

## Week 19 - Maintaining Holiness in Spite of Hurt - 1Peter 4:1-6

### Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:12-21

#### Introduction

Imagine if we lived in a society where celebrating Independence Day was seen as a proof of loyalty to the nation and one's fellow citizens

And, furthermore, imagine that it was believed that the future prosperity of the nation was contingent on 100% participation in the celebration

That was sort of what life was like in the days of Peter's original audience

The popular, pagan religions practiced by the people emphasized public celebrations and everyone was expected to come together to honor the emperor and swear by his genius, or to pay homage to the city's patron gods

In this way, social unity was promoted and, it was believed, the favor of the gods was maintained

Of course, these celebrations were rife with feasting, drinking, and all manner of carnal indulgences

It's not hard to imagine the problems that were created with friends and neighbors when a person became a follower of Jesus Christ and no longer felt they could participate in such goings on

While we don't face the precise set of circumstances that Peter's original audience faced, there are parallels to it today

And when people become Christ-followers and begin to follow a different code of ethics that no longer permits them to engage in past behaviors, it often displeases old friends and causes problems that are very real and often painful

Some of you might identify with this as your faith in Christ led to problems in your family or circle of friends

Maybe your faith has led to problems in the workplace as your code of ethics and commitments changed

Even if you haven't experienced problems that close to home we see more and more frequently how our wider society and even our government seems to be antagonistic to someone actually living as a Christ-follower

So as we open our Bibles and consider 1Peter 4:1-6 we will be looking to see how we can maintain our holiness in spite of the hurt that it brings

Let me encourage you to open your Bible to 1Peter 4 so you can follow along as I read verses 1-6 [**1Peter 4:1-6**]

*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, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 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. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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.*

The "since therefore" in verse 1 points back to **1Peter 3:18** and resumes the theme Peter began there, the value of imitating Christ's example of willingness to suffer, if necessary, in order to do God's will

Only now he shifts his emphasis from suffering to provide a good witness to being willing to suffer for avoiding engaging in sin

Let's begin by looking at the three elements of holiness that Peter mentions in our passage

## **I. Elements of Holy Living**

First, holiness, by definition, requires **separation** from the unrighteous activities of the world

We see this in verses 2-3 where Peter writes that Christ-followers are to *“live for the rest of the time in the flesh”* which obviously means for the rest of their earthly lives *“no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do...”*

Basically, and you can hear a bit of irony in Peter’s words here, he says that his original audience had spent enough time in the past sinning

That is, in doing what unbelievers like to do - that’s his meaning behind the word “Gentiles” as he uses it here not to designate those who are not Jews but those who are not Christ-followers

Actually, any time spent indulging in debauchery and idolatry is more than enough

Then Peter goes on to list six specific sins with the first five being sins of sensuality that many pagans gave themselves over to

And idolatry which was the norm but Peter says there was idolatry that incited levels of immorality that were even forbidden by the laws of human government

But here’s the thing, these are sins that people want to commit they are, as Peter put it, “human passions”

The Greek word used here denotes having strong desires or impulses or longings for something

So we come to understand that the second element of holy living is **struggle** both against our own internal appetites and the example and expectation of the world around us

In verse 4 Peter points out a truth that still applies today: that a change in behavior leads to confusion in those we used to engage in sin with

Peter says they are “surprised” or taken aback when someone who has decided to follow Christ no longer runs with the fast and loose crowd and they begin to speak evil of those who abstain from their debauchery

And it’s a struggle to not go along with the old crowd doing what you used to do because that would be easier

Peer pressure is very powerful

Then, we don’t talk about it enough but one of the biggest problems we face when trying to live as God would have us live is the fact that sin is fun, it feels good, it satisfies something deep within us and we like it

If that wasn’t true, we would have a far easier time rebuffing sin

As long as we remain in these “earth suits” of flesh we will be under the influence of “human passions” and battle with our innate appetites and living a holy life will be a struggle

And the struggle will result in **suffering**

Look with me again at verse 4 [**1Peter 4:4**] and the fact that refusing to do what one used to do before being saved will result in being maligned by ones former associates

It’s amazing to realize how little mankind has changed through the centuries

Some 2,700 years ago the prophet Isaiah pronounced woe upon *“those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness”* [**Isaiah 5:20**]

Then in the first century A.D. we see Peter write that unbelievers will blaspheme against those who cease from doing wrong

And today there is a saying that goes: “First we overlook evil. Then we permit evil. Then we legalize evil. Then we promote evil. Then we celebrate evil. Then we persecute those who still call it evil.”

It hasn't always been this way, but our culture today has largely abandoned biblical standards of morality

Things that were almost universally viewed as wrong are now widely accepted as normative and those who are diligently trying to follow Christ are attacked for being judgmental and engaging in moral snobbery

We might well deserve such criticism if we constantly scold those around us but we will often be maligned simply because we don't join in with the debauchery of the day while remaining quiet

At the very least, Peter's original audience were being slandered by their pagan friends and neighbors who they used to run with and their suffering may have gone further than that

Non-participation in sin often implies condemnation of that sin without the abstainer even having to say a word or expressing disapproval in any overt way

And when their consciences are pricked, those who are engaging in wrongdoing will often speak out or act out against those whose abstention has shined a light on their evil so as to justify their own immorality

Living a holy lifestyle of separation - going against the flow - will be a struggle and it will typically result in suffering

For those Christ-followers who live under hostile governments, the suffering they have to endure may be intense

For those, like us today, living elsewhere it may be simply result in the physical and emotional weariness or other relatively minor discomfort one must endure in going against the crowd order to be obedient to God's will

So, as we will see next, holy living requires intention

## **II. Holy Living Requires Intention**

The time to think about how to resist temptation and how to handle being maligned isn't while in the midst of the battle

A Christ-follower must be prepared in advance for the trouble God's Word says is coming

Look with me at verse 1 again [**1Peter 4:1a**] where Peter begins this section with a command:

*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves...*

Peter's command here carries the connotation of a thing to be done without delay

It's a call for decisive action

And it is a military term that means to take up arms or prepare for battle and it was used to describe a heavily armed foot soldier outfitted with armor, lance, and shield

The life of a Christ-follower is not a vacation or a playground - Jesus himself said that his followers were like "*sheep in the midst of wolves*" in Matthew 10

For us, this world is a battlefield on foreign soil, and we will face conflict, so we need to be fully and properly armed

Clearly, Peter is speaking metaphorically and not suggesting taking up literal arms as he specifies the nature of the arms he is talking about as the verse continues [**1Peter 4:1b**]:

*...arm yourselves with the same way of thinking...*

And the "way of thinking" that he has in mind is that a Christ-follower should think as Christ did about obedience and suffering

As Christ-followers, we must have the mind of Christ and accept that it is better to do right and suffer for it than to do wrong

We must endure suffering for righteousness submissively and patiently recognizing God's sovereignty in it, fully confident that God is working out his purposes through it

And to do that, we must prepare ourselves in advance by knowing God's Word, understanding its principles, and seeking how to apply it to our circumstances

So often in this life, our outlook determines our outcome and, as Paul writes in **1Corinthians 2:16**, “*we have the mind of Christ,*” and we are being “*transformed by the renewal of our minds*” as we read in **Romans 12:1-2**

We find the plan, purpose, and perspective of Christ in the pages of God’s Word and, as believers who the Holy Spirit indwells, we can share in those things and be armed against the slings and arrows of this world

We need not live in fear but we need to be prepared and that requires intention

Holy living begins in our minds - in how we think and what we determine to do

And Peter says those who follow Christ are to think like Christ “*so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God*” [**1Peter 4:2**]

However, even with prior preparation, this requires a constant struggle and will involve suffering so we need some motivation to spur us to holy living

And, in our text, Peter gives us three motivations for holy living

### **III. Our Motivation for Holy Living**

We find the first motivation in verse 1 - **the example of Christ’s sufferings**

The goal of a follower of Christ is to be like Christ so we should look to his example wherever we find it

And the example of Christ’s suffering is a thread that runs through the letter of 1Peter

Let’s look first at **1Peter 2:21-23** –

*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.** He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

Jesus’ submission to dangerous obedience is to be the model for his followers

And his victory over death motivates Christ-followers to forfeit our comfort and physical safety, entrusting themselves to “*him who judges justly*”

Then, in **1Peter 3:18**, Peter stresses the conquering power of Jesus’ suffering and in verses 21-22 he reminds his readers how God raised Christ from the dead and vindicated him by glorifying him and subjecting everything to him

We see this same thought paralleled in Hebrews 12 - let’s look at verses 2-3 of Hebrews 12 to get the idea [**Hebrews 12:2-3**]

*...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

Following the example of Christ will cause one to live a holy life and, while martyrdom isn’t mandatory for all believers, when suffering does come because of righteous living, enduring it as Christ did will assure victory over it

That brings us to our second motivation for holy living: **successful suffering leads to victory over sin**

The last part of verse 1 presents us with another difficult problem of interpretation

*For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*

As a general statement, taken plainly and without qualification, we know that this cannot possibly be true

There are far too many people who have suffered in this life and who still sin very much

And Peter cannot be saying that suffering somehow purifies and strengthens people spiritually because, while suffering does strengthen some, it hardens others and causes them to become resentful and rebellious toward God

So what is Peter saying?

When we decide to follow Christ we exercise our first decision of the will to turn from sin and to live by the will of God  
 But, any Christ-follower will tell you that the matter doesn't end there and we are also faced with the decision to continue in moral commitment repeatedly

That's the situation Peter's original audience found themselves in

The believer's former pagan friends were initially surprised by the believer's refusal to continue in the sinful practices that had been a part of their lives prior to their conversion

But then the surprise turned to anger and hostility that revealed itself primarily as verbal abuse and slander but could have gotten physical and it would have been very easy for the Christ-follower to cave under such pressure

So what Peter is saying, I believe, is that anyone who has suffered for doing what is right, and has continued to obey God in spite of the suffering involved, that person has made a clean break with that particular sin

And while Peter doesn't mean that the one who continues in obedience never sins at all, what is true is that the person who resists in spite of the suffering it causes reveals that their motivation is obeying God, not avoiding hardships

A commitment to ease and pleasure is the source of so much sin but the faith that endures is done with that

Following through with a decision to obey God even when it will mean suffering has a morally strengthening effect on our lives

And they are committed more firmly to a pattern of action where obedience is even more important than their desire to avoid pain leading to more and more victories over sin

We find the third motivating factor for holy living in verse 5 - **the reality of Christ's return to judge**

Look with me again at **1Peter 4:5**

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

No one can escape responsibility for their actions and God will one day hold everyone, both past and present, accountable for what they have done on this earth

The phrase Peter uses is also used in **Luke 16:2** of an employee's accountability to their employer

And in **Acts 19:40** with respect to accountability to governmental authorities

And also to mankind's accountability to God at the final judgment in Matthew 12:36 and of leader's accountability to God in **Hebrews 13:17**

People today like to proclaim that no one has the right to judge them and the modern concept of God is that God is love and would never actually punish anyone

But people are overlooking the fact that God is also the God of justice and he will make everyone give an account for what they have done in their lives

Even Christ-followers whose sins are covered and for whom punishment is not an issue will give an account for what they have done since their salvation

The apostle Paul makes that point crystal clear in **Romans 14:10-12** where he writes:

*"For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God "and "so then each of us will give an account of himself to God."*

And the fact that God is ready to judge means that the Day of Judgment could come at any time

Jesus taught during his earthly ministry that he would come suddenly, without warning, like a thief in the night

Each day could be the day that we stand before the judgment seat of Christ so we should always be ready to give an account of our life as we read in **2Corinthians 5:10** and no one will be rewarded unless they have competed according to the rules as we see in **2Timothy 2:5**

Within this context verse 6 [1Peter 4:6] is easily understood to mean that the gospel was preached to people who are now dead while they were alive - not that it was preached to them after they had died

The gospel was preached widely and the people who malign Christ-followers will have to give an account to God because judgment is coming to all - death doesn't spare anyone

And Peter points out that the purpose of evangelism is to prepare people for the day when they will stand before God so that, even though they have died physically, they might still live in the spirit the way God does

## Conclusion

You have probably never heard the name Mike Delcavo but back in 1993, Mike Delcavo ran cross-country for Western State College of Colorado

Mr. Delcavo was one of 128 runners competing in the NCAA Division cross-country championship on a 10,000 meter course in Riverside, California

About halfway through the race Delcavo was somewhere in the middle of the pack when he realized that the runners ahead of him had missed a turn and were going the wrong way

He began to yell out to his fellow competitors that they were going the wrong way as he took the correct path but only four other runners followed him

As it turned out, the course taken by the majority shaved about 1,000 meters of the steepest terrain off of the course and when the group of five reunited with the pack later in the race, they were way behind and wound up taking five of the last six places

Technically, the runners who had gone the wrong way should have been disqualified for leaving the course but because there were so many of them, the race officials decided to change the course to accommodate them

And to the relief of the officials, neither Mr. Delcavo nor the other four runners who took the right path with him challenged the decision out of respect for the other runners so the results stood

Then, to add insult to injury, some of his fellow runners actually laughed at Delcavo for having made the turn and staying on course

Sometimes it hurts to take the right path

We live in the world Isaiah warned about when good is called evil and evil is called good and striving to live a holy life can cause one to be laughed at, slandered, and, sometimes, even physically harmed

There are times when we can honestly say that it would be easier to follow the crowd and just let our human passions be satisfied

It takes real courage and commitment to stay the course in following God's will and it can get awfully lonely when running alone

Not only does the world not reward staying on course but those who do so are often penalized for it

But we know that there is a Judge who judges rightly and a reward for those who stay the course

Let's pray

**Philippians 3:12-21 (Page 981)**

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, 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, **1** press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.