

Be self-controlled and sober-minded

1 Peter 4:1-11

Covenant Waterfall, 28 August 2022

Introduction

After Christmas last year, had the privilege to spend a week camping on the Wild Coast – untouched beauty. Group – brothers, cousins and brothers' friends. Mix of Christians and non-Christians. When we arrived, set up tents – one of the Christian couples – dating – set up a tent each – did not share one tent. Non-Christians in our group just couldn't understand this – thought it was really weird, strange! Why would you *not* share a tent?! Rather than compromise their Christian witness and fit in, they chose to honour God, and faced ridicule and scorn for their decision.

If you are a believe, you will be put in similar situations where you will either take a hard stand for the sake of your faith, and face rejection and mockery; or take the easy route of compromise and sin, and blend in with the crowd.

Similar position the Christians to whom Peter was writing were facing. Trying their best to live an honourable life of obedience before the Lord and they were paying a price – rejection, scorn and ridicule from those around them. In this text, Peter encourages them to persevere in living a self-controlled and sober-minded Christ-like life and endure the price of living this way – scorn from those around them. Why? Because Jesus also endured scorn on the cross. But just as he was victorious through the suffering he faced, so we can be encouraged that though we will endure suffering and ridicule from those around now because of our refusal to partake in sin, ultimately we will share in Christ's victory in all eternity.

- Dead to sin, obedient to God
- Sin's penalty, the gospel's gift
- Glorify God in everything

A. Dead to sin, obedient to God, vv.1-2

Verse 1 starts off... **“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh...”** This is reminding us of our text from last week, chapter 3, verse 18, where it tells us that Christ was put to death in the flesh – describing Jesus’ death on the cross. What we’ve seen in previous weeks is that Jesus endured this suffering and death on the cross that he didn’t deserve, as he was sinless. He chose to suffer and die on the cross instead of us – he paid the price for sin that we deserve. Yet it was precisely through his suffering, death and then his resurrection on the third day, that he conquered evil – destroying the power of sin and death – so that he now reigns in victory over the powers of darkness, as we saw last week. Through the unspeakable horror and evil of the cross, God used it to bring the ultimate good – victory over darkness and the salvation of his people.

Verse 1 continues to say, **“arm yourselves with the same way of thinking”** What way of thinking? Christ’s attitude that he had as he faced suffering and death on the cross – though he didn’t deserve it, he persevered through it, endured it and was ultimately victorious as a result of it. This is to be our attitude in the midst of suffering for our faith – endure it, take it on the chin, and know that we are called to suffer only for a “little while” in this age, as God promises that he will in some way will work in it for good. In Christ, we are able to endure through suffering because he is victorious over evil and we have the hope that we will reign with him in glory for all eternity.

What is the reason we are to think like this, in the same way as Christ? Rest of verse 1:

“for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” Greek = “the one who suffers.” Is this saying that if we suffer in our flesh, this will result in us being completely sinless? Is sinless perfection possible through suffering? No! Sinless perfection is not possible this side of eternity! 1 John 1:8 is abundantly clear – **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”**

So what is this text saying? If we are in Christ, which means that we will suffer in the flesh – in this life, then we are no longer under the dominion, under the power of sin. Though sin’s power is broken over us – not mean that we are sinless – still struggle with sin on a daily basis. The difference now in Christ is that we are longer slaves to sin, dominated by its power as we once were, where before we could not help but sin. Now in Christ, we’ve been

set free from sin's power and so empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are able to live lives in wilful obedience to God.

But the reality of the Christian life is that it is not easy. It's simply not true that the moment we receive Christ, our lives become amazing, healthy and wealthy. Certainly many blessings – peace with God, assurance of our salvation, hope, blessing of knowing the Lord. But often our lives actually get harder, end up suffering. This was certainly the case with the Christians to whom Peter was writing – they were facing persecution. So there is a great cost to following Jesus.

What this text is telling us is that it is far superior to suffer in this life (in the flesh) for Christ's sake, than to take the easy route, which is to continue in sin, blend in with the unbelievers around us in their sinful lifestyles, just so that we avoid rejection. This can't be! If we are truly in Christ, we are the one who suffer in this life, and deliberately turn away from practicing sin (cease from sin).

To what end? Verse 2 continues – **“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 to live the rest of our lives on earth, no longer following our human passions (lusts, pursuing our sinful ways), but we are to live submitted to the will of God. What is God's will? Discover it through mystical experiences? No, God's will has been clearly revealed to us in his Word, and we follow it by submitting our lives to its authority – live lives in obedience to him.

B. Sin's penalty, the gospel's gift, vv.3-6

What then is the reason that we are not to follow our human lusts and instead be obedient to God's will? Verse 3 continues: **“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.”**

The time for living as an unbeliever (Gentile) is past. What marks the life of an unbeliever? Live in “sensuality and passions” – particular reference to sexual desires - you follow your base instincts, act out your unrestrained lustful desires – if it feels good, do it! Not much has

changed in 2000 years. The culture of Peter's day, the Greco-Roman world, was very much like ours in terms of sexual ethic – moral relativism. Sex not seen as exclusive to marriage – could express yourself through all sorts of sexual immorality, not a problem.

“drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties” – describing excessive indulgence in food and drink, resulting in debauchery and gluttony – complete lack of self-control and sobriety. Greco-Roman world renowned for lavish feasts and drinking parties where people would engage in many excesses. Not much has changed today.

“lawless idolatry” – describing pagan worship practices which typically involved sexual immorality and drunkenness.

Peter is saying is that we may have lived like this before we were in Christ, but now time for living a sinful lifestyle is up. Verse 4 continues: **“With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you...”**

Unbelieving friends and neighbours are surprised when you don't join in with them in their debauchery. In Roman society, if you did not engage in the pagan worship practices, partake of the communal feasts and enjoy the sexual norms of the day – seen as anti-social. That's precisely why the Christians were called by the Romans, haters of humanity. They faced ridicule and derision for not joining in the “fun” – they were heavily maligned.

Same with us today – people think that we are strange if we hold to a biblical morality. Don't join in getting drunk with them, don't sleep together before we're married, don't go along with the in vogue ideologies of the day – spirit of this age. They think we're weird, strange, cannot understand why we act like we do. Object of scorn and ridicule, face rejection.

Verse 5 continues – **“but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”**

Here we see a promise from God – judgement is coming. Everyone (the living and the dead) will one day have to give an account of their lives before God who will judge. 2 Corinthians 5:10 – **“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”**

The image of God that many of us have is that he is a friendly old grandpa who will just accept you as you are and wink away your sins. That is an idolatrous image of God. God is holy. Outside of Christ, everyone will have to account for every sinful, immoral action, every careless word, every lustful thought. And sin cannot just be winked away, it must be punished, according to God's justice. And the punishment for sins is death, an eternity facing God's wrath.

Verse 6 carries on: **"For 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."**

It's precisely for this reason why the gospel must be preached to all – so that instead of getting what we all deserve – death, those who trust in Christ instead receive what we don't deserve – grace. Because he took on himself the penalty for sins, faced God's wrath, we receive the forgiveness of our sins, peace with God, filled with his Spirit, to be raised with him from death to eternal life – **"to live in the spirit the way God does"**.

Gospel preached to the dead? Does this mean that those who have died as unbelievers will receive a chance to hear the gospel and then repent? No – no second chance in the after life. Need to respond to the gospel in this life! Referring to those in Christ, who heard the gospel preached, who responded to him in faith, and who have since died. Point? Preach the gospel to all, that all may have the opportunity to receive by faith the free gift of the gospel, which is eternal life in Christ, instead of sin's penalty which is death.

C. Glorify God in everything, vv.7-11

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

Last section brings everything together. Reality check – the end of this age is at hand. This life is not all there is – must live with eternity in mind. One day, all this will end – this sin cursed world judged by God, purged through fire, in order for God to usher in the new creation. Because this is the destination of history, it's imperative that we don't carry on

lethargically in pursuing a sinful lifestyle, engaging in the pleasures, lusts and excesses of the world.

Instead, we are to be **“self-controlled and sober-minded”**. Resist the lure of sin, put to death its desires, exercise self-control and restraint instead of following every passion of your heart, living how you see fit. Conduct your life with eternity in mind – not in drunken indulgence, but in soberness, careful to fear God and live in obedience to his Word.

Verses 8-11:

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.”

What should a self-controlled and sober-minded life look like? Verse 8 – above all, love one another, as this covers a multitude of sin. Jesus commanded us to do this, calling it the greatest command (together with loving God), and that through this the entire law is fulfilled. Much harder to pursue sin, when you love another and love God.

Rest of the passage show us some examples of this in action. Verse 9 – an example of loving one another is showing hospitality to each other without grumbling (particularly in the context of the church). Fellowship, spending time with each other, having people over for dinner, opening up your home – is a wonderful thing in God's sight and evidence of our love for one another.

Verses 10-11 show that serving one another with the gifts of the Spirit that God has distributed among the church is another way this happens. Whether its preaching and teaching (speaking God's Word), or serving one other's needs, encouraging each other, giving, acts of mercy – all these gifts build up the church through showing our love for each other and leading us to live lives that are self-controlled and sober-minded.

Our refusal to partake in the pleasures of sin, our enduring ridicule and suffering from the world who mocks us when we don't join in with them in their sin, our striving to live instead according God's will and be obedient to him in living self-controlled and sober-minded lives

– not in order that we feel morally superior, or obedience for obedience sake. All worthless if it's just so that we end up self-righteous. Missed the point. The point off all this is that (v.11) **“in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”**

Point of our lives, our motivation for everything, driving purpose – God glorified through Jesus Christ in everything that we do. Live not for our own glory – but for his alone.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 1 - Q. 1. *What is the chief end of man?*

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Hearts that are fixed upon God, for his fame and renown, affections set upon him – one true King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the beginning and the end, eternal one, Alpha Omega, the one who is faithful and true, who is good, full of grace and truth, steadfast love and mercy – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – he alone is worthy of all of our lives.

Conclusion

Think we're right with God through our moral lives, or think God doesn't really care how we live – both leave us in trouble. Reality – all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, all deserve sin's penalty – death, facing wrath of God for eternity.

Can't save ourselves – self-righteous, striving, no peace. Need Someone to save us. Only Jesus Christ – only he has lived a perfectly righteous life, completely obedient to God's will, only he paid the penalty for sins that we deserved by taking our place on the cross, facing God's wrath, and dying.

Yet he rose again on the third day – forgiving us our sins, peace with God, empowers us to live obedient lives – self-controlled and sober-minded, gives us the promise of eternal life with him. Trust in Christ and his promise to give you life, rest from striving and sin, and peace in him: Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Amen