

- I. I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. I Peter 4:1-9 . . . Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. [3] For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. [4] In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; [5] but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. [6] For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God. [7] The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. [8] Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Be hospitable to one another without complaint.
 - B. Last Sunday . . .
 - 1. we talked about God's ordained sequence of events for growing in godliness. And as I said last Sunday, we are to die to self and sin first, and than put on godliness in their place. And I ended last Sunday's teaching with an emphasis on how our dying to sin and putting on Christ-likeness needed to bring transformation to our outward actions as well as what is in the depths of our heart.
 - 2. We then talked about living the rest of our lives according to and for the will of God, rather than according to and for the sinful desires of our flesh. In talking about this, I pointed out that God's word calls us to the high and noble standard of being holy in ALL our behavior, just as God is holy. I also pointed out that this is not an extreme standard, or a unique standard for unique Christians, rather it is the normal standard of holiness for all Christians everywhere.
 - a. However, it seems many in the church today seldom speak about the call to Christian perfection while frequently speaking about the fact that no one is perfect. And it is true that only Jesus Christ has accomplished Christian perfection in this life.

- b. For the rest of us, sincerity of purpose, an effort equal to the need, and life-long perseverance in the pursuit of godliness is as close to Christian perfection as we will ever get.
 - c. Therefore, the important question is NOT whether Christian perfection is fully attainable in this life. The important question is whether you intend to do your part, *by God's gracious empowerment and assistance*, in a manner that enables you to come as near to God's standard of holiness as possible in this life.
 - d. For example, if your known and ongoing defects in holiness, humility, and love are owing to your negligence, then it is clear you do not yet intend to rise to the normal standard of holiness God has established for His children.
 - e. However, if and when it is your intention – as proven by doing your part – to be holy in all your behavior as God is holy, then you are on God's narrow path and you are sincerely pursuing the standard of holiness God holds out as normal for you.
3. The third thing we talked about last Sunday was the fact that we have had enough time to sin. Therefore, we are to run from any reasoning or any excuses or any self-talk that makes it seem as if we need even a moment more to do what we know is wrong.

C. Pray

II. Peter's list of sins

- A. I said last Sunday we would talk about the second half of I Peter 4:3 today, and that is where I want to begin today's teaching.
- B. I Peter 4:3b . . . having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.
 - 1. On a first read, it would seem that Peter's audience was not made up of very nice people before coming to faith in Christ. In fact, this list tells us that their sins were of the grosser, more publicly obvious kind – going from immorality to the evils surrounding idol worship.
 - 2. However, upon examining this list and comparing it to several other lists in the New Testament, it is apparent that this list of sins fits the category of sin commonly known as grave or mortal sin.
 - 3. Now it is true that all sin, be it grave or minor, has death as its penalty. Yet it is also true that not all sin is equal in relation to its effect on us, its effect on our relationship to God, and its effect on those affected by it.
 - 4. So let us return to Peter's list and examine the nature of the sin listed.
 - a. These sins require intention.

- b. These sins require some degree of thought and planning.
 - c. These sins require time to carry out – which means you also have time to resist the devil, turn from your sinful pursuit, and return to doing what you know is right.
 - d. These sins require deliberate rebellion against God, which is a clear indication that you are moving away from God, and you are choosing something evil over the good that God is.
 - e. These sins do serious damage to any love you have for God and others. They harden your heart against God and His word. And they damage or harden your conscience so that it no longer works as it ought.
 - f. Therefore, whether you commit these sins once or do them on a repeated basis, you have no excuse for doing any of them because you know better, you can do better, you had time to stop and move toward doing better, yet you willfully choose to commit them anyway.
5. In addition to the nature of these grave or mortal kinds of sins, God adds in I John 3:9 that the practice of sin is a clear indication you are not yet born again.
- a. In other words, if you continue to do what you know is wrong, day-after-day or week-after-week, with no sincere intention or reasonable effort to put the practice to death and replace it with godliness, it is an indication you have not repented and come to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - b. And why is the practice of sin equal to committing one the grave sins on Peter's list? Because you know you are doing what is wrong. You can do better. You have the time to intervene and bring an end to repeating the same sin. And you have the time to nurture the practice of doing what you know is right. But sadly, you continue to committing that sin anyway.
6. Peter is not the only one to give us lists of sins of this nature. The first list that appears in the Scriptures is the Ten Commandments. And then we have Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. For example:
- a. I Corinthians 6:9-10 . . . Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, [10] nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

- b. Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5, Colossians 3:5-8
 - c. And then, there is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where He expands the Ten Commandments and the larger Law of Moses to include commonly and culturally accepted sins, and the unseen sins we commit on the inside. These too are examples of grave and practiced sin.
- C. On the other side of these grave or practiced sins, that is those deliberate sins where we have time to correct our way before committing the sin,
- 1. are those sins that are the result of a foolish or careless moment,
 - 2. or are the result of an immediate and unthinking reaction to some situation or person,
 - 3. BUT WHICH we quickly perceive as wrong, repent, confess, make right with God and those we sinned against, and quickly return to our intended pursuit of being holy in all our behavior as God is holy.
 - 4. This does not make these sins less needful of Christ's sacrifice or of forgiveness, but they are not committed deliberately and they are not ignored so as to be committed repeatedly.
- D. My point here is that as Christians, God expects us to be done with the kinds of sins on Peter's list, the Ten Commandments, Paul's four lists, and John's exhortation about practicing sin – which are those sins that fit into the “we have time to stop but we continue on anyway” category of sins.
- 1. However, many Christians are still at the beginning of the Christian life – having traveled no further. This means many are still committing one or more grave sins and practicing some sin.
 - 2. If this is your situation, I am encouraging you today to take God seriously by doing your part in putting to death whatever grave or practiced sin is still part of your life, and by putting godliness in its place to the point of being done with such sins.
 - 3. Now this does not mean that it is okay or somehow excusable to commit the lesser sins due to a careless or thoughtless moment. Indeed, we are to be dying more and more to self, and denying more and more of self, and putting on more and more of Christ so that we are less and less careless or thoughtless and therefore are less and less committing the so-called lesser sins.
- E. One final thought on this – whether you view Peter's list of sins as a prohibition or an exhortation to godliness or some combination, the reality is, they point to the two paths – the broad path toward death and the narrow path toward life. May we travel the path of life.

III. Misunderstood and maligned by unbelievers, yet exonerated by God

- A. I Peter 4:4-5 . . . In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; [5] but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
- B. Old friends, neighbors and co-workers will not understand your new interests, values, commitments, behavior patterns, and obviously religious activities. They may even see you as uppity, arrogant, and judgmental. And because they will not like your new ways, some will try to get you to return to your old ways or at least get you to hid your new ways. And in doing this, they will use whatever tactics they think work best at achieving their goal – such as putting you down, attacking your character, accusing you of evil motives and unloving behavior, and spreading untrue stories about you in order to damage your reputation.
 - 1. Without question, this hurts, just as it hurt Jesus while he was here. Yet this treatment by others is a powerful reminder of why it is so vital to make God our supreme source of security rather than making the approval and acceptance of others our primary source of self-worth.
 - 2. But Peter tells us something else is going on here – God will bring the truth to bear in due time – which means it could be in this life, but for sure it will be at the judgment seat of Christ when all mankind will give an account for how they have lived.
 - 3. Now Peter is not encouraging a “get even” or “you’ll finally get yours” attitude with these words about the coming judgment, because such thinking or attitudes are from our flesh and the devil, not from God. Remember, God’s way is to “make the sun shine and rain fall on righteous and unrighteous alike” while at the same time knowing that each will be rewarded or punished according to their life choices.
 - 4. Therefore, we are to leave justice to God while bearing up under the pressures and resistance of ungodly people who are making it their responsibility to bring an end to our godliness.

IV. The end is near – How we finish counts as much as how we start!

- A. I Peter 4:7-9 . . . The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. [8] Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

- B. In these verses about the end times, Peter's primary exhortation is to be properly prepared for the return of Christ. And what does it mean to be properly prepared?
1. Being prepared for Christ's return requires purifying ourselves, just as He is pure. It requires becoming holy in all our behavior just as He is holy. Why? So we can stand before our Righteous Judge rejoicing rather than ashamed.
 2. John put it this way: "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (I John 2:28).
- C. You see, how we finish the Christian life is just as important as how we begin the Christian life.
1. In I Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul said this about finishing well: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. [25] Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [26] Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; [27] but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."
 2. In Hebrews 10:34-39, we read these words: "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. [35] Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. [37] For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. [38] But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. [39] But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul (*to finish well*)."
 3. Jesus also spoke about finishing well.
 - a. Matthew 10:22 . . . "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end (*finishes well*) who will be saved.
 - b. Matthew 24:9-13 . . . Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10] At that time many will fall away and will betray

one another and hate one another. [11] Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. [12] "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end (*finishes well*), he will be saved.

- c. Luke 12:42-46 . . . "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward (*starts out well*), whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? [43] Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes (*finishes well*). [44] Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. [45] But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk (*does not finish well*); [46] the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

D. Now I understand that some hold to a theology that stands in the way of taking these scriptures as any kind of warning. However, even if you have no fear of finishing the Christian life poorly, do you love God enough to want to finish well?

1. Is your love for God of such a nature that you want to meet Him in as good a spiritual shape as is possible for you?
2. Now if you lack this driving motivation of love, I urge you to consider what love for God ought to compel you to do. Paul said that our love for God ought to control or compel us, having concluded that Christ died for all [*of us*] – which means we have all died [*to self and sin*]. And Christ died for all so that those who live [*through Christ*] might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (II Corinthians 5:14-15).
3. Therefore, I encourage all of us to make it our aim to finish the Christian life as well as we can, and to do this for the love of God.

V. Conclusion - wrapping up all three points from today

- A. Matthew 7:24-26 . . . Therefore everyone who hears these words of [God's] and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.