The War Within

1 Peter 2:11-17 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Perhaps the most common thing we want to know is God's will for our life. Don't we think all the time, "I will wish I knew what God wanted me to do." This gets more complex the older we get. Kids aren't concerned about guidance for making decisions because they already know what they want. But as we get older, there are far more decisions to make and options within those decisions. What kind of career do I want? Where should I go to school? Who should I marry? Where should I live? What job should I take? What church should I go to? How should I budget? What house should I buy? What trip should I take? How should I parent? How should I care for my parents? Our uncertainty and need to make wise decisions is typically why drives us to wanting us to know God's will for our life. Unfortunately, when we pray, we (typically) don't get a verbal response from God. And when we look at the Bible, there is rarely anything specific for us. Now, this week we have the rare treat of examining what Peter describes as God's will. This only happens three times in the Bible where a biblical author says "this is the will of God" and this is one of them. Now this challenges us: if we actually knew God's will, would we actually want to do it?

Before Peter ever gets to disclosing "the will of God", he establishes the tension that we are going to have when we will hear the "will of God":

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Big Idea: The kingdom of self is at war with the kingdom of God.

The war starts on the inside and works its way out. We are the problem, not our circumstances. No one will ever be judged for you sins, only you will. You will not be judged for what happens to you, but only how you respond. Here in our text Peter highlights three battlefronts in the war within:

1. The Battle to Honor When We Are Dishonored

1 Peter 2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

- have “good conduct” among the Gentiles – his way of talking about how we relate to outsiders or unbelievers
- we should be able to handle the worst treatment from other people – “when they speak against you as evildoers”
- notice the "when" not "if"
- what is the purpose? Why should we persist in commendable conduct (attitudes and actions)?
- Peter echoes the words of the Master:

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."
2. The Battle to Submit to Flawed Authorities

1 Peter 2:13-15 Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

- we have no clue about the utter bombshell these words are to his readers – NERO WAS THEIR EMPEROR!!!

- but what if what they require us to do things that God forbids or prohibit was God requires? Peter faced those situations and suffered the consequences of obeying God and not man, but he still honored the authorities and didn’t go to war with them or make it political:

Acts 5:27-32 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

- even though some may fear the power of our government, we have never come remotely close in the US to this kind of conflict – as Americans we flinch even though we have never experienced anything like what the apostles faced or our brothers and sisters around the world

- it is this context that Peter grounds this command by disclosing God’s will (2:15): “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”

- so this is what God wants: let your godly conduct be so overwhelming that it can even silence the foolish

- Peter experienced this first hand:

Acts 5:33-39 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. 36 For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice,

3. The Battle to Use Our Freedom to Serve

1 Peter 2:16-17 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

- we are always looking for reasons not to love and serve each other

- we are tempted to hijack God’s kingdom with our own agenda

- the kingdom of self immerses for battle when felt threatened by other self kingdoms
Simon Sinek (Leaders Eat Last): “The less our colleagues and leaders look out for us, the less we look out for them. The less we look out for them, the more selfish they become and, as a result, the more selfish we become. And when that happens, eventually everyone loses.”

- we ultimately think that God’s kingdom is weak, ineffective, evil itself, or non-existent

- the kingdom of self hijacks the kingdom of self in pursuit of freedom – Peter asserts our freedom in Christ

- what is this freedom that he speaks of? As Americans (and New Hampshirites), we can hijack this word…

1 Peter 1:17-19 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

- what we don’t realize is that when we try to reign in the kingdom of self, we become slaves

- Jesus is the selfless King, who in His infinite freedom gave himself to buy our freedom with His blood – we are His free servants

- isn’t this what has drawn us to Jesus – seeing His perfect conduct (honorable when dishonored, submitting to flawed authorities, and using His freedom to serve us) that has silenced our foolish ignorance and caused us to repent and so glorify God

What about you?
How goes the battles in the war?
How is your conduct with unbelievers?
Are you submitting to the flawed authorities in your life?
How are you suing your freedom? For indulgence or service?