
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.1-2. We learned last week that Christ suffered during his lifetime, even to death, but that this led him to victory over sin and death and empowered him to offer us salvation. Knowing this, we have to join Jesus in adopting the willingness to suffer in this life for doing what is right. If we adopt that attitude, then we will not be so easily tempted into sin, because we will choose discipline, righteous resolve, and walking with God, over the craving to satisfy fleshly desires or for coping/escape mechanisms. Peter's readers were facing social pressure to conform to the sinful norms; if they were willing to suffer being persecuted and ostracized, then they could continue to walk with God and live to do his will, resisting the temptation to seek acceptance, comfort, and fleshly pleasures by sinning along with their non-believing peers. This holds true for us today; we must learn to expect suffering for doing what is right, and not look at suffering as something to avoid by sinning.

Reflect: If you are faced with the decision to do what you know is right and face negative consequences or avoid those negative consequences by doing nothing or doing something you think is wrong, which do you choose? Can you think of some situations when this choice might be real for you? Are you ready to adopt the attitude of Jesus, to do what is right no matter what it costs you? Pray for God's help to do this.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.1-4. Most of Peter's audience were Gentiles [non-Jews], so it might seem strange that Peter referred to sinful unbelievers as "Gentiles" here [as in NASB and ESV], but the Greek term [ἐθνῶν = eth-KNOWN] can also refer to people outside the group, in this case outside of the church [thus NET, NIV, and NLT translate into terms for "non-believers"]. Before we came to faith, we followed our lusts and lived in sin, but we have put away those bad habits now [1.14-15]. Those who still do not believe in Christ are surprised that we do not continue in these sins, as they do, and thus they revile us. Acting righteously can provoke hostility in others simply because it shines a light on their sins and leaves them with a sense of spiritual conviction which they misinterpret to be your judgment on them. They therefore will pressure you to sin along with them, and will be surprised that you do not, which will lead to further hostility.

Peter's list of sins is not meant to be exhaustive, just representative. But even sticking just to this list, we can understand what was happening. In Peter's day, idolatry – worship of other Gods – was a part of every day life in that culture, and wild parties characterized by drunkenness and sexual sin were common. When Christians refrained from these activities, they stood out as different, causing dual perceptions that they were judgmental and that they were subversive [especially for not worshipping the emperor cult], and thus keeping them from being an accepted part of the community. Things are not entirely different today. In the US, we are not asked to worship the emperor, but we are expected to follow superstitions, read horoscopes, decorate our houses and offices with symbols of evil for Halloween, accept as legal the atheistic and secular-humanistic perspectives on the rights of a fetus or the nature and source of mankind, and tolerate other religions without considering them idolatrous. When we stand up for Christian perspectives on these and similar issues, we face a strong backlash of hostility. Similarly, the person who does not get drunk with his/her peers, does not attend wild parties, does not participate in discussions about sexual sins, can end up lonely in the office or classroom.

Reflect: What situations in your life include peer pressure to do things that are wrong or to not assert your beliefs? Are you ready to resist peer pressure and do what you know is right? Pray for God's help to do this [with courtesy! 3.16].

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.1-6. We should not be tempted to turn from God, church, and righteousness, to join in with those who walk in the darkness. Those who spurn righteousness now might enjoy the social acceptance that believers lack, they might revel in their sinful pleasures, and they might get away with making believers miserable, but they will have to face the judgment of Jesus when he returns. They will have to answer for their lack of faith and their pursuit of sin. Peter counters today's commonly held belief that religious truth is relative, only relevant for those who believe: he says unbelievers will face judgment by Christ. That is why God has given us the mission of proclaiming the gospel to everyone, so that even though they might be judged by human standards, hated, and even killed in the flesh, they may have an eternal and spiritual life with God if they believe in Christ and his sacrifice for them. Note the meaning of v.6 is that the gospel was preached to those who are "now" dead [as in NET; NIV; NLT] when they were alive, not that they received the gospel after they were dead. Both non-believers and believers die, so non-believers might see no advantage in "ruining" this life by conforming to Christian standards. But death is not the end. By sharing the gospel with people, we give them a chance to respond in faith and be saved, so they can avoid condemnation and join us in the

glorious eternal inheritance with God in which we believe. Just as Jesus died in the flesh but was resurrected by the Spirit [3.18], so too we believers can count on the Spirit taking us to Heaven until Christ returns, when we will be resurrected.

Reflect: Do you think it is worth suffering a little now to walk with Christ, knowing he has saved you into a wonderful life in eternity? Do you think that gospel message is worth sharing with people you know? Are you ready to be a better witness for Christ? What kind of help do you need from your church to do this?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.7-9. We are in the “last times” [1.20], and Christ’s return to judge and bring this age to completion is considered “imminent,” in that it could happen at any moment. Even though Christ has not returned for almost two thousand years, we still must have a sense of urgency, because he could return before you finish reading this sentence! One key aspect of responding to this truth with urgency is to be intentional and disciplined about our prayer life: ask God to act while time remains, to save those whom we love and those to whom we preach and share our testimonies; ask God to bless us with fruitful ministry for the glory of his name; ask God to continue our sanctification and help us live righteously, representing him well in all respects; ask God to help us depend on him, to trust completely in him for deliverance through today’s troubles and ultimately through death into our inheritance with him; and ask God to help us praise and worship him with thanksgiving and submission. Earlier, Peter asked us to prepare our minds and remain controlled about placing our hope in Christ [1.13], and now he says something similar about our prayers.

Peter also commanded us to have an earnest love for each other; the term he used [ἐκτενής = ek-teh-NACE] implies a constant, earnest love [similar to the term in 1.22]. We are not to be merely passive or opportunistic, we continuously are to find ways to show love to one another, persisting even when we do not feel the emotion or there are relational difficulties. Peter says this effort at love is “above all,” meaning it is of the utmost importance and of the highest priority within the Christian community; it is – along with truth – an antidote to disunity within the church. When Peter says such love conceals [or covers] a multitude of sins, he is not saying that we earn our forgiveness from God: we know salvation and forgiveness are not earned, but are based on God’s grace, as Peter revealed earlier in the letter [1.18-19; 2.24-25; 3.18; see also Ephesians 2.8-9]. Consistent with what he wrote earlier [3.9], what Peter means is that when we choose to love others, we overlook their sins against us, rather than using them as a basis for retaliation [Proverbs 10.12; note the antithesis is to stir up conflict]. If we respond with love to sin within our church, we can prevent disunity and broken relationships. One way to show love is by being hospitable to each other. This can include special situations like putting up visiting missionaries, opening your home for ministry meetings, and having people over for meals or social activities. We are commanded to be hospitable to each other, even if we do not have that spiritual gift [this command comes before the following talk about spiritual gifts] or natural ability for hospitality or desire to be hospitable. As with love, we are to show hospitality even when we do not feel like it, and we are to be hospitable to each other without grumbling about it!

Reflect: In what ways are you hospitable? Should you try to improve in this area? How could the church community be more intentional and consistent in showing love to one another? What part could you play in that? Are you ready for a more devout prayer life? What steps should you take to make that happen?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.7-11. We are to be good stewards of all the resources God has given us, including our money, material possessions, time, energy, creativity and intelligence, personality, natural abilities, experiences, and spiritual gifts. To be a good steward, you have to use what God has given you to help others [not yourself] for God’s glory [not your own]. We see here that God works through us in our spiritual gifts to bless others and to bring himself glory. Our part is to be willing to be used by God so that we can bless others effectively. This is another aspect of showing love to each other. However God wants to work through you, let your attitude be to glorify God through your service to others. Peter’s examples represent gifts that involve speaking [like evangelism, teaching, exhortation] and those that involve direct action [like mercy, serving, hospitality], but we should note there are other gifts as well [like prayer and faith]. Peter said that if we have a speaking gift, we should be dependent on God so we can share God’s revelation [not our own philosophies]. Most often, this would mean sharing and explaining scripture, especially the gospel, though at times God might inspire us to say something unique that would point a specific person to himself. Peter also said that if we have a serving gift, we should be dependent on God for strength, so we can carry on without growing too weary. The glory God receives is through Jesus, because we are God’s people through Christ’s sacrifice for us. Because of our salvation in Christ, we are willing to do what brings God glory, even though it might cause us to suffer.

Reflect: Do you know what are your spiritual gifts [usually ways God has worked amazingly through you]? Are you ignoring them or being a good steward to use them well? Are you dependent on God or working in your own power?