

Conflict Resolution

I Peter 2:11-12

On January 5th of this year, the Foreign Policy website highlighted 10 conflicts in the world to watch in 2017. They wrote “The world is entering its most dangerous chapter in decades. The sharp uptick in war over recent years is outstripping our ability to cope with the consequences. From the global refugee crisis to terrorism, our collective failure to resolve conflict is giving birth to new threats and emergencies.”

The internet is a wonderful thing where information is literally at your fingertips. I was interested in knowing how many wars or conflicts are being waged right now in the world. Here’s what I found. In Africa there are 29 countries with 229 conflicts between militia-guerillas, terrorist-separatist-anarchist groups involved.

In Asia there are 16 countries and 170 conflicts. In Europe there are 10 countries with 81 conflicts. In the Middle East there are 7 countries with 253 conflicts.

In the Americas there are 6 countries with 26 conflicts between drug cartels and terrorist groups.

Those are just the conflicts that are in one way or another politically motivated. They don’t take into account conflict within cities or among competing companies or between neighbors. Conflict of one kind or another seems inevitable. It’s been that way almost since the beginning of time itself.

There is another conflict going on that political analysts won’t or don’t talk about. Social scientists and psychologists may hint at it in their studies but won’t delve into the root of problems they address. Yet it is a conflict Scripture addresses repeatedly and it’s going on right now. We are all involved in it to one degree or another. You can’t run from it. There is no compromising and it will relentlessly continue until the day you die.

Peter addresses it in our passage. We find it in his first letter that bears his name. Turn to I Peter 2:11-12 where we will see this conflict in relation to godly character. We start with the call for godly character.

I. THE CALL FOR GODLY CHARACTER – v. 11

In this verse Peter begins a major shift in the tone or theme of the letter that will run through verse 11 of chapter 4. The major theme of this section will be our conduct as Christians before an unbelieving world. Essentially he’s saying that how we live bears testimony of the gospel to those around us.

We begin first by noting that this is not our dwelling.

A. This Is Not Our Dwelling

Peter begins with an affectionate greeting, a reminder of the relationship that we are to have with each other as part of God’s family. It is a gentle appeal to the urgency of the message he is about to deliver to them. The NIV translates the word *agapetois* as “Dear friends”. In this case I prefer the KJV or ESV which translates it “Dearly beloved” (KJV) and “Beloved” (ESV). It speaks to the kind of unconditional devotion and affection we are to have for each other that motivates us in how we then treat one another, which is the call found back in 1:22 “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

The opening phrase could also be a reminder of the immeasurable love that God has for us, which in turn should motivate us to respond in obedience to Him, hence the call from Peter to godly character. It is a call to urgency, a call to arms if you will. The word “beseech” or “urge” used here, depending on your translation, literally means to call to one’s side

or to call to one's aid. Vine's dictionary of the New Testament says "it is used for every kind of calling to a person which is meant to produce a particular effect." Peter tells us what that effect will be or what we are called to do. He is going to encourage us to love God by living for Him.

Peter once again addresses the status of his audience as he did in the opening verses of his letter. They are, we are strangers, aliens, pilgrims.

We sing with the old spiritual:

This world is not my home I'm just a passing through...

In the Bible Abraham is a picture of the Christian who is a sojourner. Called out from his own land he was to travel to a place God would show him.

Hebrews 11:8-10

His nephew Lot, although described in Scripture as righteous, chose to settle in the world. He pitched his tent toward Sodom and Gomorrah and then later we read that he was found at the city gate and was hesitant to leave when told the city would be destroyed for its blatant sin.

In II Timothy 4:10 Paul urges Timothy to come to him because Demas had left him, having loved this present world.

For the Christian this world is just a temporary stop on the way to our final destination. Heaven is the goal, earth is the path we travel to get there.

Aliens are those who live in a place that is not their real home. Paul reminds us of this in Philippians 3:20 where he says that "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."

Our inheritance isn't here. All this will pass away.

Our inheritance we learned from 1:4 is one that "can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you."

So here we are passing through this world as strangers and aliens and while these terms are generally similar in meaning, there is a slight difference.

Strangers expresses the transient nature of our stay. Aliens carries the idea that we are non-citizens here.

In verse 2 we are reminded that we are separated from the world by our spiritual birth.

In verses 4-10 we are reminded that we are separated from the world by spiritual belief.

In verses 11-12 we are reminded that we are separated from the world by spiritual behavior.

By the world we mean people who have left God out. They have, according to verses 7-8, rejected Him and disobeyed the message of the gospel. So that sets us apart. Their kingdom is this world, our kingdom is in heaven. We are but strangers and aliens waiting for our ride home. This is not our dwelling.

Do we remember that this is not our permanent home?

The second thought we note in verse 11 is that this is not our desire.

B. This Is Not Our Desire

The urgent encouragement Peter issues is to abstain. It's in the present active voice meaning something we are constantly to do and literally carries the idea of holding oneself constantly back.

When I worked for hospice one of the nurses boarded horses. One of the horses brought to her was a retired race horse. Taking the horse out for a run she said you could feel his muscles tense up as if at any moment he would just take up but under her control he would abstain or hold himself back from taking off in a full gallop.

The idea Peter expresses is to keep on abstaining from sin. It's to be a continuous effort on our part. Paul writes much the same to the church at Thessalonica. (I Thessalonians 4:3)

The world has rejected our values and beliefs. We need to reject the values and beliefs of the world that are contrary to what Scripture teaches us. Paul encourages believers not to be conformed or molded to the standards of conduct of the world.

In John Bunyan's book *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Hopeful pass through Vanity Fair. The people of the city are upset with the two because they refuse to become distracted by the sinful allurements of the city as they journey on to the Celestial city. They abstain from their vices.

John Phillips writes "The decision to abstain from something is one we make for ourselves by deliberate choice."

If we are dieting, we abstain from certain foods in order to lose weight.

If we are going to have surgery, we are to abstain from eating and drinking at least 12 hours before surgery.

If this is not our permanent residence, we are to abstain from fleshly desires because they wage war against the soul, that keep us from pursuing godly character.

Even though these temptations and desires are strong and enticing, we are urged to hold ourselves back from them. Peter is not here speaking of any specific sin but of sin in general. The sinful desires of one person are not the sinful desires of someone else, so he puts them all under one umbrella – abstain from them all. In the verb tense it is to continually keep away from sin.

Romans 8:5-8, 12-13

Galatians 5:13

I John 2:15-17

A friend of mine had a pig farm. You can smell

them a mile away and it stinks. I helped him out for a couple weeks. At first the smell was really bad, almost nauseating. After several days though, I couldn't even smell how bad it really was. I had gotten used to it.

We can look at the conduct of the world and come away nauseated by what we see. But the more we play around in it the less worse it can become to us. We get used to it. It doesn't bother us like it once did.

A friend of mine was a state trooper for quite a few years before resigning to do evangelism. When he was new to the force he would roll up on a traffic accident with a fatality and with the utmost care assess and handle the victim. After a few years on the force being around guys who had been there a long time he began to act just like them. He started swearing. He would roll up to a traffic accident with a fatality and instead of handling the body with dignity would just give it a nudge with his shoe. He became calloused, hardened by the world.

Look at the world and ask yourself: how much like the world am I?

Look at the Word and ask yourself: how much like God am I?

We are to abstain from fleshly lusts or desires because they wage war against our soul. It causes great inner turmoil.

Romans 7:14-24

Galatians 5:17-18

Ephesians 2:1-3

The verb tense in verse 11 indicates that these sinful desires are constantly waging war. It is a relentless battle. They keep probing at our defenses until they find a weakness and that's where they attack.

Warren Wiersbe says "we are all soldiers involved in a spiritual battle."

Moody once said of himself “I have more trouble with D. L. Moody than with any man I know.”

The spiritual war is within us and it is fierce. But let’s remember what Paul wrote. He asks a rhetorical question in Romans 6:1-2 “Shall we continue in sin so that grace can abound? God forbid or by no means! We died to sin: how can we live in it any longer?”

In Christ we are no longer bound by sin or slaves to it. It is no longer our master. If that’s the case then we can resist its alluring pull. Giving in is no longer our only option. Peter rallies us to the banner of the cross and tells us to stand up and resist the campaign that sinful desires have waged against our spiritual nature. Temptation to go back to our former way of life is strong, but Peter urges the Christian in spite of such strong and relentless desire to resist. Paul reminds us in Romans 6:6 “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

This is not our dwelling and it is not our desire. It is a call for godly character instead.

But then in verse 12 Peter reminds us that godly character isn’t just about refraining from sin but also doing good deeds and doing so for a very good reason. In this verse we see the cause for godly character. It is a testimony to the world.

II. THE CAUSE FOR GODLY CHARACTER – v. 12

Jesus is very clear that what is in a man’s heart will come out in what he says and what he does. Our inner lives should be controlled by the Lord through His Spirit so that we honor God.

When we live godly in our character there are two reasons why we should exhibit such godliness in our lives.

A. Godly Character Brings Exoneration

I don’t like to be falsely accused of wrongdoing.

Peter is saying that in the end a righteous life will be shown to be blameless.

Serving under several different Roman Emperors Publius Cornelius Tacitus was a senator and a historian. His two major works were *Annals* and the *Histories*, which cover the history of Rome from the end of Augustus to Domitian and includes Tiberius, Claudius and Nero. He writes these words about Christians in the *Histories*: “They (Christians) were hated for their many vices.”

Suetonius, another Roman historian, says Christians were “a class of people animated by a novel and dangerous superstition.”

The vices spoken of refer to the practices of Christians during their services.

They worshipped a god named Christ who they say died and then rose again from the dead.

They practiced cannibalism by eating bread they said is the body of Christ and drunk wine they said was His blood.

They were accused of defying Caesar by worshipping only One God, not the Emperor.

Acts 17:6-7 “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here... They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”

Wherever Christianity was preached there was spiritual upheaval because it conflicted with the pagan and Jewish religions.

Christians were blamed for social disturbances.

Business men claimed their profits dwindled because of Christianity.

They were accused of holding love feasts and committing incest calling each other brother and sister.

By living godly lives through doing good deeds for those who would instead falsely accuse, malign and

berate would, in the end, prove their accusations were false.

Let's face it. The non-Christian is always looking for us to mess up. It's their opportunity of saying that our faith is just a bunch of hog-wash and we're nothing but hypocrites so Christianity isn't any better than any other religion so why believe. They are looking for any excuse to put us down and for them not to believe, so don't give them the reasons they are looking for by ungodly behavior. Instead, live good lives and do good deeds.

The word "good" can also be translated beautiful. If you remember a certain presidential candidate would talk about this person or that person being a beautiful person. It doesn't mean good looking or handsome or attractive but really speaks of honesty and integrity. It refers to telling the truth and doing right, and being gracious. John MacArthur describes it as the loveliest kind of visible goodness.

Peter is saying "prove them wrong by continuing to live right."

A godly character brings exoneration.

And then notice one final result of godly character. "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."

There are two prevailing thoughts here among scholars. One thought is that Peter is referring to the time Christ returns and judges unbeliever for their rejection of His message as we saw in verse 8 and when believers will then give glory to God. The other thought is that the day of visitation is referring to a time in the life of the unbeliever, who, when they see the godly example of the Christian instead of continuing to accuse the believer, repents of their sin and is saved. I believe it is the latter, because why else would they give glory to God?

We read the same in Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Here's the other result then of godly living. Godly living brings evangelism.

B. Godly Living Brings Evangelism

Let me illustrate this principle with a couple stories.

Herb and Ruth Clingen along with their young son were held by the Japanese in a POW camp in the Philippines during WWII. Herb's diary told of how the Japanese tortured, murdered, and starved to death many of the camp's inmates. Konishi was the feared and hated commandant. He instituted a very diabolical plan near the end of their imprisonment just before the camp was liberated.

In his book Song of Deliverance Herb writes: "Konishi found an inventive way to abuse us even more. He increased the food ration but gave us unhusked rice. Eating rice with its razor-sharp outer shell would cause intestinal bleeding that would kill us in hours. We had no tools to remove the husks, and doing the job manually – by pounding the grain or rolling it with a heavy stick – consumed more calories than the rice would supply. It was a death sentence for all internees."

In 1945 the camp was liberated by the Allies before Konishi could carry out his plan of executing all the prisoners. Years later the Clingens learned that Konishi was found working as a grounds keeper for a golf course in Manila. He was to be hanged for his war crimes. Before his execution he professed that he had become a Christian saying that he had been deeply affected by the testimony of the Christian missionaries he had persecuted.

Of this story John MacArthur states "Effective evangelism flows from the power of a righteous life."

Warren Wiersbe shares the story of a number of Native American chiefs and warriors, who, in 1805 met in council at Buffalo Creek, NY, to hear a presentation of the gospel by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket. Among other things, he said, "Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book?"

"Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Native Americans, we will then consider again of what you have said."

Robert Murray McCheyne was a pastor in Scotland in the mid 1800's. He only served in that capacity for 7 ½ years before he died at age 29. It has been said of him that the imprint he left in Scotland for those brief years was more than most will accomplish in a lifetime. A statement he made is fitting for our passage today in which he said "*The Christian is a person who makes it easy for others to believe in God.*"

Godly living brings exoneration and evangelism to those who would falsely accuse you. Is there any better cause for godly character than to see others come to Christ by your example and then God is glorified?

Sometimes I reflect back on my life and I wonder how many people I have led to Christ by my godly example but at the same time I have to wonder how many people have I turned away from Christ because my example was not godly at all.

We close with a final point: the charge for godly

living.

III. THE CHARGE FOR GODLY LIVING

II Peter 1:3-9

Peter is essentially saying that we have been given everything we need for godly living through the promises He has made to us and our knowledge of Him. Through these promises and the knowledge we have of Christ we are able to escape the corruption that is in the world through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

For this reason he continues, we are to add to our faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

There are three closing principles that I want to share with you to help in abstaining from sinful desires and being a godly example.

A. Godly Character Is A Matter Of The Heart

Psalm 97:10 "Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for He guards the lives of His faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked."

Allistair Begg writes in a recent devotional "You have good reason to 'hate evil', for just consider what harm it has already caused you. What a world of mischief sin has brought into your heart! What a creature you were when evil had done its utmost with you, before divine grace intervened! You were an heir of wrath just like others; you ran with the crowd to do evil. We were all like this, but Paul reminds us, 'But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.' We have good reason, indeed, for hating evil when we look back and trace its deadly workings. We were in such a sorry state that our souls would have been lost if omnipotent love had not intervened to redeem

us. Therefore ‘hate evil,’ Christian, unless you desire trouble. If you want to cover your path with thorns and plant nettles in your pillow, then fail to ‘hate evil’; but if you would live a happy life and die a peaceful death, then walk in all the ways of holiness, hating evil right to the end. If you truly love your Savior and want to honor Him, then ‘hate evil’. We know of no cure for the love of evil in a Christian like daily communion with the Lord Jesus. Be often with Him, and it is impossible for you to be at peace with sin.”

Order my footsteps by Thy Word,
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.

Take time to hide God’s Word in your heart so that you won’t sin against Him. (Psalm 119:9, 11)

From the wisdom of Solomon we are told to guard our heart for from it are the wellsprings of life. It is a matter of the heart.

B. It Is A Matter Of The Spirit

Romans 8:9 “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

Galatians 5:16 “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

At the end of the passage on the armor of God found in Ephesians 6 we are told to pray in the Spirit. He helps us put it all on and to use it effectively against our enemy the devil who schemes about how to defeat us. Be controlled by the Spirit so that you don’t give in to the desires of the flesh. He is the key to conquering sinful desires. It is a matter of the Spirit.

C. It Is A Matter Of The Will

Romans 13:14 “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

I Peter 5:8-9 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

It is a matter of the will.

We make the choice to resist the devil and those sinful desires by allowing the Spirit to control us. Each choice is a matter of the heart. Our choices will either be an example to others through a convicting testimony against their false accusations or they will turn them away. We are in a battle, but there is conflict resolution.

It’s a battle not only for our soul to love God by living godly, but also for the souls of those yet to trust Christ. Let’s not be the reason they refuse to believe the gospel.