

ABSTINENCE

Request: I have battled an eating disorder for years. Recently a Christian counselor read to me 1 Pet.2:11 as a possible solution to my problem. However, I am not sure what it means since I have failed abstinence type diets in the past. The last thing I need is to include the Bible to my list of diet failures.”

**“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from sinful lusts which war against your souls.”
(1 Pet.2: 11)**

The English dictionary defines abstinence as “forbearance from any indulgence of appetite.”

The Greek word for abstain is (apecho). It is a compound word (apo and echo) and means “to hold or keep oneself from something.” It is used primarily with sinful practices in the NT such as in 1 Pet.2:11.

This lesson will study FIVE aspects ABSTINENCE in the Christian Way of Life (CWL)

1. There are six key words or phrases that explain the dynamics of Abstinence in the CWL as recording in 1 Pet.2:11.

- **Beloved** (agapatos / v.pl.m) reminds us that Christians are the object of God’s maximum love based on the character and merit of God and not on the character and merit of the believer (2 Cor.5: 17; Gal.3: 26-28). God will always love you no matter what! (Luke 15:20/ prodigal son)
- **Aliens** (paroikos) foreigner or a person in a strange place; (Eph.2: 12-16; 4:17-19) and exiles (parepidemos) a pilgrim sojourning in a strange place; (Phil.3: 20) reminds us that Christians live in a hostile and foreign world in regards to the will of God.
- **Abstain** (apecho / p.m.infin) reminds us that Christians have free will and a responsibility to say NO to the Old Sin Nature (OSN) and at the same time to say YES to the Filling of The Holy Spirit (FHS) (Gal.5: 16-17; Eph.5: 18).
- **Sinful lusts** (ton sarkikos epithumia) reminds us that Christians still have an Old Sin Nature (OSN) and become carnal as long as they are alive in the world (1 Cor.3: 1-3).
- **War** (strateuo / p.a.ind) reminds us that Christians are in a spiritual conflict referred to as the angelic conflict (AC) with the Devil (Eph.6: 11-17; 2 Cor.10: 4-5).
- **Against our souls** (kata+gen. of opposition tes psuche) reminds Christians that this angelic conflict (AC) is a spiritual war and is very much internal as well as external, i.e. Old Man Cosmos Diabolicus (OMCD) (Eph.4: 22-24; Rom.12: 2).

These six key words or phrases apply only to Christians and not to the unsaved (Rom.7:24-25; 8:9, 12).

2. We are instructed to abstain from the sinful lusts, which war against our souls.

Notice that abstain is not commanded (apecho is p.m.infin not imperative). The present infinitive is used to emphasize the reason or purpose for *constant abstaining or for holding one’s self from gratifying the lust of the OSN (say NO to OSN but at the same time say YES to FHS) (Rom.8: 5-8).*

However, constantly walking by means of the filling of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is commanded (Gal.5: 16-17) (peripateo / p.a.impv.2pl) (say YES).

It is also interesting that abstain has the beneficial middle voice. Abstaining from sinful lusts benefits the Christian. Actually, the Greek word for sinful is *sarkikos*. *Sarkikos* is translated fleshly or carnal as in (1 Cor.3: 3)

Sarkikos is translated sinful because that is the result of gratification of the OSN (James 1:14-15/ personal sin).

3. Abstain is used in this way in 1 Thess.4:3-8 to instruct Christians to abstain from sexual immorality.

“For **this is the will of God, your sanctification** (hagiasmos/ Acts 26:18; Rom.15: 16; 2 Thess.2: 13):

That you:

(1) **Abstain** (apecho / p.m.infin) (say NO to OSN) from sexual immorality (tes porneia) fornication;

(2) **Know how to possess** (ktaomai / p.m.infin) acquire for oneself (say YES to FHS) his own vessel (to skeuos) (2 Tim.2: 21) **in** sanctification and honor, **not in** lustful passion (epithumia pathos) (Col.3: 5), *like the Gentiles who do not know God.*” (1 Thess.4: 3-5; 1 Cor.3: 3) like mere men.

Paul instructed Christian singles to FLEE immorality and to not sexually arouse one another until marriage (1 Cor.6: 18-7:2). “*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.*” (Heb.13:4)

4. In Paul’s closing remarks to the churches of Thessalonians (1 Thess.5: 13-28), he instructed them to “abstain from every form of evil (poneros / cosmos diabolicus) (2 Thess.3: 3; 1 John 5:18-19).” (5:22).

This time Paul gave a command (apecho / p.m.impv.2pl).

Paul told them how to do it in 5:21 – “but examine (dokimazo / p.a.impv.2pl) everything carefully; hold fast (katexho / p.a.impv.2pl) to that which is good (kalos/ divine production/ Titus 2:14).”

5. Paul attacked apostate doctrines of legalism that taught a false system of abstinence for salvation and spirituality in 1 Tim.4:1-6.

Two of these apostate doctrines were abstaining from certain foods under the OT dietary laws and things sacrificed to idols (Col.2: 16-17; Rom.14: 5-8; 1 Cor.10: 31).

Paul gave similar instructions in 1 Cor.8 with the law of love – “*But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.*” (8:8) “*Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.*” (8:13)

This had been covered at the first church conference at Jerusalem under the law of love (Acts 15:20) – “*that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.*” (15:29) (Acts 10-11; Lev.11; Deut.14)