

December 9, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Holy War

1 Peter 2:11-12

1. Fight Against Fleshly Lusts (verse 11).
2. Fight For Excellent Behavior (verse 12).

John Bunyan is best known for his book, "The Pilgrim's Progress." In fact, it is reported to be the most well-read book in the history of the world, with the exception of the Bible, itself. The book is an allegory of a Christian seeking to find his way to heaven. Christian starts out with a burden on his back, as he leaves the City of Destruction. He follows the counsel of Evangelist to stay on the straight path until he comes to the wicket gate. When he comes to the hill called Calvary, he loses the burden and receives the scroll. Along the way, he meets with many people. Some of them try to cause him to stray, like Obstinate, Ignorance and Worldly Wiseman. Others he meets become his encouraging traveling companions, like Faithful and Hopeful. On his journey, Christian encounters various difficulties. He travels through the city of Vanity Fair and through the depths of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Though lack of faith, he finds himself in Doubting Castle. Finally, he arrives at the Celestial City, safe and sound. It's a great story that has strengthened many souls down through the ages. But, this wasn't the only allegory that John Bunyan wrote.

John Bunyan also wrote a book entitled, "Holy War," which also is an allegory along the same lines of Pilgrim's Progress. The story is about a city called, Mansoul. The original beauty and splendor of this city was unmatched, while it was under the dominion of Shaddai. This city was a walled city, which was typical in those days. This city had five gates: Ear-gate, Mouth-gate, Eye-gate, Nose-gate, and Feel-gate. Nobody ever went in or out of the city, but through these five gates. The great enemy of this city was a certain Diabolus (which is the Greek word for "Devil.").

The story unfolds by describing how Diabolus came and overtook the city. He and his companions approached Ear-gate and began to make a plea to follow him, rather than Shaddai. The only way to conquer the city was to kill Captain Resistance and Lord Innocence. Upon taking the city, Diabolus immediately removed Mr. Understanding from being mayor and replaced him with Mr. Lustings. Mr. Conscience was also put out of office, who Diabolus and all in the city considered to be very obnoxious as he spoke against all of their evil plans. Eventually, Mr. Understanding and Mr. Conscience were imprisoned for disturbing the peace.

When news of the city's downfall reached Shaddai, he was not surprised at what took place. The first attempts at overtaking the city were met with failure. Shaddai sent an army of forty thousand under the direction of Boanerges, Conviction, Judgment, and Execution, who came with great energy. But, Prejudice defended Ear-gate with a guard of sixty deaf men. Later, Shaddai sent three of his volunteers to fight against the city, Tradition, Human-wisdom, and Man's invention, but they are all taken prisoners in Mansoul.

Finally, Shaddai sent his son, Emmanuel to dethrone Diabolus. When Diabolus heard about this, he sent proposals for peace to Emmanuel, even promising to become Emmanuel's deputy in the town. But, Emmanuel turned down the offers and made a great assault on Ear-gate. Eventually, Emmanuel became the ruler of Mansoul. He made Mr. Experience an officer in the city, under the direction of the new secretary, Mr. Conscience.

However, Mansoul wasn't entirely at peace. He had to face a counter-revolution in the city, lead by Covetousness, Lasciviousness and Anger. He had to face new onslaughts at Ear-gate by the army of Doubters that approached the town. By night, some made an attack upon Feel-gate, when it happened to be very weak. At one point, an army of Bloodmen, [or persecutors], attacked the town, but the Mansoulans, headed by Faith and Patience, overcame them. Eventually, the principal of the Doubters was tried, convicted, and executed.

The book ends with Emmanuel making an impassioned speech to Mansoul, which ends with these words, ...

You must believe, O my Mansoul, when I am [away] from you, that yet I love you, and bear you upon my heart for ever. Remember therefore, O my Mansoul, that you are loved of me; as I have therefore taught you to watch, to fight, to pray, and to make war against my foes, so now I command you to believe that my love is constant to you. O my Mansoul, how have I set my heart, my love upon you, watch. Behold, I lay no other burden upon you, than what you have already, hold fast, till I come. [\[1\]](#)

That's the Holy War. Now, obviously, it's an allegory of what takes place in our souls. The city of Mansoul represents the soul of man. The devil will come and attack our souls through our own Ear-gates. In order for the devil to reign in our lives, our conscience and understanding will need to be suppressed. Conviction and Tradition and Judgment will have no effect upon dethroning the devil in our lives. It's only when we embrace the rule of Emmanuel, the son of God, in our lives that we will truly be free. And even then, attacks will come upon us.

Our Ear-gate will be attacked by doubters. Our Eye-gate will be attacked by coveters. Our Feel-gate will be attacked by lusts. But, we must follow the words of our Lord Jesus, "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

The Christian life is a war. There is a battle that goes on everyday for our souls. We will see this battle in our text this morning.

1 Peter 2:11-12

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe [them,] glorify God in the day of visitation.

In the spirit of my introduction this morning, I have entitled my message, "Holy War." In these two verses, we will see the two fronts upon which we need to fight our Christian lives. First of all, ...

1. Fight Against Fleshly Lusts (verse 11).

I trust that you can see the war terminology used in this verse. It comes there at the end of verse 11, where it says that our "fleshly lusts ... **wage war** against the soul."

In this verse, Peter uses military language to describe his point. This is the language of the soldier, who would take up his full armor for the day of battle. It pictures the soldier, who has girded his loins and put on his breastplate. It pictures the soldier who has taken up his shield and put on his helmet. With sword in his hand, he is ready to fight (Eph. 6:13-17).

Such military language isn't unique to Peter. In Ephesians 6, Paul told us to take up the "full armor of God" (Eph. 6:13). The apostle Paul told Timothy, "suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3).

The idea is the same in all of these verses. As you live your Christian life, live it like a soldier lives his life. Be alert. Be on guard. Be ready. Be armed. Because, you have an enemy out there who is taking up arms and attacking you where you are vulnerable.

Perhaps you are vulnerable in your Ear-gate. You listen to things that you ought not to listen to. You listen to those things that stir your flesh. Realize it's a war. It could be music in your iPod. It could be the radio station you listen to in your car. It may be false teachers that you listen to on the radio or on the television. You need to realize that you are under attack. You need to be ready to fight back.

Perhaps you are vulnerable in your Eye-gate. You look upon those things that you ought not to look at. You look on those things that stir your flesh. Realize it's a war. It could be magazines you read. It could be posters you see at your workplace. It could be catalogues with Christmas sales. It could be the cute girl at the checkout counter. You need to realize that you are under attack. You need to be ready to fight back like a soldier.

Perhaps you are vulnerable in your Feel-gate. You love certain sensual pleasures, which have a way of dominating your life. It could be food, which leads to gluttony. It could be sexual pleasures, which lead you to sin. It could be video games, which cause you to fritter away the precious time God has given you. It could be your laziness. Your love for sleep causes you to be a sluggard and you fail to work hard. You need to realize that you are under attack. You need to be ready to fight back like a soldier.

The Christian life isn't a day at the beach. No, the Christian life is a tour of duty in Iraq!

Now, notice here the enemy that Peter brings up in this text. He says, "abstain from **fleshly lusts** which wage war against the soul."

Fundamentally, your war isn't with the things around you. Fundamentally, your war is with your own flesh. Certainly, the things around you stir your flesh. But, Peter says that it's your flesh that wages war against your soul.

Diabolus didn't simply walk into Mansoul and take over. It had to be an inside job. Those patrolling Ear-gate had to let him come in. Those in the city had to silence Mr. Conscience and Mr. Understanding first. And once they were silenced, Diabolus was able to exert his full rule. So also with your flesh. For sin to get the best of you, it needs to be an inside job. Indeed, that's what happens. Your own, evil cravings within you pick up their arms and start attacking you.

Peter wants for all of us to know our enemy. Because, "to be forewarned is to be forearmed." If you know your enemy, you can prepare to fight your battles. That's what makes the "war on terror" so difficult. We don't know our enemy. Our enemy may be a citizen of the United States. We just don't know. But, in the war for our souls, the enemy is clear. Peter makes it clear. He says, "abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." Pogo the Possum said it best, "We have met the enemy and he is us." How true it is.

Peter wasn't the only one who talked this way. Jesus said that it is what "proceeds out of the man that ... defiles the man" (Mark 7:20). Jesus continued, "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). Jesus lists here a wide variety of sins. And yet, He said that they all originate inside of us. They all originate from our "fleshly lusts."

James said it this way in his little epistle: "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; And when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). To be sure, the temptation comes from the outside. But, temptation can only lead to sin when it resonates on the inside of us. We are "carried away and enticed" by our own fleshly lusts.

And it can get pretty ugly. Later in his epistle, James continued, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" (Jam. 4:1). James talks about your own pleasures that "wage war" in your members. Your

own sinful pleasures pick up their machine guns and fight for the right to enjoy their own lusts. In the next verse, James describes how this works. "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." (Jam. 4:2). In other words, you have a fleshly desire in your members which wants something. When you can't have it, you protest. You are ready to pick a fight. You will quarrel until you get it.

You just check this out. The next time that you have an argument with somebody about something, stop and think about it. Ask yourself, "Why am I having this argument?" I'll tell you the answer. It's because there is some fleshly lust that you are craving at that moment, which is being denied you. And you will be like a mother bear robbed of her cubs. You will do whatever it takes to get what you want. If someone else is standing in the way, you will fight and oppose them.

This is true of all sibling rivalry. This is true of all marriage conflicts. The fact that you will do this with those you love demonstrates how strong the flesh really is. You aren't fighting a foreign opponent who is coming after you. You are fighting your own flesh, which rages within like a giant she bear!

At this point, you might say, "Steve, what exactly are these lusts that Peter is talking about?" I believe that the apostle Paul helps us out at this point. In Galatians 5, Paul gives us a list of the deeds of the flesh, which all come from the lusts of the flesh. "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Your "fleshly lusts" include such things as ...

- ... Immorality - that is, sexual misconduct.
- ... Impurity - that is, sinful, dirty behavior.
- ... Sensuality - that is, sinful physical pleasures
- ... Idolatry - finding satisfaction in anything other than God.
- ... Sorcery - involvement in the occult.
- ... Enmities - hatred toward others.
- ... Strife - real conflicts with others
- ... Jealousy - a desire to have what another wants
- ... Outbursts of anger - a lack of self-control that finds expression in a display of anger.
- ... Disputes - arguments of any type.
- ... Dissensions - a large disagreement
- ... Factions - a split in unity
- ... Envying - a wishing that you had what others have
- ... Drunkenness - a lose of control of your mind
- ... Carousing - a search for mischief.

Paul concludes this list by saying, "and things like these" (Gal. 5:21). By these words, he is indicating that this is by no means an exhaustive list of all of the fleshly lusts that exist. Rather, this list gives us an indication of what sorts of things stir within our flesh. And then comes his most amazing statement. He says, "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21). Should you choose to involve yourself in these things and make it your habit, your eternal destiny is at stake. "Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21).

I trust that all of you would agree that this is a pretty serious statement. These are disqualifying sins. If you are continually engaged in these things, you won't enjoy the delights of the kingdom of God in the future. And yet, I believe that this is exactly what Peter is talking about in our text this morning. He says, "abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war **against the soul**" (1 Pet. 2:11).

Your soul is your most valuable possession. In Mark 8:36-37, Jesus asked the hypothetical question, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" The answer is obviously, "Nothing." If you have all of the world's goods, but lose your soul, it is no profit for you at all. There is nothing that you can give in exchange for your soul. Here in 1 Peter, he says that your "fleshly lusts" are waging war against your most valuable possession. This calls for some serious action.

Wherever the President of the United States travels, there is great security. Why? because we value the life of the leader of our country. Surrounding any airport, there is much security. Why? because we value the safety of our own lives when we travel. Around Fort Knox, where the United States keeps much of it's gold stash, there is much security. Why? because we value the gold that our country possesses.

Here are a few facts about Fort Knox for you. Today, it holds more than 5,000 tons of gold! Today, gold goes for about \$800/ounce. Should you do the calculations, there is about \$100 trillion worth of gold at Fort Knox. And thus, we have \$100 trillion reasons why to have security so high at Fort Knox.

In case you are thinking of a bank robbery, think again. First of all, the vault where all of this gold is kept is on the same property as Fort Knox, which is an Army post. This means that tanks, attack helicopters and artillery are nearby. There are about 30,000 troops stationed at Fort Knox, which means that there are no lack of people to fight against any intruders. The entire compound is ringed with several fences, all of which is guarded by security police. There are alarms, video cameras, and armed guards all around. The vault which holds all of this gold is underground. The walls of this vault are made of thick granite walls all around. The blast-proof door to the vault weighs 25 tons. That's a 50,000 pound door! To enter into the vault, various members of the staff must dial separate combinations known only to them. Once the door is opened, there are several other smaller cells that must be entered in order to get at the gold. All of this mitigates against any attempted bank robbery.

Now imagine that our country had some inside intelligence and knew for sure that there would be an attack upon Fort Knox. Furthermore, suppose that as the day of this attack was approaching, we witnessed a large buildup of weapons in a city about 30 miles away from an underground network of rebels. What do you think our nation would do? We would make great efforts to defend our stash of gold against all attack. In fact, I would go further. I believe that we would go on the offensive and breakup the buildup of weapons against this place.

Church family, please know that a similar attack is taking place in your life. Fleshly lusts are waging war against your soul. Will you defend yourself against these attacks to your most valuable possession? Will you go on the offensive, knowing that your soul is at stake? If we, as a nation, would fortify heavily for perishable things like silver or gold (1 Peter 1:18), would you fortify your own defenses when your imperishable soul is under attack? I trust that you will say, "Of course I will."

Perhaps you say, "But Steve, I don't know how to fight against these lusts!" Fortunately for us, Peter tells us how to fight the war against our flesh. He says, "**Abstain** from fleshly lusts" (2:11). This means that we ought to keep away from our fleshly lusts. We ought to avoid them. And so, when waging war with our fleshly lusts, the best way to fight is to walk away.

When dealing with people who want to argue with you, the Proverbs tell us that our best course of action is to walk away. "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out" (Proverbs 17:14). "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel" (Proverbs 20:3). "A gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). When people come upon you and want to bicker with you, your best choice at that moment is to walk away. So also when temptations come upon your soul. Your best action is to abandon your lusts.

This was modeled by Jesus. When Satan tempted him on three occasions, Jesus didn't take what Satan had said and turn it over in his mind and think about it. Satan told Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matt. 4:3). At this point, Jesus didn't think to Himself, "I am the Son of God. Satan is seemingly denying this. I can prove it to him right now by doing what he is challenging me to do. I can turn these stones into bread. Come to think of it, I am a bit hungry. I sure could use some bread about now. Should I do this?" Jesus had none of these thoughts. Rather, Jesus quoted Scripture, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). In so doing, Jesus "abstained" from the temptation that came upon Him. He quoted a verse of Scripture that proved Satan to be wrong and carried on His way.

This is how you need to battle your own fleshly lusts. When the temptation comes, get away. When your eyes see something that you ought not to see, turn your head away. Turn off the television, turn the page in your magazine, close down your computer, don't return with a second look. When your ears hear something that you know is wrong, stop listening. Turn off the radio, end the conversation, or walk away. When your flesh is seeking to engage in sinful, sensual behavior, run away. Don't draw near to see how attractive the temptation is. Flee from it!

Peter's counsel here to abstain was Paul's teaching as well. When writing to the Thessalonians, he said, "This is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4:3). You keep away from it. You don't dabble in it. You don't play with it. You don't inquire into it. Far too often, people flirt with temptation and ask, "How far can I go without sinning." That's the wrong question to ask. The proper question is, "How can I sway away from this temptation as far as possible?" When you come close, the flesh has an opportunity to win it's war over your soul.

The one who thinks that he can handle a little temptation is a fool. "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" (Prov. 6:27). If you play with temptation, you will be burned. So, stay away! Church family, "Abstain from fleshly lusts!" Don't play with fire.

Finally, on this point, we notice that Peter gives a reason why it is that we ought to act this way: we are not of this world. "Beloved, I urge you **as aliens and strangers**" (1 Pet. 2:11).

Fundamentally, this earth isn't our home. We are merely here for a short while. We are "just a passin' through." The customs of the world are not ours. Our love and affections are to be in another place. The apostle John said, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17). We are not of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). So live that way.

Peter has already mentioned how we are aliens. It is how he began the letter. In the very first verse of the very first chapter, he wrote, "Peter, and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1). Now, it's not that all of these people were from another country, but now find themselves living in different parts of the world. Rather, it's that they are from Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, but now, they have found a new home in heaven, where their true citizenship is!

Being "born again to a living hope," they no longer have their affections upon the things of this earth. Because, they are from above! They are from the heavenly Father. Peter is simply calling us to reflect these things! You are from another kingdom. So, don't entangle yourself in the things that men of this world are engaged in. May that give you reason to "fight against fleshly lusts."

My second point is really the flip side of the first.
2. Fight For Excellent Behavior (verse 12).

Verse 11 leans toward being an inner struggle. Verse 12 leans toward being an outer struggle. Verse 11 describes what to flee from. Verse 12 describes what to follow after (see 2 Tim. 2:22). Verse 11 deals more with our struggle with our self. Verse 12 deals more with our witness to the world. Here the words of Peter, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe [them,] glorify God in the day of visitation."

If you think about Peter's comments here in verse 12, you can see how difficult this is. It's why I have sought to keep with the war-terminology

in this point. "Fight For Excellent Behavior."

Peter is urging his readers to a certain kind of behavior. At first glance, we might simply look at this and think that Peter is calling us to a life of good deeds, which the public sees. Here are some good deeds that the public sees.

- Visiting nursing homes.
- Singing for the Salvation Army.
- Shoveling the driveway for your elderly neighbor.
- Serving Thanksgiving meals to homeless people.
- Being responsible for the cleaning of a two-mile stretch of highway.
- Visiting criminals in the local jail.
- Giving blood to the local blood bank.
- Volunteering for the Red Cross.
- Helping storm victims (such as in the case of Katrina).
- Doing volunteer work at the local hospital.
- Raising money for the American Cancer Society for cancer research.
- Donating food to a local food pantry.
- Being a Big Brother or Big Sister to underprivileged children.
- Adopting a child.
- Watching your neighbor's home when they are gone.
- Donating a kidney to a relative, who needs a kidney transplant.
- Helping out at the local rescue mission.
- Building a home for the poor through "Habitat for Humanity."
- Giving your money to some charitable institution (a church, a missionary, a social service agency).
- Being a foster parent.
- Bringing meals to shut-ins through a "Meals on Wheels" program.
- Buying food for a homeless person.
- Working as a search and rescue volunteer.
- Raising awareness of some social issue.
- Being an active member of a Kiwanis or Rotary club.

These are all good deeds that are very public, that many people might see. Furthermore, these are good things to do. We ought to be involved in these types of things as we have opportunity. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:9-10, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." The idea is that our faith in Christ ought to work itself out in doing good in this world. To be sure, the focus of our efforts ought to be with those in the church (i.e. the household of faith). But, we ought not to miss our call to "do good to all people." We are called to be those who engage in the "good works that God prepared beforehand [for us] that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). I would love to see a church filled with people seeking to make a difference in the world with these sorts of activities.

Certainly, most of the things that I have listed here are merely humanitarian in nature. But, you can turn a humanitarian deed into a deed done for Jesus by opening your mouth. While doing these things, you can speak of Jesus. You can tell others of the great love of Christ that you have experienced that has so transformed you that you want to love and help others in their difficulties. While you are engaged in your activity, you can "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). This will turn these humanitarian opportunities into opportunities to proclaim His fame! After all, as we do these types of things, we need to be careful to see that God is glorified in them. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

But, if you look once again closely at verse 12, I don't think that Peter is quite referring to any of these sorts of things. And the reason is simple. Because, Peter mentions that your good behavior is considered by unbelievers all around you as evil behavior. I think that everything that I mentioned so far is looked upon very favorably by non believers.

For instance, suppose that you get involved in a Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. You give four hours a month to an inner-city boy who doesn't have a father in his life. In so doing, you are giving him a role model of what a faithful father is. It's a good thing you are doing, especially if you are telling them about Jesus in the process. And now, suppose that you have a conversation with someone at work (or with your neighbor) about what you do. How will they look upon you? My guess is that they will commend you for volunteering your time in this way. Perhaps they will say something like, "Good for you!" As much as you seek to give glory to God for the light you are shining in doing these things, I still believe that the vast majority of people will commend you for actions, because these things are pretty much viewed by all in this world as good things for our society.

But, Peter is explicitly encouraging his readers to have excellent behavior, which is thought of as evil behavior. Peter says this, "Maintain good behavior among the Gentiles (that is, those outside the church). This good behavior is such that people will say that it's not good behavior. Rather, it's evil behavior. You will be slandered because of your behavior. But, keep going, because later there will be a time in which people will change their minds about your behavior. They will eventually come to realize that your behavior was really good behavior. And thus, they will glorify God."

Now, let me ask you, what sort of behavior is Peter talking about here? What good things have you done that are seen by others as evil deeds?

There are a few things like this that come to mind. Volunteering your time at the Pregnancy Care Center might cause some strong pro-choice

people to oppose you. Here is a good deed that is seen as evil by others. Or, perhaps, going off to China to teach English to the Chinese students. While you are there, you will have a great opportunity to engaged in Christian activity and so encourage the Christian in that country. If you do this, the government will be highly suspicious of you. It is good to go and encourage other believers in foreign lands. Here is a good deed that is seen as evil by others. The teens of our church recently saw a documentary of other teenagers bringing Bibles into Vietnam for the believers there. Had the government caught them, they would have had the Bibles confiscated. It is good to bring Bibles to those who have none. Here is a good deed that is seen as evil by others. In a Hindu land, you might be seen as an evil doer is if you reach out to those of a low caste and touch them and love them. They are seen by others as "unclean" and "paying the penalty for a previous wicked life." Here is a good deed that is seen as evil by others. In our land, there are some who may slander you for spanking your children. They may consider you to be a child abuser. Indeed, some forms of spanking are child abuse. If you love your child, you will discipline your child. "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (Prov. 13:24). But, here is another example of a good deed that is seen by others as evil.

I found it difficult to come up with many more examples. In our day and age and culture, it's a bit difficult to come up with good deeds that are viewed by others as evil. I believe that this is mostly as a result of the blessing of a Christian influence upon our country (however much we are losing it).

In some sense, I think that it was also in the days of Peter as well. In chapter 3, verse 13, Peter asked the rhetorical question, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" The answer is obviously, "Nobody." If you seek to do good to others, few will seek to hurt you.

Nevertheless, there were people in Peter's day who were experiencing this very thing. It's almost unimaginable, really. But, in the next verse, Peter mentions the possibility that you might "suffer for the sake of righteousness" (1 Peter 3:14). Here, Peter affirmed that his readers were doing righteous things and were suffering for it. A few verses later, Peter says, "It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong" (3:17). In chapter 4, verse 4, Peter talks about how people will malign you for not engaging in their sinful activities (4:4). Later in chapter 4 (verses 15-16), Peter says, "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." In other words, "if you are a Christian, doing Christianly things, you may well suffer."

When Peter wrote these things, there was budding persecution coming against the Christians of the world. Last week, we saw how Peter and John were arrested for preaching Christ. Telling others of the work of Christ and calling them to repent of their sins is a good thing. And yet, this was considered evil by the Jewish leaders, who did everything in their power to stop them from so preaching.

As the years went on, there were some other things that Christians did that were considered to be evil. This might seem bizarre to you, but, the early Christians were considered "atheists" by the Romans. They were "atheists" in the sense that they refused to worship the Greek pantheon of gods. They were also "atheists" in the sense that they refused to bow down to Caesar. And so, by worshiping Christ, the early Roman government saw these people as evil doers.

Here's another thing that might seem bizarre to you. The early Christians were considered to be "cannibals" by the Romans. The Romans had heard of how the Christians gather to "eat flesh" and "drink blood" (i.e. with the Lord's Supper). And thus, they were called, "cannibals." Now, certainly, they were in error with these accusations, but that's what slander is. Slander is when you are wrongfully accused of some evil deed. By following obediently after Christ, they were slandered as evil doers.

Philip Schaff summarized the slander that came upon the early church with these words, ...

The common people also, with their polytheistic ideas, abhorred the believers in the one God as atheists and enemies of the gods. They readily gave credit to the slanderous rumors of all sorts of abominations, even incest and cannibalism, practised [sic] by the Christians at their religious assemblies and love-feasts, and regarded the frequent public calamities of that age as punishments justly inflicted by the angry gods for the disregard of their worship. In North Africa arose the proverb: "If God does not send rain, lay it on the Christians." At every inundation, or drought, or famine, or pestilence, the fanatical populace cried: "Away with the atheists! To the lions with the Christians." [\[2\]](#)

And so, as the early Christians would carry out their normal Christian lives, of evangelizing and of gathering for worship and of celebrating the Lord's Supper, they were being slandered for it. And yet, we live in a land that is immune to these sorts of persecutions ... or do we?

My wife told me that this past Friday she was in Sam's Club. She was looking at the children's books that they had on display. There were two women next to her looking at the books as well. One of them said, "Oh, look, here's a book of Bible stories. This would be perfect for (so and so)." The other woman replied, "Yeah, that would be nice." At this point, Yvonne told me that she was encouraged by the conversation. First of all, that Sam's Club had Christian books they were selling. Second, that there were some people who were interested in purchasing some of the books. And then, her encouragement was quickly shattered, when the first woman spoke again. She then said, "Nah..... They already have enough of this crap anyway." [\[3\]](#)

Now, we don't know the circumstances behind those who said these things. Nor do we know the circumstances concerning those of whom these women were speaking. But, we do get a sense of what the average non Christian may think of our Christian activity. Christian books and resources are good things to purchase for your home. But, they may be seen as evil things by other people. We may well be maligned behind our backs, and never even know it.

I remember when I was working in the computer world of this happening to me. I was carrying out my life, working hard, seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and speaking of Christ when appropriate. At one point, totally behind my back, my fellow office mates were maligning my Christian behavior. When my non-Christian boss heard what they were saying, it was so bad that he told them they were not to speak of me

in this way any longer. I only found out about the event later in one of my year end reviews, when my boss related this to me. He asked me if I detected any of this sort of action or behavior against me. To the credit of my workmates, I hadn't.

Who knows what others are thinking about your activities at Rock Valley Bible Church! But, when you are faithful to the Lord you will face the hostility of others.

I remember the time when a friend of mine and his wife invited an older couple in his neighborhood over for dinner at their house. Throughout the course of dinner, they were engaged in nice conversation. After dinner, I believe that they transitioned into a card game of some type. At one point, the husband of the house shared the gospel with this older couple. Upon doing so, the older gentleman spoke something to this effect, "Now, why did you have to go and ruin a perfectly enjoyable evening and friendship by saying those things."

And so, there may well be things that we do in carrying on our love to the Savior that cause others to call them evil deeds. But, the good news is that we have a hope that those who slander our behavior may well give glory to God someday.

Look at how verse 12 ends, "so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe [them,] glorify God in the day of visitation."

Commentators are all over the board regarding the meaning of these words. What is the "day of visitation"? The two most common interpretations are that Peter is talking about the day of conversion or the day of judgment.

It may mean the day of conversion, as they see the great God you serve so faithfully. Even in the face of persecution, the reality of God is so great in your life that you will continue in your righteous behavior. As people see this, they are attracted to your God. Eventually, they repent and give glory to God in His day of visitation. This is how persecution of the church always works. When things are particularly difficult for the people of God, God will strengthen them to shine as examples in their behavior. As others see this, it will help in persuading them to the faith. Tertullian said long ago, "The blood of the martyrs is ... seed [of the church]." [4] When Christians are put to death, they have a great opportunity to show the world that God is more valuable than life itself. This becomes attractive to those who want something greater in this life.

A second option to the meaning of the phrase, "the day of visitation" is that it might refer to the day of judgment when unbelievers are forced to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. On that day, they may be forced to confess that your deeds were righteous and that their own deeds were evil.

I don't really know whether or not this is talking about the day of judgment or the day of salvation. But, here's what I do know: a life that follows Christ may face ridicule now, but it will be vindicated later. Or, as we have seen is true in 1 Peter, "Suffer now, glory later."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 9, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] An electronic version of this book can be found here in various formats: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/holy_war.html.

[2] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, p. 43.

[3] I don't make it my practice to use such vulgarity in my messages. However, at this point, I felt the necessity to quote this woman verbatim, that the level of animosity might come through strong and clear.

[4] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, p. 76.