

Abstemiousness – I Peter 2:11-12

I. Introduction:

- A. I was driving one of our members back from a medical appointment at the VA hospital one afternoon.
1. While on Francis Street I glanced over and saw a small office with a sign above the door reading: *“Abstemious Outpatient Clinic.”*
 2. I was confronted with a new word: *“abstemious.”* I made a mental note and looked it up later.
 3. The word refers to someone who abstains, and when it is used today it usually in the context of total abstinence from drugs or alcohol.
 4. Googling the *“Abstemious Outpatient Clinic,”* I found it to be a drug-rehabilitation clinic.
 5. I decided that I like the word and would make it a regular part of my vocabulary.
- B. This lesson is entitled *“Abstemiousness.”*
1. *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, **ABSTAIN** from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”*
 2. The word “abstain” whether in Greek, English or Swahili means exactly what you’d think it means.
 3. Don’t permit fleshly lusts into your life – not for a moment; not ever.
 4. Let’s consider the people and the problems of verses 11 and 12.
 5. Peter refers to his readers as *“beloved,” “besieged,” “beheld,” “besmirched”* and *“beautified.”*

II. Peter’s first word is *“beloved”* – *“Dearly beloved.”*

- A. I know that it shouldn’t, but these words give me pause.
1. They are found nine times in the Bible, and eight of them are in the epistles, but only once in Peter.
 2. Over the years, I have heard preachers use those two words more than nine times in a single sermon.
 3. Some preachers utter these words on an average of nine times in every message.
 4. But only rarely have you heard me put these into any of my sermons.
 5. I would like you to know that when I say *“Dearly beloved,”* I mean it; it’s not just a habit of speech.
 6. I want to be like Paul who was opening up his heart when he said to the Philippians: *“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”*
 7. Paul really meant those words, but I’m not sure about many of my contemporary brethren, because of the simple fact they say it so very often. Are they really sincere?
- B. But what about Peter? This is the only place where he says, *“Dearly beloved.”*
1. Again, I point out that we aren’t positive that he had ever been to Asia, Pontus, and Galatia.
 2. So the question becomes: can Christians really love people they have never met?
 3. Perhaps part of the answer is hidden in the Greek word used in all nine of these scriptures.
 4. I would have guessed that the word was *“phileo,”* which speaks about *“brotherly love,”* but it is not.
 5. This is *“agape”* which is directly related to the grace-driven love of God Himself.
 6. It might be hard to have brotherly love for a brother we’ve never seen or met, but when we are convinced of the brotherhood we have with that person within the love of God, it becomes easier.
- C. Peter is beginning to share things which some of those brethren from Asia Minor might not fully appreciate.
1. But he introduces it all with an expression of his God-given love for them.
 2. He is not angry with any of them. He is not judging them.
 3. Nothing will be mentioned which is specifically designed to hurt them or alienate them.
 4. **He** loves them with the same love which **God** has for them – and for **him**.
 5. Without the words becoming rote, robotic or routine, perhaps we should speak of our agape love for one another more often.

III. Another word which applies to Peter's exhortations is: "besieged."

A. "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

1. New converts need to be told up front, and older Christians need to be reminded, that the life we are asked to live for Christ will not be easy.
2. Every day there will be battles and skirmishes with our three great enemies: the world, the flesh & the devil.

B. There is an enemy closer to our soul than the sibling or the spouse who sleeps beside us every night.

1. When the Lord saved us and regenerated our spirits, we were left in our fleshly bodies, awaiting the time of our translation to Heaven.
2. And that flesh has been corrupt since the day we were born.
3. Even if it is not "out to get us," it is not very supportive to our Christian activities.
4. Even when it is not attacking and assailing us, it is constantly there to impede our spiritual progress.

C. Paul wrote a letter to the same people to whom Peter was writing this letter.

1. Paul knew these people were Christians, because he had evangelized them and saw their conversions.
2. And yet, he still had to write: *"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law."*
3. *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

D. Neither Peter, Paul nor anyone else is going to say that our flesh will draw us into **all** these sins.

1. Nevertheless we are at war with our flesh, and anyone at any time, might be tempted to any of these sins.
2. Peter says, "fleshly lusts war against the soul."
3. James asked, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"
4. Paul even said of himself, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my (fleshly) members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"
5. As it was with Paul, our soul and spirit are under siege, and our own flesh is a part of the attacking army.

IV. Another word related to this exhortation is "behold."

A. "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles... which they shall behold."

1. Yes, the word "conversation" refers to the way we speak to people throughout our day to day lives.
2. But in the day when the Bible was translated, the word meant more than mere words.
3. It spoke about **everything** within those day-to-day lives.

B. There will be periods in your Christian life when specific people study your conversation – your every move.

1. They will watch you when you go to church and when you go to the grocery store; they will listen to your music and to your conversation with your spouse. They may even watch you die.
2. They take note whether or not you are friendly toward strangers or casual acquaintances.
3. They will see whether or not your life, your conversation, matches your profession.
4. Others may not directly study you, but they will simply note something you do or say, later equating it to that of a professed Christian.

- C. Peter specifically mentions *“honesty.”*
1. *“People are studying you to see if your life-style is thoroughly honest.”*
 2. I was listening to a Christian lady who was a teacher of a class with some eastern European children in it.
 3. She said, point blank, that those children were liars; she couldn't count on them to ever tell the truth; it was a part of their upbringing to be deceitful.
 4. If that was also true of the people in Asia Minor, to see some radical honesty in those who were converted would have been a great testimony.
 5. Is this why Peter specifically mentioned honest?
- D. The truth is, truth should be the testimony of every Christian in any society.
1. In the midst of several practical exhortations, Paul said to the **Romans**: *“Bless them which persecute you... Rejoice with them that do rejoice... Be of the same mind one toward another... Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of ALL men.”*
 2. *Rejoice with them that do rejoice... Be of the same mind one toward another...*
 3. *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of ALL men.”*
 4. There should never be even the hint of dishonesty, deception or delinquency in any saint of God.

V. **“Besmirched” is another word which we can apply to this scripture.**

- A. It speaks of making something dirty, or damaging the reputation of someone.
1. *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*
 2. As we've said before, Christians are nothing but strangers and pilgrims in this world.
 3. *“Strangers”* suggest that we have homes here, but our citizenship is elsewhere.
 4. And *“pilgrims”* refer to people who are on their way to somewhere else, usually a religious or spiritual place.
- B. Because we are citizens elsewhere, and we are trying to live according to the laws of our fatherland, the locals may look at our behavior as traitorous.
1. They think, we should be worshiping at the lake, burning the incense of marijuana and beer.
 2. When we speak out against the murdering of the unborn, they think we are attacking their faith.
 3. When we refuse to christen our babies, they think we are condemning our own children to hell.
 4. And therefore they speak of us as *“evildoers.”*
 5. This is perhaps why Peter tells us in the immediate context to submit ourselves to the ordinances of men
- C. We should have mixed emotions about that word *“evildoers.”*
1. We should have a measured response when it is thrown into our faces.
 2. In one way it should be welcomed, because it was used by the wicked to describe our Lord Jesus.
 3. But then Peter says, *“Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an (actual) evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.”*
 4. He will tell us in just a few more verses that God established human government for the purpose of punishing those who are actually evildoers.
 5. We should hate the word *“evildoers”* when applied to us, because it isn't really true.
 6. But at the same time, unjustly applied, it proves that we are aliens, strangers and pilgrims, like our Saviour.
 7. Again in **1 Peter 3** our apostle repeats himself, *“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”*
- D. What should we do when the world besmirches us with false accusations?
1. First, control your emotions, especially your temper and your retaliatory tongue.
 - a. Some people will behave this way toward us to test us, when in reality they are in awe or actually wish to have what we possess.
 - b. Don't blow it by saying or doing something unbecoming for a child of God.

2. Second, make sure that their accusations are not accurate.
 - a. Sometimes outsiders have a better perspective of our behavior than we have ourselves.
 - b. Be sure that you are **not** an evildoer.
3. Third, go on being the obedient servant of the Lord you were meant to be, doing it as lovingly as possible.
4. And with the fourth step we come to our fifth word in our general outline.
5. A word I have somewhat mutilated or manipulated for this message.

VI. "Beautified."

- A. *"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."*
 1. There is a day coming soon when the Lord will once again visit His creation.
 2. He visited with Adam and Eve in the Garden, and He visited the Patriarchs and Israel from time to time.
 3. Eventually He became incarnate and visited with us as the Lamb of God.
 - a. John's Father, Zacharias, praised God with the words, *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people..."*
 4. There is another visitation written on His calendar, when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
 5. He will judge the evildoers and justify those who have been falsely accused of evildoing.
 - a. It will be proven in that day that God's saints are not traitors and trouble-makers.
 - b. We are ambassadors for the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who will at that time be sitting on the Judgment throne.
- B. In that day of visitation there will be multitudes who will bow their knees before the Lord, confessing that they had been wrong and that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
 1. And they will also have to admit that the Lord's saints were not the evildoers they accused them to be.
 2. We will be giving the honor God's saints deserve. We will be beautified with the truth.
 3. But more importantly, we and they will bring yet more glory to the Lord, the King of glory.