

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #16

I Peter 4:1-6

In the recent Olympics that were held in China, our USA basketball team won the gold and they called themselves the “redeem team.” Part of the reason they called themselves that was because four years before this, some of our NBA players went to the Olympics and not only didn’t win the gold, but they acted in ways that were obnoxious. This year’s team made the commitment not only to win the gold, but also to restore integrity back to the USA. One of the players, who had been on both teams, said we were all aware that we are not just basketball players; we are representing the United States of America. We are in a foreign country and we need to be good representatives for the USA.

You and I who know the Lord lived in a foreign country, the world. We are citizens of heaven, so this planet we know as earth, is not really our home. God wants us to remember we are His representatives. Sometimes when you live in a pagan world filled with pagan things, it isn’t easy being a good ambassador for Jesus Christ.

According to the Scriptures, we are to try to become all things to all types of people so that we might win them (i.e. I Corinthians 9:19-23). How far do we take this? How do we actually go about this type of evangelism? How do we make the best possible statement of grace to this world? Peter says there is a way to make a statement to this lost world and that is by your consistent, godly lifestyle. When you make a break from old friends and old habits and you pursue the will of God, you actually become a powerful witness for Jesus Christ in a way that ultimately will bring judgment upon them. That is what Peter believed.

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED FOR US, WE NEED TO PASS OUR TIME ON EARTH LIKE HE DID, NOT PURSUING THE LUSTS OF MEN BUT THE WILL OF GOD SO THAT WE MAY BE AN EFFECTIVE WITNESS TO THE LOST WORLD.

I want you to remember God has saved you and left you here on purpose. He wants you living in this world here and now. Now the conjunction “therefore” which begins **verse 1** immediately connects us to the preceding context which describes what Jesus Christ did, namely suffer and die on our behalf, the just for the unjust. Think of the fact that **our sin caused the suffering of Jesus Christ**. Let us suppose, for a moment, that a vicious criminal broke into your home and killed your child with a knife. Would you love the knife that killed your child? Would you hold onto the knife and cherish the knife that butchered your child? You would never want to see it again. Do you realize that our sin killed Jesus Christ? Do we want to cherish and hold on to the very weapon that nailed Him to the cross? If we want to be an effective witness for God, we must not ever hold on to our sin.

There are three main points of instruction given in this passage:

INSTRUCTION #1 – Arm yourself with the same purpose and mindset of Christ. **4:1a**

You will notice that **verse 1** begins with the main challenge to “arm yourself.” This immediately tells us we are not living in a friendly environment. Unfortunately some believers just drift through life and never realize they are in war and conflict. We are soldiers in this world and we are living in a foreign environment for this is not our home.

The main purpose of Jesus Christ was to do the will of the Father no matter what. That is why He came here. Christ was always interested in pleasing God and never interested in pleasing the flesh. He knew that by coming to this earth He would suffer and die. But He kept His focus on the glory to follow. He was always about accomplishing the will of God. We need to arm ourselves with the same philosophy and purpose. That word “arm yourselves” is a military metaphor which does have warfare ramifications. The aorist tense of the verb means we are to make a decisive resolution as a soldier of Jesus Christ that we will pursue the will of God no matter what the threat or consequences. We need to think in terms that our existence here on earth is not to have a party but to do the will of God even if it means we suffer.

Result #1 - When we are ourselves with the same purpose we cease from sin. **4:1b**

Now there have been a variety of opinions as to what this means:

- 1) When a person is identified with Jesus’ death on the cross by Spirit baptism, his condemnatory sin is gone.
- 2) When a person decides to suffer, he has chosen to make a break from sin.
- 3) When a Christian suffers and physically dies like Christ, he will be forever free from sin.
- 4) When a Christian suffers while staying focused on God’s will, sin is no longer the primary pursuit of life. Obviously if you are suffering for righteous purposes, your focus cannot be sinful things.

The verb “cease” (παύω) is perfect passive. The word means to cease in the sense of restraining, hindering and leaving off something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 350). **Peter is not saying that when we suffer and stay focused on the will of God we become sinlessly perfect; what he is saying is that we reach a point in which pursuing flesh sin is no longer the object of our lives.** As D. Edmund Hiebert said, our “old life, dominated by the power of sin, has been terminated” (*I Peter*, p. 242). God has given us a new focus (passive verb) and He has brought about the victory, which is now that His will and no longer our flesh is our primary focus. This focus begins at a point in time and continues into the present and on into the future (perfect tense). **Suffering has the potential to take us to new levels in our spirituality.**

The attitude we are to have is I am done pursuing fleshly activities. When people look at us they should see a difference. They should take note of the fact that we no longer pursue the things we once did; we have ceased from sinful pursuits.

Result #2 - When we arm ourselves with a will of God focus, we don’t waste our life, we invest our life. **4:2-3**

When you come to the place where you truly believe eternity is rapidly approaching, you will want to make the best possible use of your time because time is ticking; we are all on the clock.

We have spent enough of our existence wasting time and wasting life. We have wasted plenty of time “sowing our wild oats” and we have seen where that leaves us. If the truth were seen by all of us as to how much time we have actually wasted in life, probably every single one of us would be totally ashamed of ourselves. As we focus on doing the will of God with our lives, we make the most of time and we make a powerful statement for God’s grace.

Now in **verse 3**, Peter describes what life was like for most prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. That phrase “desire of the Gentiles” refers to the desires of the unsaved world. I Howard Marshall said don’t think that only Gentiles are capable of these things for Jews were just as guilty (*I Peter*, p. 135). In fact, Peter actually includes himself in this statement. In **verse 3**, some manuscripts actually contain the pronoun “for us” (γαρ ημιν) rather than “for you” (γαρ υμιν). So Peter is describing what life was like even for him prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now there are six waste of life features that are given in this text, which at one time were things we “carried out” and “pursued.” The infinitive “to have carried out” is one that means to labor at something or to work at something in order to achieve something (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 240). The participle “pursue” (πορευομαι) is one that refers to moving or proceeding in one’s own direction (Ibid., p. 373). Combined, these two verbals present the idea that these waste of life qualities were things we worked at and went after. Before Christ, we had no power to stop ourselves. We had wicked motives, amusements and practices.

The list is not pretty, but it is very accurate. The list sounds like a New Orleans Mardi Gras or a college sorority or fraternity with its drinking, carousing, orgies and substance abuse. These things are not new. This stuff was going on back in Peter’s day. You look down through this list and you would think Peter was alive today. By virtue of the fact that God lists these things, He knew these types of things can be a real threat to the believer.

Perhaps you are not guilty of everything mentioned in the list or perhaps you are. But I can almost guarantee that in one way or another some of these waste of life features were at some point or at some time connected to you if you are honest. **By virtue of the fact that the list is varied, tells us that every believer has sinned in more than one way and in more than one time.** There are six waste of life features that Peter names:

(Waste of Life Feature #1) - Life that pursues sensual things. 4:3a

The word translated sensual (ασελγεια) is one that actually means to pursue licentious excess. (Ibid., p. 63). This is the kind of action that even shocks “public decency.” As Dr. Paige Patterson said, this refers to “open debauchery” (*An Exposition of I Peter*, p. 152). This is the kind of lifestyle that has no self restraint even when in public. Our present world is given to this focus. Nothing is sacred anymore. Sin is publicly flaunted. Just this week it was announced that Hallmark is going to market same-sex marriage cards.

(Waste of Life Feature #2) - Life that pursues lustful things. 4:3b

The word translated “lusts” (επιθυμια) is one that has in view a passionate longing, an emotional craving and desire for things forbidden by God (Ibid., p. 170). Dr. Alford called them “unclean lusts.” The particular flare of this word has to do with emotional surges and it does have to do with sexual things. But it also can mean more than just sexual things, but also has in view any craving such as for power, money or revenge. If your life is all about pursuing lustful things, your life is a waste of time.

(Waste of Life Feature #3) - Life that pursues drunkenness. 4:3c

The next three things on the list all have to do with excessive drinking. The actual word “drunkenness” (οινοφλυγια) is only used here and it refers to drunken debauchery. To drink to the point of overflow (Ibid., p. 314). Drunkenness exists when there is no interruption in the flow of alcohol. The word is not referring to a glass of wine but to letting it flow.

(Waste of Life Feature #4) - Life that pursues carousing. 4:3d

The word “carousals” (κωμος) refers to carousing revelry (Ibid., p. 262). It carries with it the idea of drinking and various public and obnoxious and immoral behavior. Back in Peter’s day, there were all kinds of heathen festivals that featured this type of thing. Festivals could be political, such as when a major military victory had occurred, they could be private, public or religious. This type of focus in life is a waste of time.

(Waste of Life Feature #5) - Life that pursues drinking parties. 4:3e

The Greek word used here for “drinking parties” (ποτος) refers to actually carousing in the sense of a drinking bout (Ibid., p. 375). The primary difference between this Greek word and the previous words is that this one is much more public.

(Waste of Life Feature #6) - Life that pursues abominable idolatries. 4:3d

The word abominable (αθεμιτος) refers to lawless, ungodly, unlawful things according to the Word of God (Ibid., p. 11). Things that break the laws of God and even the laws of society. These are things detestable in nature..

The world still advertises this lifestyle and debauchery. Now we have commercials trying to convince people this is the way you want to live. It tries to make this lifestyle look good; in fact it calls it “happy hour.” There is nothing happy about it. It leaves people with guilt, shame, disease and sometimes even death. This is no way to live life. This is the biggest waste of time one could ever have.

Apparently for Peter, as for some of us, this was the way we lived our lives prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. For those of us who lived our lives this way, we can testify it was a waste of time, a waste of life.

I like something Dr. Warren Wiersbe said, when it comes to sin, God wants us to have a militant attitude against it (*Be Hopeful*, p. 101).

INSTRUCTION #2 – You will be maligned for your testimony. **4:4-5**

The assumption Peter makes here is that when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you don't pursue this anymore and by not pursuing these things you make a great statement for God.

If you have ever been in a restaurant where the lights are dim, it is amazing how quickly you can adjust to darkness. Do not be deceived as a believer. If you go to places where things are dark spiritually you will be amazed how quickly you will seem to adjust. That is why the believer must make a break from these things. When you do, the world will view you as weird.

But what I find so weird is that the world doesn't seem to think it is strange when people wreck their lives, bodies and minds by going from one sin to another. But let a person come to faith in Jesus Christ and start living for God and some of those same worldly people think you have lost your mind.

The word "surprise" (ξεπιζω) is one that means the people of the world are totally astonished and surprised by what they consider to be very strange in that you no longer pursue the previous lifestyle (Smith, p. 307). You don't party with them anymore and you don't run with them anymore and as a result, they "malign" you. That word "malign" (βλασφημεω) is one that means they speak lightly and profanely of that which is sacred (Smith, p. 82). God considers you to be His sacred property and those who speak lightly of it are speaking lightly and impiously of something God deems very sacred.

Some of us have experienced this in a big-time way. We came to faith in Christ and in a short time lost our friends and even some family. Not only did our friends change, but the things they said about us changed as well.

You purpose to be godly and pursue the will of God and you'll be maligned; God guarantees it. You'll be called "Goody Two-shoes", "no fun", "Bible believer or thumper", "they think they are better than everyone else", "there is Miss/Mrs./Mr. Perfect", "they are church people, not like us." Don't be shocked when this happens; this is the way it has always been.

Verse 5 makes it very clear that these people who malign you will give an account to God for what they did and said. **What they don't know is that they may make their judgments against us, but one day God will judge them.** God will judge those who are alive who did these things and those who are dead that did these things. No one will be exempt. When they do and say things against the people of God they are heading to a very serious court date in which they will give account to the Judge. Contextually, part of what God will do to judge them is to use our testimony as evidence against them.

Let me tell you something about pagans; they are very afraid of death and they should be, because for one who is not in Christ there is no eternal hope.

INSTUCTION #3 – The reason the gospel was preached to those dead in evil sin was so that they could come alive to God and for God and show the amazing transformation of pursuing the will of God. **4:6**

God saved us to make a transformed life statement for Him. That is why He saves sinners and leaves them here in this sin-filled world.

You purpose to live your life for Christ. Don't go around judging people who are lost. You and I don't need to be telling them about their sin, we need to be showing them we have been saved out of it. We need to be in this world and we need to be an effective witness in it. We need to demonstrate God's grace. At times we will probably suffer but eventually we will be eternally honored.

There are two extremes as God's people we need to avoid:

- 1) Christian isolationism. God wants us in the world making a statement for Him. He wants us in schools, on jobs, in society making a statement by our lifestyle for Him.
- 2) Christian conformism. We are not to be conformed to the wicked things of this world, but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

In view of the fact that Jesus has done so much for us, this is the least we can do for Him, and when we do these things our lives will not have been a waste of time.