Life*, tells how he got saved and suffered some of this slander and rejection from his own wife, but he continued to live carefully with her, loving her with good, excellent deeds, and won her to the Lord.

Who is observing you? Many are. Your children and grandchildren and neighbors and all those difficult people at work, your fellow classmates, where you shop, out on the athletic field. What are they seeing in your life? Tertullian in the early church wrote this: "'Look,' they (the Roman unbelievers) say, 'how they love one another' (for they themselves hate one another); 'and how they are ready to die for each other' (for they themselves are readier to kill each other)."

That's what glorifying God on the day of visitation means. You and I are to fight the war within ourselves so our character truly pleases God and it becomes evident to others that we are obviously different and God uses our witness to win some to Christ. How many stories we've heard of a faithful friend who continued loving and showing Christ, or a mother or grandmother who was faithful to Jesus and loved her son or daughter regardless of how far off he or she went. Then at some point, maybe not directly, but God brings the memory of that excellent, loving, kind testimony back to mind and God visits them with the grace and power of the gospel and they bow their hearts to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and glorify God!

This is the Christian's responsibility to the culture. To win them to Jesus!