



FAITHFUL LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD

A SERIES IN FIRST PETER



GOOD STEWARDS OF GOD'S GRACE

1 PETER 4:1-11

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WORLD

INTRODUCTION

In a time of rampant sinning and sexual perversity, Peter encourages his readers to live like Jesus did in every way. What does that look like? Jesus lived solely to do the will of God and denied every human passion that would deter him from that mission. Consider that: in every encounter and temptation, in every interaction and conversation, Jesus chose to do exactly what God desired for him to

do. He was our example of complete and absolute obedience and faithfulness. This is what all of the work of God in our lives is leading us to: perfect obedience, perfect submission, and perfect harmony with the will of God. If you are on the journey of sanctification, you are making continual progress toward those ends.

Now, this would be easier and it would happen more quickly if we didn't live in a time that is every bit as perverse and rebellious as the time of Noah and the time in which Peter's original readers lived. And much of the world has reached the point again where not going along with the sinful perversions so common in this world will get us ostracized. People judge us for this, but we are to be concerned with a more important judgment: the judgment of God. And so we are to put to death what is earthly in us so that we can live in the spirit and not in the flesh, as Jesus did. And this is how Peter begins this section of his letter:

TEXT

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...

Now, we need to grasp what Peter is saying here because one danger is that you might look at these words and deduce that, because you still sin, you must not be a Christian. But not one of us in this room has "ceased from sin" in any perfect or absolute way. So what is Peter saying?

One fundamental principle of biblical interpretation is that we must let Scripture interpret Scripture. In other words, instead of us wrestling with a doctrine by ruminating, speculating, and then

pontificating, we look first to other places in God's word that might help us understand the section we're reading. To help us understand what Peter is saying here, flip about 3-4 pages forward in your Bibles to 1 John 3:4-10.

Ok, let's zoom in on v9:

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

John says here that not only does no one born of God make a practice of sinning, but that those who are born of God *cannot* keep on sinning because they have been born of God. So you cannot be born of God - you cannot have truly seen Jesus and truly know Jesus - and keep *practicing* sin.

Some try to wrestle this verse into saying that once a person is truly a believer, they will not *be able* to sin. But if that's what John is saying, then he would be contradicting his own words from the beginning of his letter. There, he says that not only are we capable of sinning, but that we must admit that we sin or else we make God a liar. So what he is saying here is not that we are incapable of sinning, but that if we are truly born of God, then our *practice of sinning* will come to an end. What is the difference?

We will continue to sin. Some of you will remember, or maybe it is your present experience, that when you became a follower of Jesus, all of your practices of sin, sadly, did *not* immediately come to an end. Some of your practices of sinning *did* immediately come to an end, but others took time to put to death. You had formed habits and behaviours and even sometimes addictions that were not instantly

cured when you placed your faith in Christ. The sanctifying work of Jesus got off to a roaring start in some areas of your life, and a slower start in some other areas.

But although this is true, what is also true for everyone who is genuinely born again is that you will begin to hate your sin, and you will stop trying to get better at it. That's what practice is - trying to get better at something, to do it more efficiently and effectively. Now, instead, because you have been born of God, the practice of righteousness becomes possible in your life. You begin to desire it, and that desire grows. And this is because your spirit has been transformed and has changed direction from its orientation to sinful living toward godly living.

And that's what John and Peter are both talking about here. Your desires have fundamentally changed direction. If the Spirit of God is truly now living in you, then your time of desiring to practice sin is being put to death, and your desire to practice righteousness has come to life.

And a bit of advice here: in those areas of your life, even after you are a believer, where it seems that your flesh still wants to practice its ways, take severe action to confront those areas. Those are the areas of greatest weakness and danger. Search God's word, call out to him in prayer, confess these weaknesses and sins to fellow believers, and go forward with a determination to put the practice of sinning to death in your life.

The determining factor about the genuineness of your salvation is not that you no longer sin. I'm sorry; I wish that were the case. That day is coming, but that day is not today...

The determining factor about the genuineness of your salvation is in the following question: Is the overall direction of my life oriented toward practicing righteousness or toward practicing sin? Look at your life - is the trajectory toward godliness or is it toward ungodliness?

Ok, so that's what Peter is getting at here when he uses the term "ceased from sin"...

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for **whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...**

We are to patiently emulate Christ, because his death made a way for us to access the resurrected life. Jesus suffered in the flesh; He was physically afflicted in his body. He endured abuse, torture and ultimately death at the hands of his persecutors. But as we saw in the previous section, he did this so that he might bring us to God. He was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

Peter now says that those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus have "ceased from sin," meaning **not** that we are now already perfect in every way, but that we recognize the goal, and that we are making progress towards it. We are practicing righteousness. Practicing and by God's grace, seeing the results of that practice, which is moving us toward the goal. Listen to Paul in Phil. 3:12-14:

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers [and sisters], I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I

press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

And so we cease to practice sin; we cease trying to get better at it and begin to fight against it. Christ has put an end to sin’s dominion in our lives. It no longer rules us. And we are to willfully cooperate with this process called sanctification. We are to put all sin to death; we are to die to sin. Dying to sin means to stop being its friend, to stop making space for it, to stop inviting it in for a coffee. It means using every weapon at our disposal to keep it subdued and to put it to death. Why?

² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

We are all, this morning, living in earthly bodies. This will be the case for some time to come - it will be a longer time for some than for others. And as long as this is the case, we need to understand that there are two ways to live for the rest of the time we have in the flesh, that is, in these bodies. We can live for human passions, or we can live for the will of God.

1. We can live for human passions

What are human passions? He will list a few in v3, but for now, more generally, human passions are those desires that are contrary to God’s will. They are desires for what God has forbidden, and these are the natural inclinations of mankind apart from God. God is the Creator and lawgiver, and sinful humankind wants to rule over itself and to overrule what God has commanded. If there is something he says ought not to be done, we want to do it. If there is something he says we should do, we don’t want to do it. That is our natural condition apart from God.

We want *our* wills and desires to be primary, not the will and desires of God. We see that this was the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. God said not to do something, and mankind wanted to do it, to walk the path apart from God's command, and to, in a sense, forge their own path, thinking they knew better than God.

So that's one way we might still attempt to live today. We can live for human passions. The other way is this...

2. We can live for the will of God

What does it mean to live this way? It means to put God's glory first in everything you think, say and do. It means to put away selfishness, to deny yourself, to submit all your plans to his better plan. It means constantly seeking to know and understand what God wants you to do and then doing it.

When I was in Bolivia in 2022, I listened to the testimony of a Spanish pastor there named Hugo Mercado. He told of his life of sin before he met Christ and then meeting Christ and living for him, and he described it this way: "I destroyed my own dreams so I could follow his dreams." That's a good way to say that he wanted to live for the will of God and not his own will, which was only leading him to destruction. "I destroyed my own dreams so I could follow his dreams."

These are the options: Will we, as Paul says in Romans 14:13, either "make provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires," Or we will make provisions for the Spirit, to allow the Spirit unhindered access to our wills in order to lead us into the will of God, to do what God wishes to be done by us. We will either do this or we will spend our time getting lost in endless thoughts about how to indulge our evil desires.

When we do this, when we practice sinning, how to sin better, more, we always plan to fail. It is like an alcoholic who claims he's trying to stay sober but keeps a secret stash just in case the desire to indulge becomes too strong to resist. But it's also like someone who is addicted to pornography who claims he's trying to address that problem while leaving open very obvious access points. Such a person is likely to fail *often*. If we want to live for the will of God, we must know our own weaknesses and work not only to avoid them but to persist in putting them to death.

³For the time that is past suffices, Peter says, for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

This is what self-willed living looks like. This is life lived against what God wants us to do, life in hard pursuit of all that the self wills and the flesh desires: Engaging in sensual excesses and sexual sin, desiring to obtain what is forbidden by God, routinely getting drunk and engaging in unbridled sexual immorality, more getting drunk, all while engaging in idolatry, the worship of the creature instead of the Creator.

You'll notice that alcohol and sex feature prominently in this list. Across that area of the world at that time, these were cultural norms. And we must notice as well that these two things still drive much sinning today. Neither is inherently evil, but the misuse of both is the cause of great evil.

Paul warned the church in Corinth about this type of dangerous behaviour as well. He writes in 1 Cor. 10:6-8:

“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.”

There is a cost to ongoing unrepentant sexual immorality. Later in that same chapter, Paul says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). That is to be our radical commitment to living for the will of God. And this will look very odd to those who are living the opposite way! Peter warns them of this in v4:

⁴With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

Why are they surprised? Because it was odd behaviour in that society to NOT engage in this unrestrained sinning - that's how commonplace it was. And now, by not joining in, they are being reviled. Why do they revile?

One reason must be because they have an internal sense, a conscience, that tells them this behaviour is out of step with God's design and instruction. When people are rebelliously at odds with God, they often lash out and mock those who are seeking to follow God's ways. When people indulge in rampant and unrepentant sin, they always want others to join in. And when others don't, they mock.

Peter's readers were, as we are, living in a world that is accurately described by Paul in Romans 1:18-32. This describes any society that

takes a long walk away from God. After talking about how widespread dishonouring of God leads to all kinds of sexual perversion, Paul says this:

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² **Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.**

That's an accurate picture of the world at that time, and it is an accurate picture of the world today. People not only practice what God forbids, but they also invite others to join and praise others who do the same. But Peter reminds them that... v5

⁵ **they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.**

What Peter is saying is that these people may revile us and judge us for not joining in, but that is an insignificant judgment on us by them in light of the judgment they will face before God if they do not repent of their rampant sinning.

⁵ **They will have to give an answer, an explanation in response to the judgment of God, who is ready to determine what is right and what is wrong among the living and the dead.**

And this is why - look at v6

⁶For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

R.C. Sproul says Peter here is “not talking about Jesus ’preaching to dead spirits; rather, he is indicating the reason that Christ came. Jesus preached the gospel, and many of those who had heard Him and believed had died, so their battle was over and their victory won.”

We have here an encouragement to die to the flesh and live in the spirit, the way God does.

⁷The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

The time allotted by God for the present order of things is almost up. God has allowed the world to proceed as it has. God has permitted sinning to continue as it has. God has allowed our rulers, those to whom he has delegated a measure of his authority, to rule badly. Everything in this world is imperfect and not as it should be, but that time is coming to an end.

So what should we do? Jesus says this in Mark 13 about the end of this age, which will culminate in his return:

³² “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the

time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

³⁵ **Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—**

³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ **And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”**

Peter says to be self-controlled and sober-minded, and those are the keys to staying awake the way Jesus warns us to. Gluttony and drunkenness will put us to sleep, but we are to stay awake, so we must not indulge in those. The pursuit of sexual sin will blur our minds and blind our eyes to the coming judgment, but we are to stay awake, so we must be temperate and show restraint. We must be calm in our spirits as we wait, ruled by the word of God and not our ever-changing emotions and desires.

Self-control and sober-mindedness are the exact opposites of what Peter calls “human passions” in v3. Self-control - all of the sinning listed in v3 involves letting the self, the flesh, loose to do as it pleases. Sober-mindedness - notice in v3 that Peter mentions both drunkenness AND drinking parties. That’s a lot of intoxication, and intoxication is the opposite of sobriety.

So self-control and sober-mindedness are very important, but there is something even more important that we should apply our efforts to:

⁸ **Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.**

Love - agapé - affection, goodwill, benevolence... Above all, **most importantly**, we are to value one another highly as whole people, body and spirit. Love one another. What does this loving look like? We can see in the numerous other uses of this phrase, “love one another,” in the NT.

1. **Serving and self-sacrificial** - John 15:12 - “**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**”
2. **It has to do with showing honour** - Romans 12:10 - “**Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.**”
3. **It is something that God teaches us to do** - 1 Thessalonians 4:9 - “**Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.**”
4. **It is in the very foundation of Christian teaching** - 1 John 3:11 - “**For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.**”
5. **This love is from God, and loving this way proves that we have been born of God and know God** - 1 John 4:7 - “**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.**”
6. **Loving in this way is proof that God abides in us** - 1 John 4:12 - “**No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**”

This is a self-sacrificing, serving, honouring love. This is very different from the worldly, carnal so-called “love” we see in v3. We are not to just use each other’s bodies for pleasure, as those who do not follow God do. We are not to see each other as opportunities for personal pleasure, or personal enrichment, not as selfish sources of amusement, but as selfless opportunities for service. Rather, our love pushes in the opposite direction. It is self-sacrificing, it serves others, and honours them.

Covered Sins

And this kind of love, it says, covers a multitude of sins. “Cover” here means to overlook slights and offences against us in the interest of preserving peace. This is *not* to take sin lightly or to deny that sin has happened, but to forgive sin easily and, of course, be willing to forgive sin repeatedly, as many times as Jesus said we should.

Peter might also have in mind what Jesus says in Matt. 18 and the process of confronting sin in the life of a brother or sister in Christ. Jesus instructs us to confront privately and to hope for repentance early in the process. We hope that if someone has sinned, our efforts to encourage them to repent, to turn back, will succeed. And if repentance for personal sin is voluntary and sincere, there is no need for it to be made public. In that sense, it is hidden or concealed or kept secret.

We should be eager to overlook and forgive petty offences; we should decide in advance that this is what we are going to do. We should be intentionally hard to offend, not taking the bait that is so often dangled in front of us.

How else can we love one another earnestly? Peter gives us some practical examples:

⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

⁹ Be genuinely interested in being generous to frequent guests.

Have each other over frequently. Make time to accept invitations and make invitations yourselves.

What else? Here's an important one...

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

We see here three truths about every Christian:

1. Every Christian is gifted

Peter is making a definitive statement here; he's not asking a question. He's not asking if we have received a gift from God; he's stating that each of us has. This is taught consistently throughout the NT. For example, in 1 Cor. 7:7 - **"But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another."**

Every Christian is gifted...

2. Every Christian is a servant

We are to use these gifts to serve one another. The Greek word here is a close relative to the word from which we get the English word "deacon." In Greek, the word has the sense of people actively

serving, of “kicking up dust” because they are “on the move.” How busy are you with serving others? Are you kicking up any dust?

Every Christian is gifted...

Every Christian is a servant...

3. Every Christian is a steward

A steward is someone who manages or distributes what belongs to someone else. We have these gifts of grace from God, and they are not to be saved for later, not stuffed into a mattress - they are not for our personal gain or enrichment. They are to be distributed and invested in others so that they might multiply in their effect. Peter urges us to realize and act upon the fact that:

¹⁰ Each one of us has been divinely empowered to share God's work with others. And we are to use these gifts vigorously to serve one another as people who have been entrusted by God to dispense his grace to others.

And then two of what could have been many examples:

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies

If you're gifted to preach, faithfully preach the word. And when you serve, let the Holy Spirit empower your service. And then, lastly, here's the “why?”:

in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.

It's not for our own glory that we serve. If that's our motive, we might receive an earthly reward, but we will forfeit the heavenly one. We speak, we serve, so that God will be glorified.

CONCLUSION

In Galatians 2:20, Paul says these well-known words: **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**

Denying ourselves and putting our human passions to death is a lifelong battle, but it is a battle that will someday come to an end. The death of our human bodies will bring an end to our struggle with sin. But until then, we must live a Colossians 3 life: We put to death *and keep putting to death* what is earthly in us (Col. 3:5) And we put on *and keep putting on* the new self, **"which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."** (Col. 3:10)

We cannot live for human passions and the will of God at the same time. Many have tried, and all have failed. The battle between the spirit and the flesh goes on as long as we are in these bodies in this world. R.C. Sproul describes this well: "There is a sense in which we have died to sin, but there is another sense in which the old man is still very much alive, and we deceive ourselves if we think that we have moved completely beyond the pale of sinning. But something dramatic has taken place. If you are a Christian and the Holy Spirit has regenerated your soul, then in a very real sense, your old man has been put to death. A death sentence stands over your sinful nature, and you have been made alive in your soul by the Holy Spirit."¹

¹ — 1–2 Peter: An Expository Commentary by R.C. Sproul <https://a.co/bBuFrgA>

Peter, in this Scripture inspired by God, encourages us to make it our aim to be like Jesus in every way. He encourages us to live for eternal joys and not temporal pleasures. Just as it did in Noah's time, sinning has been going on long enough, and God will deal with this. This rampant sinning is so ingrained into our society that we are sometimes the oddballs for not joining in - and we are mocked for this! But you don't have to give an account to these people. Instead, they will need to give an account to God. This judgment is coming soon, so be ready. We are to show restraint and moderation as we prepare for the return of Jesus.

The most important part of this preparation is to make strenuous efforts to love other believers while easily overlooking and forgiving insignificant offences. This will deepen and sweeten the fellowship of faith and make the community of faith a shining light for those with eyes to see. So expend much effort to love one another. Go out of your way to show affection and goodwill, and bless one another. When you do this, petty offences will be easily forgiven.

How can we make opportunities for this? Host each other in your homes. Proclaim the gospel to one another. Serve Christ by serving one another. Use every other gift as God intended, to serve one another.

Why? Because the end of all things is at hand. And so, Peter says, follow these commands:

1. Be self-controlled and sober-minded: be temperate, sensible, and calm and collected in one's spirit.
2. Keep loving one another earnestly: love each other constantly, strenuously, and intensely.
3. Use your gifts to serve one another.

And the purpose of obeying these commands is that “in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen.

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, a pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit:
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