

<sup>11</sup> **Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,** <sup>12</sup> **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.**

Here the apostle Peter addresses Christians as **sojourners and pilgrims**. A pilgrim is a person who is living in a place not his home; he's travelling through this world to another world, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who **were strangers and pilgrims on the earth for....they were seeking a homeland...they desired a better, that is, a heavenly country.** (Hebrews 11:13-16)

The Bible says in Philippians 3:20-21: **For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>21</sup> **who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.** Though we belong to a country here on earth (Canada), that is our *secondary* and *temporary* citizenship as Christians. Already now, our *primary* and *eternal* citizenship is with Christ in heaven. As we live in this world we eagerly await Christ to come back and take us into the world to come.

In our culture where Christians are becoming more and more worldly – at home here in this world, longing *less* for our true homeland, the heavenly country – it is important that we accept and live this pilgrim identity as Christ's people!

Here in our text we see the Christian's pilgrim calling has to do with

- 1) his *inner life* [**abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul**]
- 2) his *outward life* [**having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles**]
- 3) *the world* in which he lives [seeking to bring our lost neighbours to Christ that they may **glorify God in the day of visitation**]

### 1) The Christian Pilgrim is called to inner warfare

**Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims** – Christ's apostle, Peter, is not *suggesting*; he's strongly *begging* and *urging* the Christian church, the holy people of God who have been set apart from this world **to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.**

This pilgrim calling is urgent because Satan wants to destroy us – **Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith...** (1 Peter 5:8-9)

–but also because *there are fleshly lusts – evil desires – living right inside us that want to destroy us.* We must always be aware of these *spiritual germs* that live inside us and want to take over and poison our hearts and minds. This inner assault requires vigorous action all the time: <sup>11</sup> **Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.**

a. This command is a Gospel command – Peter addresses Christians as **sojourners and pilgrims**. Christ has done a great work in your life. When He called you to faith by the Spirit's power through the Gospel, He made you an outsider to this world, and an insider in God's heavenly kingdom.

–I Peter 2:4 - **Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,** <sup>5</sup> **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood...**

–I Peter 2:9 – **But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**

– when you put your faith in Christ, He joins you to Himself and makes you a member of His eternal, heavenly kingdom. In Christ we are given a new identity, a new life, a new citizenship, and a new destination. We are a new creation in Him. So this calling to fight against fleshly lusts which war against our souls is not about becoming somebody we are not, but about being who we already are in Christ. We have a Saviour and Master, an Almighty Commander in Chief to call on to supply us with all the wisdom, protection, energy, comfort, and boldness we need to wage this warfare.

b. This is an urgent command – **Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims.** There are two wrong attitudes for us to take:

1. *I must fight this war in order to become saved. My salvation depends on me.* This is wrong.

--Christ **who began to do a good work in you will bring it to completion.** (Philippians 1:6)

--Jesus said: **My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.** (John 10:27-28)

The Christ who has saved you with His precious blood and set you apart by His powerful Spirit, will see to your salvation. So fight hard, but always rest in His love, power and promises!

2. *I'm already saved so I don't have to fight; this command is not for me. I can sit back, relax, and play games and everything will be okay.* This too is wrong! The way the Holy Spirit protects your salvation is by giving you the will and strength and wisdom to fight your own evil desires. If you don't fight them they would utterly destroy your soul. If you're not fighting, it's only because Christ does not live in you by His Spirit and you're not saved.

So we must cultivate the mind of a pilgrim – this world is not my home, I'm just passing through, and I have to live here in such a way that 1) I'm not pulled off the pathway, and 2) others can see Christ in me and be drawn onto the pathway by faith.

### **c. this is an action command:**

We cannot be passive in this battle, we must act. There are two verbs in this command: **abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul**. Both verbs are in the present tense – keep on *abstaining* because these evil desires within you keep on *waging* war against you. These desires are enemy soldiers that do not quit. They look for every opportunity to take advantage of you, exploiting your weakest moments, when you're tired, or feeling low, or when you're doubting, or feeling self-confident and strong.

These desires can appear to be both attractive and harmless, and giving in to them is very easy, but it will have the impact of a narcotic upon your soul, making your soul numb, slow, ineffective, passive, and weak. They will hinder your zeal for serving God. They will leave you unready for new attacks and even more ready to give in. They will make you the opposite of alert, watchful, and sober-minded (see I Peter 5:8 above).

Jesus said: **But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.... But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.** (Luke 21:34-36) Another way to look at these evil desires is that they are like rocks which make your soul heavy and weigh you down. They are a spiritual depressant.

But what are these fleshly lusts or evil desires that war against the soul? It can be so many different things

- pride, tempting your soul to exalt yourself and bypass and look down on others
- spiritual laziness, tempting you not to spend time in word, but waste your time in gaming
- the love of money, tempting you to make the desire to get rich 1<sup>st</sup> in your life, and to neglect God and His word (see Psalm 1)
- envy and jealousy, tempting you to think evil of others, and engage in slander and gossip
- impatience, tempting you to become a bully toward those who get in your way
- hero worship, tempting your heart to have more zeal for a singer or player than for the Lord
- drunkenness, a heart that seeks joy in alcohol, parties and revelry (see I Peter 4:3)
- bitterness, when someone aggravates you or hurts you, to let the poison of bitterness enter your soul and make you hard

These desires come in all shapes and sizes and we are called to abstain, which means, to hold them off, resist them, build up a line of strong defenses against them, relying on the power of the Spirit to strengthen us. We must say "No" constantly to these evil desires that want to hang out in your soul, keeping a clean conscience before God and man. Taking proper care of your soul is key to the pilgrim's pathway, making sure you're healthy on the inside, your desires are pure and focused on Christ.

I Peter 2:1-2 says: **Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, <sup>2</sup> as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.**

### **2) The Christian's pilgrim calling also has to do with his outward life: we are called to a holy life of good works**

<sup>11</sup> **Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, <sup>12</sup> 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.**

Not only the heart matters, but your whole life, **for out of the heart are all the issues of life.** (Proverbs 4:23). You care for your soul, so that out of it good fruit can grow in your life so others can see Christ in you. Honorable conduct among the Gentiles is the result of proper soul care, and one of the goals of it. I must care for my soul so that I can and will be relevant and spiritually effective among my neighbours.

**Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles.** As pilgrims travelling through this world, your life and conduct matter a lot. You are on display as Christ's people! You will surprise the people around you by refusing to join them in their crude joking, drinking parties, and immoral behavior. Don't put down the boss like they do. Don't be lazy on the job like they are. Be distinct. Be exemplary. Be Christ-like.

--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. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you. (1Peter 4:3-4)

--As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1Peter 1:14-16)

To live honorable lives means to live clean lives in an unclean world, to live pure lives in an impure world, to live holy lives in an unholy world – lives which testify to the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**(see Ephesians 4:24)

Peter goes on from here to explain what he means by honorable conduct:

--in your relationship with the government, honor the King.

--In your relationship with your employer, obey him, work hard, even when he's harsh or unfair. Remember that Christ is your true Master, and that will help you to remember that your actually getting up in the morning to work for Him! It's not all about you, getting as much out of your company or your workers or your clients as possible.

--In your marriages, husbands and wives live together in a chaste and considerate manner. (see I Peter 3:1-7)

-in your relationships as the Body of Christ be humble, tender-hearted and sympathetic toward one another

Sadly, Christians in our culture seem more ready to follow the culture than they are ready to follow the Christ. Christians have become worldly; they are not other-worldly. They're not just passing through; the world has become their home. When we neglect our souls and the call to grow up in our salvation through the Word of God, we become irrelevant and unnoticeable. We become useless in this world. We must repent of our sloth and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and become zealous again for good work.

In the early church Christians were known for their good works: they were known for visiting the garbage dumps to look for abandoned babies, to take them home, adopt them and raise them. They were known for *sharing their bread but not their wives*. The pagans would ignore the sick and leave them to die, but Christians would care for the sick, not only among fellow Christians but among the pagans as well. It was very evident that something different lived in them, Someone different lived in them!

As pilgrims, we are ultimately focused on our heavenly destination: Christ our Bridegroom, coming home to Him. We are eager for His coming and for the glory that we will have with Him in the new heavens and earth. And as we stay focused on Him, and not let our souls get sidetracked from Him by evil desires, we will become more and more holy. He will do that in us by His Spirit. The Bible says that as you look at Him (in His Word), you will be transformed in his image from glory to glory. Keep looking at Him in faith as you live in this world, and He will transform you! **Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..** (Hebrews 12:1-2). And your focus on Him, the goal of your salvation, will transform you now as you live in this world.

And then our journey through this world becomes a very powerful witness to those living around us. Sometimes people worry that being *too heavenly-minded will make us of no spiritual good in this world*, but the much greater concern is that *we become so earthly-minded that we are of no heavenly good in this world*.

3) Thus, the Christian pilgrim's concern is for the salvation of this world in which we live

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By your holy living, you want to glorify God above all and you want to encourage fellow Christians, but you also want to lead your neighbours to Christ so that they join with you as travel your pilgrim journey toward the heavenly homeland! You can hear Peter echoing the words of our Lord Jesus here, who said: **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**(Matthew 5:16)

The pilgrim life doesn't mean we don't care about this world. *This is not our home, we're just renting, so we can trash the place.* Some have this bad attitude! But that's not the mind of Christ at all! Christ made the world; He owns it; He's our landlord. And though sin has corrupted it, and He's going to remake it and bring us into a new heavens and a new earth. How we live here matters very much to Him, especially how we treat our fellow image-bearers whose never-dying souls are hanging in the balance. Christ weeps over the lost, and so should we. He stretches out his hand to the lost and so should we.

This doesn't mean the world will always appreciate our good works and witness, our love for the lost. Christ said we can expect the world to hate us. Peter says here that **the Gentiles will speak evil against as evildoers.**

It's true that the enemies of Christ like to spread lies about Christians, like Jezebel told lies about Naboth, and the Sanhedrin about Stephen. The early Christians were called cannibals because they ate the body and blood of Christ at the Lord's Supper. They were accused of subverting the state because they worshiped Christ above Caesar, when in fact they were known to be the most obedient citizens in the empire. They were accused of being fools because they put their faith in a crucified Savior. And such slander against Christians continue today – that believing the Bible makes you anti-intellectual, that opposing homosexuality means you're homophobic, being pro-life means you're anti-women, that Christianity is a dangerous philosophy.

But such opposition should not deter us or slow us down in any way. Peter says a few verses later: **For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.** We don't fight false accusations by taking revenge, getting even, calling them names, or slandering in return, but by doing good anyways, living holy anyways, knowing that a holy life, a Christ-filled life is powerful, like salt and light, *no matter what people might say!* A holy life, a life of charity and kindness and love toward the weak and the needy, has brought down many a pagan from his lofty throne and brought him to bow the knee to Jesus!

That is our hope, our goal, our dream: that through our witness in good deeds and kind words, they may see, and seeing, they may put their faith in the one who saved and changed us, so that on the last day, the day God comes to visit this world as Judge, they may glorify Him as their God and Saviour, rather than try to flee from his presence and call on the hills to cover them.

Like Paul speaking before King Herod Agrippa and the Governor Festus who were holding him prisoner for his faith: **I wish you would all be like me, except for these chains.** (Acts 26)

### Conclusion

Dear people of God, we are being watched very closely by the world. They are watching how we handle sickness, how we handle stress, how we treat our siblings, spouse, and how we treat one another, how we relate to government, and to people in our workplace. Don't be afraid of that, but make much of it! Make much of your relationship with your boss, your employee, your client, your dentist, your doctor, your neighbor, even the telemarketer! because you have been placed as a pilgrim-ambassador right where you are to testify to your Saviour!

This is how God intends to reach out and bring many people to a saving knowledge of Christ.