Abstain from Fleshly Lusts: The War Within

War is terrible. Casualties take so many forms, with some being innocent people who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The atrocities of war are nearly beyond belief. The old adage, "all is fair in war" has been played out time and again through the ages as people have suffered the ravages of warfare. Since the American Civil War, we have very little historical experience with war on our own turf, and no personal experience whatsoever with war in our own backyards. For Americans, war is always something we wage "over there."

Our shores have been safe from the all-out bombardments which other societies have frequently experienced and for whom there is almost automatic acceptance that warfare is a fact of life. The carnage of dead bodies strewn about the shattered streets of our hometown is a picture we have not seen. Try to imagine your home a bombed-out shell. Picture in your mind your livestock slaughtered, your workplace destroyed, and your way of life completely decimated. Visualize if you can the little children of your neighborhood with missing limbs, or raped, or perhaps dead. Most of us cannot even begin to imagine what it would be like to live in war-besieged places like Iraq, Croatia, or Palestine. There, human life is so poorly regarded that the leaders of these peoples do not mind spilling the blood of their own countrymen in what sometimes appears to be senseless, petty strife. Perhaps those of our nation who have seen active combat know something the rest of us do not. War is not pretty, and those who glory in it are misguided. It is serious business, and armed conflict always produces loss from which neither the victor nor the conquered ever fully recovers.

If carnal warfare is merciless and horrific, how must more so the spiritual warfare in which Christians are engaged. Peter warns the readers of his epistle to realize the seriousness of the struggle they were making against immorality of all sorts. In fact, he uses several strong terms in 1 Peter 2:11 to impress the imagery upon the minds of first century Christians, and also upon us. He wrote *"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul."* Since we are really living in a place which is not home to us, we must be careful lest we succumb to the alluring temptations of the flesh. Just as American travelers must not drink the water in some foreign lands no matter how sparkling pure, and refreshing is may appear — even so Christians in the world must avoid the contaminants to our souls which come so attractively packaged. A Nigerian preacher friend of mine learned this lesson in a severe way upon visiting the United States. The rich, fat, sweet diet of Americans proved to be intolerable for his bland stomach. Those southern pecan pies were so alluring, but eating an entire pie at once will sicken the best of Southerners, much less a Nigerian! Peter said we must "abstain," which literally means "to hold oneself constantly back from." Fleshly lusts are seductive, promising, and so palatable – especially at the first. Solomon's wise instruction concerning the fleshly lust of alcohol is an appropriate illustration of the fact that it may be alluring at first, but in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper" (Proverbs 23:32).

These "fleshly lusts" of which Peter speaks "war against the soul." If a good military strategist never underestimates his enemy, then Christians must surely realize that lust is a serious deterrent to spirituality. Lusts of the flesh are insidious and powerful. They mean to win, not just tease and toy with the Christians affections. Pornography entices and excites, then enslaves. Filthy speech is at first "cute" or "cool," but becomes a mindset reflecting a soiled heart. Adultery titillates the libido, but ultimately destroys the soul and even the body. Immodesty is at first "trendy" and "fashionable", but finally lewd and lascivious. "It's war out there," dear brothers. Arm yourselves with the Spirit's sword and shield and do battle for your spiritual self-preservation.

- by Mark White

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We Must Obey Truth

Truth is something that we cannot ignore and successfully escape. It is something we must search out — understand — obey — uphold. It is something that is worth losing all to find and yet, it is something that we have a tendency to let slip by as we busily engage in the time consuming work of "making a living."

Jesus told Pilate that he came to the world to bear witness unto the truth (John 18:37). He had earlier identified "truth" as being the word of the Father (John 17:17). There are things that

are "truth" in many areas, but the truth of which I speak is that regarding man's spiritual being, well-being and destiny. One of the tests of true discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is one's knowledge and continuing in truth (John8:31-32). Yet some men say that truth is unattainable and that there is no such thing as TRUTH. Could be we are trying to justify our refusal to search out truth and stand for it.

What is your attitude toward religious truth? How hard are you seeking to find it? How firmly do you stand in the defense of it? How earnestly do you oppose all that opposes truth? In 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 Paul speaks of those who do not believe the truth and who do not love it. He points out that God will thus send them a strong delusion and that they will be damned because of this! They didn't love it — They didn't believe it!

In Romans 2:8 Paul points out that God will punish those who do not obey truth. This same thing is taught in Galatians 2:14 and 5:7. Thus the importance of knowing truth and obeying the same cannot be over emphasized. God would have all men to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1) and be saved. Souls are purified when men obey truth (1 Peter 1:22). We should clearly see the need to search out, understand, obey, and uphold God's word (TRUTH) in all things. Are you doing that?

- by J. F. Dancer

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"I Don't Want To Be A Hypocrite"

A man begins to neglect his spiritual duties. Though once faithful to attend all of the assemblies, now he never does. He has basically severed all ties with the local congregation. He refuses to return calls, and is never available to meet with concerned Christians who try to visit with him.

Finally, a face-to-face meeting is held. Why has he followed this course of action? What has happened to cause this dramatic change in him? Here's his explanation:*"I know that I'm not living right. I have a problem with sin in my life. I'm tired of 'living a lie'. When I come to church I feel like a hypocrite. I just can't continue on like this. So, I've decided to stop the charade. I won't be coming to church anymore, because I don't want to be a hypocrite."*

What can we say about such a situation? Certainly, hypocrisy is an ugly thing. In fact, the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees received Jesus' strongest words of condemnation. It is right, therefore, to rid oneself of hypocrisy. And, we definitely ought to be honest with ourselves about such a situation. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (1 Jn. 3:20).

However, here is where we think the fella in our example (along with many real persons) makes a terrible mistake. He assumes that he has only two alternatives: 1) continue to act as a hypocrite by remaining in his sin while making a pretense of faithfulness, or 2) give up his service to God completely.

Those are not the only choices! What has been overlooked here is the right choice. Repentance is the answer! Yes, you should stop being a hypocrite, and you can do so by repenting!

- by Greg Gwin