

Living for God

1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. **2** As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. **4** They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. **5** But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. **6** For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. **8** Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[**9** Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10** Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. **11** If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.]

Sermon starts here: When Peter begins chapter 4 by saying: 'Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body,' he is referring to what he earlier said in 3:18: 'Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'

Christ *died*. That suffering to the point of death was done in our name. In a sense, it was our death, and when we accept Christ as Saviour and Lord, we realise his death applies to us. It was as if we were the ones that died.

Peter is confirming what Paul said in Romans 6: 'All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.' (Rom 6:3,4)

Paul went on in v11: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

That is what Peter means by the opening of chapter 4:

... arm yourselves with the same attitude, because he who has suffered (i.e. died) in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

It is amazing how important little things can be, when everything in the garden is rosy. You must get home in time to see Eastenders, or the Lottery result, you must get your washing done on Monday, you can't possibly do without a smart car or a kenwood chef or SatNav or membership of the golf club or a seat at the top table.

And then something happens that reminds you of your mortality (in my case, surviving a heart attack, but it could a road accident, a serious assault or burglary, a medical or surgical emergency, even a financial crash; or the loss of someone close and dear to you); suddenly, your attitude as to what is important changes. For one person, the fictional drama of a TV soap becomes unbelievable and irrelevant; for another, the urge for more money, always more, evaporates, replaced by gratitude at what they actually have, for it is enough.

IN the same way, a new Christian realizes that when Christ died on the cross for their sins, a sentence of death that they deserved was carried out.

The heart attack survivor says, 'I could have died;'

The sinner saved by grace says, 'In Christ, I did die; my old sinful self that deserved to die is dead

and gone. Life can never be the same again.’ He or she is ‘done with sin’, as Peter puts it

‘As a result (v2) the new Christian does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.’ The sentence of death that we deserved was for *resisting* the will of God; how can we possibly want to disobey God consciously hereafter?

The Greek has a vivid contrast between two singular nouns and two plural ones: not the lusts of men (lit) but the Will of God. Before coming to Christ, our lives are a mish-mash of conflicting passions and goals. Humans indulge in whatever we imagine will give us pleasure, satisfaction; but of course, satisfaction is the one thing such a life cannot give. Pulled every way by our own desires and by those of our friends, we suffer from aimlessness, shown in a constant desire for new experiences. Post Modernism says, nothing fits together; Peter says, ‘Oh yes it does!’

Contrast the singularity of the Will of God. God is One. Jesus said, I and the Father are one. In the garden he prayed, Not my will but yours be done. One God, one will. If Christians appropriate fully what Peter and Paul are teaching, their lives enjoy a unity and integration which is unavailable to sinners.

We bring every decision back to the overarching principle: is this within the will of God? What job shall I work at? Where shall I live? Shall I marry, and if so, whom? In big things and small, what would Jesus do?

V3 shows the dramatic dichotomy between a Christian’s present life and his or her past, with their conversion as the turning point. Peter’s message is we ought not to use any of our time in the present or the future to do things typical of our past.

IN contrast to the will of God, pagans have a will; they exercise it by choosing to do things like ‘living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.’

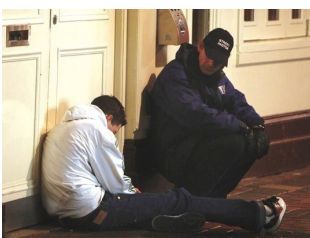
Peter was speaking to first generation Christians, for whom some or all of these words had been true. For our society, after centuries of Christian influence, we would not expect every non-Christian to evidence such depravity.

But we have to concede some people do live like this, even today. The results of over-indulgence in alcohol can be seen late night at weekends in our city streets. Programmes about young people in Mediterranean resorts show men determined to get drunk and find a ‘bird’. Stag nights and hen nights are often organized around getting the groom or bride drunk.

I know little of this by experience, but I am aware that some Christians in Stirling go out as ‘Street Pastors’ late on certain nights to help people who have got into difficulties. They provide free flip-flops for young women who can no longer walk in their high heels, insulating material for those that come out of hot night-clubs into freezing temperatures and suffer from hypothermia; they arrange for friends who are separated to find each other, and make sure lone females get home safely.



The Police are delighted with the work of Street pastors, in Stirling as in other cities, and wish they could be there on Saturday nights as well as the Fridays at present. As Christians we are not being judgmental, but caring. Yet the drunkenness is undeniable. And there is drug-taking too, as young people look for a high.



What about the other strands of wrongdoing in v3?

- ‘Debauchery and lust’ are allowed free rein by our culture. For years, the promiscuity was heterosexual. Now homosexual orientation gets promoted as ‘normal’, and homosexual practices are treated as if they equated to marriage.

The Presbytery of Lochcarron-Skye has had to bring an Overture to this year’s General Assembly to ask them to make clear what should have been obvious all along, that standards of Christian marriage apply to all ministers of the Church of Scotland. It did not need to be

spelt out before; it does now.

“That this Church shall not accept for training, ordain, admit, re-admit, induct or introduce to any ministry of the Church anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful marriage between a man and a woman”.

There are ministers of homosexual orientation in the C of S who choose to adopt a celibate lifestyle. The practice of sexual acts is one of the elements of the past life they have ‘died to’. That is the only route consistent with the Bible which is the foundation of the ministry.

- Peter deplores ‘idolatry’; we may not use the term much today, but it is there all the same: in the worship of football teams, especially sectarian, of money and the things money buys. In Peter’s day, idolatry involved sexual promiscuity as a means of honouring the idol; if we include ‘pleasure’ as an idol, that still goes on in some circles. If you ever hear a ‘swinger’ describing their events, you will recognize orgies.

V4 Non-Christians think it strange that we do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on us. Here’s a recent prayer letter from Roger Carsewell:

‘You know something is amiss when Janet Daley, respected Jewish columnist, wrote in the Daily Telegraph, 16/02/09, ‘Evangelical Christians are now treated like pariahs in a society which is still officially Christian. What is being lost in all this cowardice and turmoil is the sense of common humanity that might have seen us through.’

A few days earlier the same newspaper reported a fashion model who said that if she told her crowd she was a Christian, she’d be treated as if she had said she was a paedophile.

This has come on the back of a Christian foster mother being struck off the list after a foster child was converted from Islam to Christianity.

Caroline Petrie was suspended from nursing without pay because she offered to pray with an elderly patient.

Pilgrim Homes, who care for elderly Christians, had to battle legally to qualify for a grant because it would not allow its residents to be questioned about their sexual orientation.

A primary school receptionist faces suspension because her five year old daughter talked to a classmate about the gospel.

This is the world that has made celebrities out of people who are known for their godlessness, their immorality, their self-indulgence and pride, their hedonism and capitalism, their scorn, rudeness, and blasphemy. We should not expect them to cosy up to people who proclaim the righteous God who is the judge of all.

Peter shows we are not their judge: he goes on: v5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

‘Ready to judge’ because God is utterly fair; he knows all the facts; and he had made a way for all to be forgiven if they’d listen. Christians face death with confidence, in Christ....

[explain v6 as referring to people who are now dead who heard the gospel while they were alive. They had the chance to repent and believe and those who did believe now live according to God in regard to the spirit. i.e. in resurrection life]

7 ‘The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled **so that you can pray.**’ Let’s come back to that. Meanwhile:

8 ‘Above all, love each other deeply, for love covers over a multitude of sins.’

The usual misinterpretation of this verse comes from those who heap abuse on us (v4). They see the meaning as, ‘If you love someone, then any sexual acts with them are OK. Love cancels any sinfulness in the act. I have heard a Professor of Practical Theology assert this point at the Assembly.

In their support they may quote Proverbs 10:12, which Peter may be quoting; the New English Bible translates as, ‘Hate is always picking a quarrel, but love turns a blind eye to every fault.’

That may be a pre-Christian advice of popular culture, a saying collected by Solomon, but it does not describe God, who finds sin so awful, so deserving of judgment, that it took the death of his own son to pay for it.

The real meaning is perfectly plain: If you love someone, then a huge range of wrong behaviour is excluded. If you love someone, it is not an option to hate, despise, assault or kill them. If you love them, you will not steal their property, or reputation. If a man genuinely loves a woman, he will delay giving sexual expression to that until he has committed himself to her in the publicly witnessed ceremony of faithful marriage.

Real love, godly love, seeks the good of the other; that rules out a vast number of sinful thoughts and actions.

Why else did Jesus quote the OT when asked which was the greatest commandment? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength - that covers the first four of the Ten; you shall love your neighbour as yourself - covers the other six. Deut 6:5, Lev 19:18, Mark 12:30,31

To imagine that an act forbidden in Scripture as contrary to the will of God ceases to be sinful because the actor claims it is done in love is *ludicrous/ illogical!* But we will hear that argument again at the General Assembly, mark my words.

The world has no answer for guilt, except to pretend that sin is not sinful. The effect of that view is to deny themselves the mercy and forgiveness of God; if you think there is nothing in you to forgive, you conclude you have no need of a Saviour.

To sum up: as Christians we need to act on v 1,2

Arm ourselves with the attitude, I have in Christ died to sin. This is entirely consistent with the rest of the NT, with Paul as we saw in Romans 6, and with Jesus 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

I repent of my once sinful life; I want to find the will of God in the Bible, and obey it.

Take to heart v7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled **so that you can pray**

That conversation with God is why Christ died - to bring us to God. It's why we were saved.