

14. Living For God

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American soldiers participated many wars throughout the world history: from World War 1, World War 2, Viet Nam War, Korean War, and Desert Storm in Iraq, Afghanistan and back to Iraq now.

Those soldiers were uprooted from their homeland and transplanted onto foreign soils. Even though the people in the lands of war appreciated the American soldiers efforts to free them, they couldn't help but to notice some of ugly behaviors of American soldiers with their weekend pass as a license to let go of their fleshly desires to party and cause troubles in foreign lands. The Iraqi prison inmate abuse situation doesn't make it any better. It's no wonder the term "Ugly American" emerged as a label for such men.

As Christians, we face a similar situation. Since our citizenship is in heaven, the earth is not our home. For us, it is foreign soil. Consequently, we need to be on our best behavior, otherwise people will get a distorted perception of what our homeland is like and call us "Ugly Christian."

Our attitudes are weapons, and weak or wrong attitudes will lead us to defeat. Outlook determines outcome, and a believer must have the right attitudes if he is to live a right life.

Having told us how to have a clear conscience in chapter 3, here in chapter 4, Peter tells us how to think clearly in days of difficulty.

A. PROVISION BY GOD

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

1) What is there for "Therefore?"

The word "therefore" is a word of summary that connects what apostle Peter is about to say with what he has just said. And what has he just said? We need to back to 3:18-22. He has said that Christ has suffered and died on our behalf, the Just for the unjust.

2) It is no vacation, but war

The word "arm yourselves" was used of a Greek soldier putting on his armor and taking his weapons. In other words, we, as Christians, are not here on our vacation, but we are in war against the enemies which are the principalities, the powers, the rulers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Our goal in life is to cease from sin. We will not reach this goal until we die, or are raptured to heaven. But this should not keep us from striving.

As I said this before, we cannot be sinless like Jesus, but we can sin less by following the Word of God.

3) The will of God for us

1 Peter 4:2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Jesus said that anyone who would follow Him must take up His cross and follow according to Matthew 16:24. Taking up the cross meant that we are committed and not looking back what we had before! We should burn the bridge completely that there wouldn't be any turning back.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Not everyone of us is required to die as martyrs, we certainly need to live as martyrs.

Many of us are defeated in our battle against sin, because we refuse to sacrifice everything in the battle. We only want victory if it comes easily to us. Jesus called us to have the kind of attitude that would sacrifice our fleshly desires in the battle against sin in Matthew 5:29-30.

Matt. 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

If we do the will of God, then we will invest "the rest of our time" in that which is lasting and satisfying. But if we give in to the world around us, we will waste "the rest of our time" and regret it when we stand before Jesus. The will of God comes from the heart of God and it is an expression of the love of God. We may not always understand what He is doing, but we know that He is doing what is best for us. We do not live on explanations, but we live on His promises.

B. TRANSFORMATION BY GOD

1 Peter 4:3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

Once we were the heathens in this world, but now we are Christians, born-again in Christ, receiving eternal life through the blood of Jesus Christ, having our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We no longer can associate ourselves with the crowd once we hung around.

The things used to entice our fleshly desire, the things we thought they were fun, are completely against the Word of God. As we made a choice to come to Christ, we continuously have to make choices to stay in the course.

"Lewdness" and "lusts" describe all kinds of evil appetites and not just sexual sins. "Revellings and drinking parties" refer to pagan orgies where the wine flowed freely. Of course, all of this could be a part of pagan worship, since "religious prostitution" was an accepted thing.

I am sure you have noticed all of beer commercials on TV show people who are young and good looking, fun loving party animals. They absolutely do not show the big fat couch potatoes, or drunk driver who just killed a bunch of people, or broken family of an alcoholic. That is exactly what sin does. It gives us temptation and pleasure for a season, but the results of our sins are devastating.

C. REACTION BY UNSAVED FRIENDS

1 Peter 4:4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

They couldn't imagine why we would want to be boring, no-party-Christians. They even think that we lost our minds and went to deep ends, even though they are the ones in real deep ends.

Our old friends will not only be shocked at our new lifestyle, but also they might actively ridicule and unjustly judge us for it as well.

Not only do we look at life more soberly, but, secondly, suffering causes others to see us differently. Tragedy, persecution, and difficulty make us a marked man.

D. FACING THE ULTIMATE JUDGEMENT

1 Peter 4:5 They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

1) Grave danger to face the Ultimate Judgement

Peter is not saying this out of condemnation, but rather out of compassion, for he realizes they're in grave danger.

The terrible irony of our unsaved friends' judgement against us is that they themselves will face the ultimate judgement.

Rev. 20:11-13 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

It has been said, "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of angry God."

1 Peter 4:6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

2) The Gospel to everyone

Peter also says that it was because of this eternal judgment that the Gospel was preached to the dead - they know, and live in constant awareness of, the reality of eternity.

Peter has already told us that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison, proclaiming a message of judgment. Apparently, during this same time, He also preached a message of salvation to the faithful dead in Abraham's Bosom (Luke 16:22) who were anticipating the work of the Messiah on their behalf.

This was not the granting of a second chance, but the completion of the salvation of those who had been faithful to God under their first chance.

Some cults use this verse to say, "When a person dies, they'll have a second opportunity to accept the gospel." However, taken in context, it's clear Peter is talking about those who suffered to the point of death and are now living in heaven.

Jesus fulfilled the passage from Isaiah where it promised that He would lead captivity captive and to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Eph 4:8-10 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Show and tell about Jesus

Whom are you living for? Are you living for yourself? Or are you living for your Jesus the Lord? If you say that you are living for God, then your life should reflect what you say, in conversations, thoughts, action, and the relationship with other people.

Let's say I have a peach tree in my backyard. For last three years, it never gave me a single peach. So I say, "It just takes a place and gives me no fruit. I am going to cut it and replace with some other fruit tree that gives fruits." I grab an ax, and go outside. The peach tree sees me coming with an ax and starts to wave its branches and yell at me, "Hey, don't cut me down. I may not have fruit, but I am a peach tree inside." Then, I'd say, "Show me fruit."

2) None of us are immune to sin.

If we think that we are spiritual enough to handle whatever the sins we used to have difficulties, we will go down fast. Before we know it, we will be right back where we were, if we don't guard our hearts.

Let's experiment something. Let's turn off the light. It doesn't take long for our eyes to get accustomed to the darkness. Just like that we can go back to our sinful past very easily.