

1 Peter 2:11-12, Part B

1Pe 2:11 (NKJV) Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

What Peter says is the culprit when it comes to abstaining is what he calls “**fleshly lusts**”. The primary word is “**lusts**” (Gr.-*epithymia*), but the word “**fleshly**” (Gr.-*sarkikos*) helps identify the character of the lust. It refers to that which is of this world and is defined by the world’s attributes and characteristics. What the word “**lusts**” refers to is having an intense desire for something, a passionate craving for something, and in this case, it is having an intense desire for worldly things and fleshly things that are not of God.¹ The general and most common use of the word is that of having strong desires for things which are perverted, and eventually those strong desires will overcome the person and become the dominating force of their life. Lusts have the innate and very distinctive ability to enslave people, to make them actual slaves of that for which they lust. I know a man right now that has been an alcoholic all of his life. He lost his wife and he lost his children all because he had a strong craving to drink beer. He lost his license multiple times when he was caught driving drunk. He kept attending Alcoholics Anonymous, but to no avail. He struggled to maintain a meaningful work level. He lost his home. He literally became a slave to his lust and eventual addiction to beer.

So, we have the obvious examples like drug addicts and alcoholics, but people can be controlled by lusts for many other things. It could be a lust for money, lusts for personal achievement, or lusts for personal beauty. People lust for power and control and for the ability to dominate others. Many politicians have become addicted to political power. Some of the owners of these baseball teams and football teams are addicted to the prestige that goes along with being the owner. They spend hundreds of millions of dollars to buy players that will take them to the Super Bowl, the World Series, the Stanley Cup, or the World Cup. People can be controlled by lusts for many things, and once they become addicted to certain lusts what is important to understand is that **those lusts will eventually destroy their life**. In [Galatians 5:19-22](#), Paul gives an entire listing of characteristics and attributes in a person’s life that are what he calls “**the works of the flesh**”. Whenever God gives a list of various attributes, it is something that is very important because it condenses and compacts content and substance into very specific terms that are very easy to see and understand. Listen carefully to what Paul calls the “**works of the flesh**”.

Gal 5:19 (ESV) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ 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.

So, if you see any of those characteristics in a person’s life, then what it means is that they are living a life that is characteristic of the flesh, or what Peter identifies as “**fleshly**”. If we transpose some of those terms into [1 Peter 2:11-12](#), it becomes evident that people can be addicted to non-sexual things such as strife, jealousy, anger, division, and what Paul calls “**things like these**” (v21).

Right or wrong, I am personally convinced that there are people in churches who are addicted to what Paul refers to in [Galatians 5:20](#) as “**divisions**”, or “**dissensions**”. He also uses the word “**strife**”. They

simply like to argue and be contentious. The word “**divisions**” actually carries the idea of being someone who is somewhat addicted to creating discord and dissension. It is almost as if they get a kind of emotional “high” from the conflict. I have personally met people like this. It seems as if they are just looking for a good fight, a good conflict. It is almost as if their flesh just feeds on that kind of lust. Now, we normally do not think of the word “**lusts**” in this way, but a lust is anything that excites a person’s flesh. We generally think of “**lust**” in sexual terms, but we have to remember the context in which Peter is writing – and it does not have a sexual connotation. He is writing to believers, to people he calls “**elect**”, to people who hopefully see themselves “**as sojourners and pilgrims**”, and yet he is clearly implying that they are involved in things that would qualify as “**fleshly lusts**”, and that they need to “**abstain**” from those kinds of things. It is important that he does not qualify what those “**fleshly lusts**” actually are, but clearly he is deeply concerned with the results that they will produce – whether in the individual, in the local assembly of believers, or in what he calls “**the Gentiles**” in v12 referring to lost people.

Now, relative to what Peter is addressing, and this is a very critical point in this discussion, but **it simply is not possible to partially abstain** from anything that is wrong, from anything that is fleshly. It is not godly to curse a little. It is not godly to look at pornography occasionally. It is not godly to be selfish every once in a while. A person who is a drug addict cannot still take some drugs every once in a while. A person who has become an alcoholic cannot be a casual social drinker on the weekend. A person who is addicted to divisions cannot be contentious a little bit in each meeting. Why? It is because it is no different than just “**a little leaven**”. Just one drink of alcohol or just one argument is the enemy’s fuel for slavery to that lust. No wonder Paul starts out with “**I beg you...**” because he clearly understands the implications of being addicted to the wrong things.

If we as believers are really going to take verses like this seriously, then it is imperative that we must ask ourselves the right questions. For instance, if you were to do an honest assessment of this one verse, how would you actually characterize your life? If someone else was to evaluate your life, what would they say you were like – a pilgrim or an earth dweller, a person with great self-control or a person out of control? Would you be someone that would be characterized by having your life bound by and consumed by worldly possessions and a life of utter ease, or would someone see you and characterize you as someone who was sacrificial and fully surrendered to Christ? Are you someone who is looking for heaven on earth? It is so critical to understand that the time that we are given by God is simply a preparation for the future. Whatever you are doing with your life is either storing up treasures in heaven or forfeiting heaven’s treasures for earthly pleasures. There really is nothing in the middle. If I can say it this way, time is short and eternity is long, and no one has as long as they think that they have. Time passes by very quickly, and before we know it, the end of our life is upon us. The questions once again would be things like am I fighting the good fight of faith or am I forsaking the battle for worldly, fleshly things? Am I girding up the loins of my mind to serve Christ or to serve my own worldly lusts? Am I redeeming the time that God has given to me to glorify Him and His Son, or am I wasting my entire life on things that are passing away. Listen to how Jesus characterized all of this in [Matthew 6:19-21](#) when He said the following,

Mt 6:19 (NKJV) "**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;** ²⁰ **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither**

moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The last thing that we should ever want is for our heart to be attached to this world. I love how Jesus put it in [Luke 17:32-33](#) when He simply said this,

Lk 17:32 (NKJV) **Remember Lot's wife. ³³ Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.**

These are very real and deeply spiritual questions that everyone who claims the name of Christ must face. No one receives an exemption from being called on by Christ to genuine Christian living. No believer is the exception to being a deeply committed follower of Christ. No Christian has reached a place of immunity from the spiritual obligations imposed on all believers by the Word of God.

If we are truly spiritual “**pilgrims**” and our life has not been captured by all of the worldly and fleshly lusts that so easily consume a man, then in a kind of supernatural way we have an abhorrence for all of those things that rob us of our devotion and commitment to God. I hope you feel the same way that I do, but I literally hate it when the world with all of its glamour and glitter seems to pull my heart away from the things of God. We are people who should become very uncomfortable when the world and all of its lusts are consuming our thought life, consuming our resources, and consuming our time. It seems to happen almost unnoticeably, imperceptibly, gradually, and without any kind of fanfare. It just happens, and we wake up one day and we just seem more captured by what the world is offering to us rather than what God is offering to us. This very real tendency to just “**drift away**” from the things of God described in [Hebrews 2:1](#) is so subtle that it is often almost impossible to even recognize and perceive in our own life. We can clearly see it in others, but rarely in ourselves.

It is obvious that Peter understands a very crucial issue. He understands that when a believer begins to lust after worldly things, that it cannot only injure his physical body such as alcohol or sexual diseases may do, but it primarily injures his soul. He says that it actually “**wars against the soul**”. The word for “**wars**” is “*strateuomai*” and it means to lead an army, to wage a war, and in this context to war against godly principles and moral precepts.² It refers to a spiritual battle, one that is constantly carrying out a campaign of spiritual warfare against the believer. No matter how insignificant, minor, trivial, unimportant, and inconsequential some of these “**fleshly lusts**” may appear to you personally, in the spiritual realm they are waging a battle for your very soul – and you do not even know it. The battle that is being waged against you is always imperceptible to you personally until it is too late. In a war, the enemy never reveals to his opponent what he is going to do next. The strategy of war is to mislead, to deceive, to outwit, to overcome, to destroy – and all of those terms fit very well when it comes to the spiritual battle being waged for your soul. If you are a Christian, the enemy knows that you are eternally secure, but he also recognizes that if he can destroy your testimony that you can be spiritually neutralized. So, his goal is clearly to nullify, to literally deactivate your Christian life. You lose, he wins.

I wish that I had good news that you can reach a point in your life where you have become so spiritual that this conflict no longer exists, but that would not be a truthful statement. In fact, this is a constant and continual conflict from which we will never be free until we are with Christ. I wish I could tell you that you can reach a place of spiritual nirvana and enlightenment that you will no longer be affected by the war on your soul, but I cannot do that simply because it is not true. What I can tell you with great

assurance is that the enemy is constantly working to deplete every believer of their faith in God, of their commitment to Christ, and of their love for His Word and His church. Unfortunately, it appears that very often he has been quite successful. Do you know how he wins? Have you been listening? It is through these “**fleshly lusts**” for the things of the world rather than a hunger and spiritual lust for the things of God.

The world allures and attracts believers with all of its lusts, and the believer’s flesh is the instrument where that lust is originated. God has given the believer a new heart, but these “**fleshly lusts**” are literally waging a war against the believer’s new heart.³ Think of these “**fleshly lusts**” as spiritual terrorists who are literally intent on destroying your Christian life. No matter whether we want to or not, we are always fighting a spiritual war, we are always engaged in an unseen conflict with forces of evil that are very organized and deceptive. It is a war where we are fighting against sin, against Satan and his lies and deception, against worldly and fleshly lusts, and often against our own stubbornness and unwillingness to simply let Christ live His life through us. [2 Timothy 2:4](#) says it this way,

2Ti 2:4 (NKJV) No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

Every believer has to cultivate this kind of mindset, this kind of mental picture of what they are really engaged in on a daily basis. So many Christians are totally satisfied with just going to church, hearing someone else do their homework, and then living how they want to live the rest of the week. At a personal level, I am not sure that any of that could even be defined as even being Christian in nature. It just seems that the church has lost sight of the fact that it is composed of “**pilgrims and sojourners**” and exiles just passing through the world, people who are not attached to this world. [1 John 2:15-17](#) are some very convicting verses,

1Jn 2:15 (NKJV) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The very last thing that God wants His children to do is to become comfortable in an evil world system that is becoming more and more corrupt with each passing day, yet that is exactly what is happening to the modern church of Laodicea. So, if I as a believer am truly committed to the reality that I am a “**pilgrim**” who is merely passing through, then I have to constantly be confessing that reality. If I just go through the casual, weekly motions of Christianity, then I will become more and more comfortable with the world and all that it offers to me. “**Fleshly lusts**” will always lead to a falling further and further away from God because by its very nature it absorbs so much of our attention. These fleshly and worldly lusts create a supreme disregard for both God and the things of God in a person’s life, so if you have any that you know of, I deeply encourage you to purge your life of their corrupting influence on you.

I was reading recently about what sinks ships. It is not that the ship is in the water, but that the water is in the ship. That is what sinks it. It can endure the worst of storms, but if somehow the water breeches the ship and gets inside the ship, then it will invariably sink. The same is true of believers. We are in the world, but we are not to be of the world. As Peter has expressed in v11 here, we have to live side by side with unbelievers and within a pagan system that is opposed to all for which we stand as Christians.

However, if those immoral and unspiritual elements are allowed to penetrate our life, they can eventually sink us and destroy the very thing that we should so dearly covet – our Christian life and witness. As [1 John 2:15](#) reminded us earlier, we cannot love the world or the things of the world. Why? It is because that is what will sink us. As has often been said, it is not the Christian in the world that is the problem, but the world in the Christian that causes their downfall.⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ Logos, *1 Peter 2:11*, ep.

² Zodhiates, 1315.

³ MacArthur, 138.

⁴ Precept, *1 Peter 2:11*, ep.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Logos Bible Software." *Logos Bible Software, Gold*. Bellingham, Washington, n.d.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Peter*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2004.

Unknown. "Precept Austin." *Precept Austin*. n.d. http://www.preceptaustin.org/1_peter_211-12.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Revised Edition, 1993. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.