War Against My Soul

1 Peter 2:11  Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

We Are At War
September 11, 2001 was a formative day for many in my generation.

- We were a generation
  - that could not remember Pearl Harbor.
- WWII was a distant war
  - that was fought by our grandparents.
- Korea and Vietnam
  - were footnotes in history.
- And the Cold War
  - was the closest thing that we ever knew to war
    - and it was the war
      - that never really was a war.
- I grew up in an era of relative peace and security.
  - I was part of the generation
    - that heard President Reagan
    - utter those famous words:
      - “Mr. Gorbachev, Tear Down This Wall.”

We saw freedom prevail in the face of tyranny.

- We saw good triumph over evil.
  - In our narrow scope of experience
    - the good guys always won,
    - the oppressors were always defeated
  - and when an aggressive nation
    - invaded its weaker neighbor,
      - a world wide coalition came together
        - to bring liberation
        - to those who were suffering.

- It was the era of a new world order.

However, all of that changed on September the 11th.

- It began like any other day.
  - We had no idea when we got out of bed that morning
    - that we were a nation at war.
- We had no idea that there was
  - a cruel tyrannical force at work in the world
    - that had no greater reason for existing
      - than the demise of our great nation.
• Its not that we shouldn’t have known we were at war.
  o The signs had been there for years.
• We would look back from the vantage point of that day
  o and realize that this was not a new enemy.
• There had been many threats,
  o there had even been other attacks,
    ▪ but we had remained blissfully ignorant.

It was almost as if we believed that
• as long as we refused to take the threat seriously
  o then the threat wasn’t really that valid.
• We simply ignored the evidence,
  o stuck our collective heads in the sand
    ▪ and pretended that the enemy lacked the ability
      • to truly wage war against
        o the greatest nation on this planet.
  • We couldn’t have been more wrong.
    o And in the aftermath of that terrible day
      ▪ it became startlingly obvious
        • that we were at war.
    o Indeed, we had been at war for a long time.
• It didn’t matter that we never acknowledged our enemy,
  o it didn’t matter that we ignored them.
    ▪ It never slowed them down.
• They continued to plot, and plan,
  o and eventually carried out
    ▪ the deadliest attack on American soil
      • that has ever occurred
      • in the history of this great nation.

All of a sudden, as we watched the terrible spectacle
• of those twin towers coming down,
  o of people leaping to their deaths
    ▪ from those burning buildings,
      • it dawned on us that were a nation at war.
• I come to this pulpit tonight
  o in an effort to sound an alarm,
    ▪ to make you aware of the fact
      • that, whether you realize it or not,
        o we are at war.
• This service, on this Sunday evening,
  o needs to have an eternal impact upon our lives.
• We must realize that there is a fanatical enemy
  o that is obsessed with our destruction.
In the weeks, months and even years
  • before the devastating attacks
    o that brought our nation to the realization
      ▪ that we were at war,
    o evil men who were virtually unknown to us
      ▪ plotted against us.
  • It didn’t matter that there had been
    o no formal declaration of war.
  • It didn’t matter that we didn’t recognize
    o the threat that they posed.
  • None of that had any impact
    o on the reality of the situation.
  • They were at war against us
    o and we didn’t even know it.

It is my goal tonight to stir your soul
  • and cause you to come to grips with the fact
    o that we are at war.
  • There is an enemy that seeks to destroy us,
    o there is an enemy that is at war with us
      ▪ whether we realize it or not,
      ▪ whether we acknowledge it or not
      ▪ and whether we choose to participate in it or not.
  • You may not realize the gravity of the situation yet,
    o you may be as ignorant of this war
      ▪ as we were on the day before
        • the towers came down,
          o but that doesn’t change a thing.
            ▪ We are at war.

War Is About Survival

War. The word alone has a lot of gravity to it.
  • It defines a conflict far beyond the casual contest.
    o War isn’t just a game
      ▪ where someone wins
      ▪ and someone else loses.
  • It isn’t a competition
    o where everyone shakes hands afterwards
      ▪ and one team leaves the field a victor
        • and the other team says,
          o “wait until next year”.
    o That’s not war at all.
      ▪ Many times in war,
        • the losers don’t walk off
• of the battlefield at all.
  • One soldier, who saw combat in Afghanistan said that, in the perspective of the battlefield,
    ▪ war is not about victory at all.
    ▪ War is about living or dying.
  • He went on to say that
    ▪ there are no winners in war,
    ▪ only survivors.

You must realize the gravity of what the Bible is talking about
• when it says that we are in a war.
  ▪ War is about life and death.
• It isn’t just a statement
  ▪ that the enemy of your soul doesn’t like you.
• This is statement that he intends
  ▪ to absolutely destroy you!
    ▪ That is the nature of war!
• There is an enemy that strives
  ▪ for the destruction of your eternal soul.
• An enemy that seeks not just to harm you,
  ▪ not just to humiliate you,
  ▪ not just to overwhelm you,
    ▪ it is an enemy that seeks to annihilate you.
• In our text, Peter said that
  ▪ this is an enemy that makes war against your soul!
• There is an enemy that is fixated
  ▪ on destroying your very soul.
    ▪ You have to grasp the importance of that.
• This isn’t just an enemy that would take your life.
  ▪ This is not an enemy that seeks victory
    ▪ in the temporal realm
      ▪ of flesh and blood.
  ▪ This is an enemy that is fixated
    ▪ on the eternal destruction of your soul!

Not only must we realize that we are at war,
• we must realize that this is a war
  ▪ with eternal consequences.
• We may live in the flesh,
  ▪ the individual battles of this warfare
    ▪ may be lived out in the flesh,
      ▪ but the significance of this war is eternal.
• This is an enemy that wages war against my soul!
The soul is that essence of eternal life that was first breathed into man by God.

- The soul is that everlasting part of me that was condemned under sin.
- My lost soul is what compelled God to make himself a little lower than the angels so he could suffer death for me.
- The soul is that intangible eternal treasure that has been redeemed, not by silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.
- I know of nothing that is more serious or has more eternal consequence than my soul and there is nothing that is more dangerous to me than an enemy that makes war against my soul!

More than just my body,
- more than just my livelihood,
- more than just my earthly treasures, my soul is at stake in this warfare.

The very promise of eternal life within me is in danger of being destroyed.

Nothing could ever be more significant than the outcome of this warfare, for no prize has ever been more valuable than my soul!

Jesus asked this question in Matthew 16:26:
- “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”
  - What is the exchange rate for a soul?
    - What could ever compare to the value of your soul?
  - The answer was given in the first half of that verse where Jesus declared that the “whole world” with all of its riches and wonders is absolutely worthless when compared to the eternal value of your soul!
- Nothing is more priceless than my soul!
  - If my enemy wins this war, if this war ends with the loss of my soul, then I will be lost forever.
  - Eternity hangs in the balance.
    - I am in a war
• and I am in danger of losing my soul.

The Enemy Within Me
I read a lot of military history
• and lately I’ve been reading first hand accounts
  o of the war in Afghanistan.
• The war in Afghanistan is a difficult kind of war
  o because it is a war against an enemy
    ▪ that blends in with the population.
• There are no uniforms,
  o there are no enemy bases
    ▪ and there is no command and control structure
      • that we can bomb into oblivion.
  o The enemy rises from the indigenous population.
• They may be manning a stall in the marketplace one day
  o and firing an RPG from a hillside on the next day.

This became a real problem
• because the people responsible
  o for our military strategy in Afghanistan
    ▪ decided that in order to defeat the insurgents
      • they needed to win the trust of the population.
• So they invited governors, mayors, and even police chiefs
  o to become a part of their operational planning.
• The problem is that, in many cases,
  o these men were loyal to the enemy.
• It is a terrible tragedy
  o when you invite your enemy into your camp
    ▪ and make them aware of your plans.
• There are some heart-rending stories
  o of devastating ambushes and horrifying battles
    ▪ that were fought because the enemy
      • had an inside man
    ▪ who was broadcasting the movements
      • of our troops.
• It is hard enough to fight a determined enemy
  o who stands against you,
    ▪ it is many times harder to do battle
      • with an enemy that fights you
        o from within your own headquarters.

After we recognize that we are at war,
• and after we realize how serious this warfare is,
  o we must then come to grips with the truth
that the enemy has a man on the inside.

- The hardest thing for us to recognize
  - about this war that we are engaged in
  - is that **the enemy is not just an external entity**
  - **that works against me.**
- The enemy of my soul
  - has a willing accomplice in my flesh.
- The antagonist that would destroy my soul,
  - that would see me condemned to hell
  - for all of eternity,
  - has a man on the inside.
- Peter said, in our text,
  - that **it is my fleshly lusts**
  - **that wage war against my soul.**
- What a tragedy!
  - There is an enemy within me!

This war would be so much easier

- if the weapons of my enemy's warfare
  - were all external,
- if every attack against my soul
  - was launched from outside of me.
- If I could see the enemy coming,
  - if I could always focus my attention
    - on external threats.
- But that is not the case at all;
  - it is my own fleshly lusts
    - that war against my soul!
- I don't just war against
  - the legions of darkness
    - that seek to destroy me.
- I wage a deadly warfare
  - against an enemy that has a foothold
    - in my own heart,
  - an enemy that asserts itself
    - in the very affections
    - and desires of my own flesh.
- The word that is translated as "lusts" in our text
  - has the meaning of "cravings or strong desires."
- Peter said that it is the cravings of my flesh,
  - the inner appetites or strong desires
    - **of my own humanity,**
      - which wage war against my soul.
The power of sin is that it appeals to the appetites of my flesh.
• There is an enemy within me
  o that makes evil seem to be
    ▪ more attractive than righteousness.
• An enemy within me
  o that makes a lie seem to be
    ▪ more pleasing than truth,
  o that causes immorality to be
    ▪ more alluring than purity,
  o that sees the things of this world
    ▪ as being more appealing
      ▪ than the things of God.

I have longings and passions within me
• that are inherent to my own human nature,
  o that have been corrupted
    ▪ so that they wage war against my soul.
• The value system of my flesh
  o has been corrupted by the sin nature
    ▪ so that it naturally desires
      ▪ that which is a spiritually destructive to me.
• Left to its own devices,
  o my flesh will destroy my soul!

This is the battleground.
• The war for my soul
  o is waged within my human will.
• James said that the cravings and desires of my flesh
  o tempt me by enticing me to sin.
    ▪ The first and greatest enemy
      ▪ that I must overcome
        ▪ is my own flesh!

Abstain
If I recognize that I am at war
• and if I recognize that my soul is at stake
  o and if I grasp the fact that the enemy is within me,
    ▪ then I must wonder:
      • How do I survive this war?
• If war is about survival,
  o how do I preserve my soul,
    ▪ how do I protect
      ▪ the most valuable treasure that I posses?
• Peter said that, in order to overcome this enemy,
  o we must abstain from the passions of the flesh
    ▪ that war against our soul.
• We must fight the sinful desires of our flesh
  o like the **deadly compulsions**
    ▪ that they are.
• You can’t indulge them,
  o you can’t flirt with them,
    ▪ and you can’t afford to give them
      ▪ even a small foothold in your life,
  o because they are not just
    ▪ innocent little carnal indulgences,
      ▪ they are the attacks of an enemy
        ▪ that wages war against your soul.

From a carnal perspective,
• nothing that you possess
  o is as valuable as your life.
• If you ever find yourself
  o in a life-threatening attack,
    ▪ where an antagonist intends to kill you,
  o your body will be flooded with adrenaline
    ▪ and you will fight that attacker
      ▪ with everything that you have.
• You will find, in that life-threatening moment,
  o that you possess superhuman strength
    ▪ because your body will pour all of its energy
      ▪ into self-preservation.
• Nothing takes precedent
  o over the desire to preserve your own life.

Let me share an eternal truth with you:
• **Your soul is infinitely more valuable than your life.**
  o Jesus said, in Matthew 10:28,
    ▪ that rather than being afraid
      ▪ of an enemy that can kill the body
        ▪ but not the soul
  o *we should fear him which is able*
    ▪ *to destroy both body and soul.*
• The kind of fierce self-defense
  o that you would bring to bear against an enemy
    ▪ that sought to take your life
  o is the kind of resistance
    ▪ that you should bring to bear
• against the enemy that would wage war
  o against your soul!

• That’s the kind of resistance
  o that you must bring to bear
    ▪ on the deadly compulsions of your flesh.

• You have to recognize
  o that the carnal lusts of your flesh
    ▪ have eternal consequences
  o and you must determine
    ▪ to oppose them
      • with everything that you have!

Let me explain what the scripture is talking about
• when it makes reference to fleshly lust.
  o It is not just talking about the desires
    ▪ that pertain to your humanity,
  o it doesn’t just mean simple desires
    ▪ like hunger and thirst.

• It is talking about desires
  o that are detrimental to your spiritual life.
    ▪ In the context of the verse “fleshly”
      • is used as the opposite of “spiritual”.

• A fleshly desire is any desire
  o that has a negative spiritual impact.
    ▪ That is the kind of desire
      • that you must abstain from.

• Because, when the lusts of the flesh
  o hinder your walk with God
    ▪ they wage war against your soul.

There is a powerful principle here that we must grasp about our desires.
• There is a standard by which we can determine what desires we must abstain from:
  o If it wars against your soul,
    ▪ you must abstain from it.
  o If it threatens your commitment to God,
    ▪ you must abstain from it.
  o If it threatens your faithfulness to the things of God,
    ▪ you must abstain from it.
  o If it hinders your walk with God,
    ▪ you must abstain from it.
  o If it impedes your commitment to sacrifice
    ▪ for the kingdom of God,
      • you must abstain from it.
  o If it’s going to make you miss church,
War Against My Soul

Priority God

Our theme for 2015 is priorities

- and in January we are emphasizing
  - the most important priority of all:
    - God.

- What I’m trying to tell you tonight
  - is that your walk with God
    - should be more important to you
      - than anything else!

- The condition of your soul
  - should take precedence
    - over EVERY other pursuit.

- To lose the war for your soul
  - is to lose out with God for eternity.

- To lose the war for your soul
  - is to waste the precious blood
    - that redeemed you at Calvary.

- The writer of Hebrews says
  - that if you abandon your soul
    - to pursue the desires of your flesh,
  - you have trampled the Son of God underfoot,
• counted the blood of the covenant
  • by which you were sanctified
  • a common thing,
• and have insulted the Spirit of grace.

• Those are appalling charges
  o to have leveled against you
    • but that is a strong statement
      • of the importance of preserving your soul!
• Your soul is so valuable to God
  o that he bled and died for it.
• But many times we live our lives
  o as if the sacrifice of God has no real value
    • because we live as if
      • our soul doesn’t really matter.
      • God forbid!

Your first and greatest priority should be God.
• He loved you enough to redeem you.
  o He purchased your soul with his own blood.
    • You owe everything to Him.
• In every part of your life,
  o in every pursuit,
  o in every pleasure,
  o in everything,
    • God should come first!
• You should consider him,
  o and consider the value of your soul,
    • before you consider anything else.
      • Because you are in a war for your soul.

Victory
So if we recognize that we are at war
• and if we recognize that our soul is at stake
  o and we realize that the battle is waged
    • in our own fleshly desires,
  o then the final thing that we need to know
    • is how do we win this war?
• If it is true that war
  o is not about winning and losing
    • but, as the battle hardened veteran said,
      • it is really about life or death
  o then the way to win this war
    • is to put the desires of the flesh to death.
• That is exactly what Paul says in Romans 8:13.
Romans 8:13  *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

- If you live after the flesh,
  - you are going to die.
- He’s not talking about physical death,
  - because it is appointed to every man once to die.
    - I’m going to die physically
    - no matter if I live after the flesh or not.
- No. What Paul is talking about is spiritual death.
  - He is saying that if you live after the flesh
    - then you are going to lose your soul.
- It’s the same message that Peter gave us.
  - These fleshly lusts,
    - these carnal human desires
      - that take me away from God
      - and do damage to my walk with God,
        - they wage war against my soul
      - and, if I live that way,
        - I am going to die spiritually.
- If I voluntarily subject myself
  - to the bondage of the flesh,
    - I will lose my soul!

But Paul’s warning is balanced with an incredible promise:

- If through the spirit,
  - I put the deeds of the body to death,
    - I will live!
    - That word “mortify” means to “put to death.”
- That is the opposite of living in the flesh.
  - That is what Peter means when he says
    - that we must abstain from fleshly lusts.
- We cannot continue to allow
  - the appetites of our flesh
    - to come in between us and God.
- We cannot continue to allow
  - these fleshly desires
    - to drive us further and further
      - away from God.
- We must learn to live after the spirit
  - instead of living after the flesh.
- We must learn to allow the spirit of God within us,
  - the very power of the Holy Ghost,
to direct our lives.

In as much as there are cravings of the flesh that must be reigned in,

- there are cravings of the spirit
  - that must be pursued.
- While the flesh longs to put distance between me and God,
  - the spirit longs for closeness to God.
- While the flesh finds delight in everything but church,
  - the spirit finds its nourishment in the house of God.
- While the flesh derives its pleasure from worldly things
  - the spirit finds its fulfillment in godly things.
- The spirit longs for time spent in prayer,
  - for time spent reading the word of God,
  - for the fellowship of the people of God,
  - for the atmosphere of corporate worship
    - that is experienced in the church house.
  - The spirit thrives on the presence of God!

Listen to pastor tonight, I’m not saying that every pleasure in this life is sin.

- I’m not saying that there is no room for any hobbies or personal pursuits in your life.
- I’m not trying to imply that you have to live your life like a monk in a monastery somewhere and that you cannot interact with your world.
- But listen closely to what I am saying,
  - when the desires of your flesh come between you and God they do damage to your walk with God!
- When the pursuits of this life take you away from the presence of God
  - and cut you off from the renewing of the spirit of God within you,
    - they are detrimental to your soul.

You have to understand, this evening,

- that your flesh is in cahoots with your enemy.
  - Your flesh is not naturally inclined to follow after that
• **which is spiritually good for you.**
  • Left to its own devices,
    o your flesh will take you away from God,
      ▪ not towards him!
  • You must understand that you are in a war,
    o your soul is at stake,
      ▪ your flesh is a traitor
    • and the only way to win the war
      o is to allow the Holy Ghost
      o to lead and direct your life!
    o You must put God first!

CLOSE
We do well to remember
• that as long as we live in this carnal world,
  o we are living in a war zone.
• The forces of evil
  o that are arrayed against us
    ▪ are formidable
    • and they have a willing accomplice
      o in our flesh.
• The way of a man, Solomon said,
  o seems right to the man.
  ▪ **You cannot trust your flesh.**
• Under the guise of cravings
  o that seem to be perfectly natural,
    ▪ it will wage war against your soul.
• It will use your own desires
  o to drive a wedge between you and God.
• It will use seemingly innocent things in your life
  o to separate you from the presence of God.
• You must learn to live
  o by the power of the spirit of God.
• You must learn to abstain
  o from fleshly lusts
    ▪ by yielding to spiritual desires.
• That is the key to victory.
  o That is the way that we overcome.

It is time to put God first.
• It is time to bring our flesh under submission.
  o What we need
    ▪ is a good old-fashioned breakthrough.
  o What we need
• is a refilling of the Holy Ghost.

• What do you mean pastor?
  o I'm telling you that the key to spiritual victory
    ▪ is the constant renewal
    ▪ of the spirit of God within you.
  o It's been too long
    ▪ since you got lost in the Holy Ghost.
  o It's been too long
    ▪ since you have been baptized,
      • fully immersed, in his spirit.

• With every passing moment,
  o your spirit grows weaker
    ▪ and your flesh grows stronger.

• It is time to stir yourself,
  o to bring yourself to an altar
    ▪ and to ask God to baptize you
      • all over again
        o in the power of the Holy Ghost.

• That is the key to victory!