

Freedom Not to Sin

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[0 : 00] 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.

There's a high school girl. She's a Christian girl, a devout girl. She reads her Bible daily, prays for her family and friends.

[1 : 09] And at the public high school she attends, she prays before a meal, which is really hard to find in a public school. And people kind of look at her a little awkwardly while she does that because no one else is doing that at the table.

And as her peers are beginning to, her girl peers are beginning to dress more and more scantily, she refuses to follow that pattern, and she continues to dress modestly as the Bible teaches her to.

And for that reason, she gets unfairly labeled as a prude in the school, especially by the guys who are vindictive toward her because she had refused, spurned their inappropriate advances.

And she goes to college, and there she decides that she's not going to join the sorority that all her best friends from high school are joining because she knows that it was known for a lot of drinking parties and even one-night stands for the girls that are there.

And so she refused to join that. But as a result of that, she gets disowned by her friends, who are her best friends from high school because they think that she is now being judgmental and looking down on them for not joining that sorority, even though her affection for them and her commitment to them has not changed at all.

[2 : 23] And her junior year, she's continued to be devout in following the Lord as she becomes a leader of the Christian Fellowship there. But that year, she gets kicked off campus, or the Christian Fellowship gets kicked off campus because they subscribe to biblical sexual ethics and will not let people who don't subscribe to the biblical sexual ethics become leaders in that fellowship.

So she gets kicked out, and because she's one of the leaders of the group, she gets publicly vilified by her peers in the college newspaper. And after graduation, here's a bright point in the story, she meets a godly man and gets married at the workplace.

However, to her great dismay, she discovers that she has breast cancer, and she dies shortly after getting married. There's also a Christian man in his 50s.

He's a banker. He's diligent. He conducts himself with integrity, and he goes on business trips just like his other co-workers. And when he goes, but sees co-workers sometimes go on their off hours visit strip clubs or to go out drinking, and he doesn't do that.

And because of that, he gets labeled the Christian guy who spoils all the fun. Nevertheless, because he does his job better than most people, most of his colleagues, he gets tolerated.

[3 : 49] That is until his boss starts to tell him to lend to subprime borrowers, people who are not qualified, according to their credit history, to take out loans to buy a house.

And he boxed at that, and conscientiously and respectfully expresses his objection to his boss, and says, no, I don't think that's a good idea. These people are not going to be able to pay. You're not setting them up for success.

And the boss uses that opportunity to fire him and paint him as incompetent and insubordinate and fires him without severance pay.

And he gets fired, and after that, the housing market bubble bursts, inspiring the U.S. economy into financial crisis.

And so he can't get a job as a banker anymore, anywhere. No one's hiring. So he gets a job at the local grocery store. And he works there for several years. And then he retires and lives, free marines and dies without much savings to give to his kids because he had used it all up in the intervening time between his two jobs.

[5 : 03] As you hear stories like that, you might ask, you know, what gives, right? I mean, that's, God, what are you doing? If these are the people that are trying to serve you, why don't you bless that first girl with health and with some loyal friends?

Why doesn't God reward that conscientious banker with an even more lucrative job, helping him to make more money than his boss who was trying to do not so helpful practices in order for selfish gain?

And after all, they die just like all their less scrupulous peers. What do they have to show for that? Living in a different way.

And these were the questions that were burning in Peter's audience mind because the unbelievers of the first century were similarly viewed as killjoys because the Christians refused to participate in the most popular entertainments of the Roman Empire.

For example, the gladiatorial games or the chariot races with all their violence and gore or the risque theater performances. And they also refused to participate in other sinful acts like premarital sex or adultery or theft or a lot of drinking and orgies.

[6 : 31] They refused to participate in all of these things. So the Christians in the first century were considered killjoys. And instead of being rewarded by God in this life, they suffered slander and persecution.

And many of them died. They passed on without any sort of vindication. So what gives God? In that situation, Peter reassures believers.

He says, we can suffer rather than sin because God will judge both the living and the dead. That's what Peter tells us here. So we'll talk about those two in two parts.

So we can suffer rather than sin. Percy, look with me at verses one to two. It says, 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. It begins with a sense clause, meaning that's the reason, that's a grounding for this exhortation.

[7 : 39] Since before Christ suffered in the flesh, that's why we ought to also arm ourselves with the same kind of thinking. So he's kind of hearkening back to chapter three, verse 18, which we talked about a couple weeks ago, where he says, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

And what is that same way of thinking that Christ had? Because he doesn't really seem to unpack it here. So he continues in verse one to two. For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

I'll explain that in a second. So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. So the conjunction for there can also be translated as that is.

It's an explanatory conjunction. And that seems to make more sense because he had already given the reason for it with the first sentence, since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh.

And now, so it really, what's going on here is explaining the content of that attitude that Christ had. So he's saying, Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, that is, this way of thinking, that whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

[8 : 48] And that's in fact how some of the English translations have it, including the TNIV. So that means the attitude that we're supposed to have is that those who suffer, whoever suffers, has ceased from sin.

But what does that mean, right? That's a really, it's a question that bothers a lot of Bible interpreters. What does it mean that when we suffer in the flesh, we cease from sin?

And I don't think it means that when we suffer a lot in life, that we are no longer susceptible to sin, right? And I think we see a lot of counterexamples of that. So like, for example, if you have a fire, let's say you have a fireplace, and you throw wax into the fire, it's going to melt, right?

But if you throw clay into the fire, it's actually going to harden. It's not going to melt, right? In the same way, even though it's the same fire, the response of the wax and the clay vary because of their material constitution.

In the same way, suffering is the same way. It's like the same fire. You could throw one person in there, they'll come out softer. They'll become more grateful for the small blessings they have in life. And they'll become more tender and compassionate toward other people.

[9 : 55] And one person, you throw them into suffering, they'll come out more hardened. They'll come out bitter and dissatisfied with life, right? So suffering itself is not what objectively makes people cease from sin.

I don't think that's what it's referring to. In fact, as the Bible also teaches, if you look at the example of Job, Satan tries to use suffering as an occasion for sin for Job, right? So there, clearly, suffering is not leading to ceasing from sin.

He's trying to use suffering to make people sin, Satan in that case. So that's not what that means. So what does it mean then that whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin? And I don't, so some people tie it to what Paul teaches, you know, how he talks about it in Romans 6 too.

How can we who died to sin still live in it, right? So he talks about how we as believers, we participate in Christ's death and resurrection. We have died to sin, so now we live to holiness.

So then how can we, how can we then live in sin anymore? This is an important truth and it is a true, that's a true statement. It is true that we participate in his death and life resurrection and that we are no longer to live in that way.

[11 : 02] But I don't think that's what Peter is trying to say here. And that's because Paul uses the phrase, he's in the flesh to refer to our sinful flesh, but Peter doesn't use it that way. Peter uses it to refer to our time on earth, our time in the body, right?

So he, so that's why if you look at verse two, the latter half of it, Peter says, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passion, but for the will of God.

See, Paul could never write that sentence because he would say, if you're living in the flesh, then you are living for human passions for him. Those two things are synonymous. But here Peter is saying that you live, while you're living in the flesh, don't live for human passions.

So that's a clear example that Peter and Paul are not using the phrase in the same way. So, so that's, so then it doesn't mean that the word, we cease from sin in the sense that we're justified by, by Christ.

We were righteous because of what he has done. So then what can it mean, right? As we have gone through the book of first Peter, he, he has talked about the various stations in life, whether in our relationship to government, in our relationship to our spouses, in our relationship to, to our, to our neighbors, to our employers.

[12 : 13] In all of that, he taught us to do good and suffer while doing it, while suffer unjustly while doing good. And, and that's, I think what he is referring to here is that when we suffer in this manner, even while doing good, when we suffer in this manner, even unjustly, we, we demonstrate the fact that we are through with sin.

We're done with sin. No matter what, we're not sinning because I am, I'm, I'm, I'm dead to sin and I'm no, I'm no longer going to, entertain the possibility of doing good and contravening God's word.

It's kind of like a, this example came to mind. I think you guys all know and love the Lord of the Rings, right? And the, in, in the book, Fellowship of the Ring, I mean, the Fellowship is formed.

It's, it's like a dwarf and, and, and a wizard and, and an elf and a man. Like they are, they form a fellowship to go and destroy the evil ring that gives the evil Lord Sauron his power.

And as the, on their quest, they go through the mountain of Moria and, and are attacked by a giant demonic fiery monster called the Balin, right? You guys know the scene I'm talking about.

[13 : 20] As he's getting, as they're getting chased and they're going through this narrow bridge, called the bridge of Khazad-dum. And the wizard, the Gandalf recognizes that the most vulnerable members, the hobbits of the fellowship are not going to make it.

So he, instead of going through the bridge, he stops in the middle, right? And he, and he, he, in the movie, he says, you shall not pass, right? He faces the Balin. He says, it's not in the book, but in the book he says this, he says, you cannot pass.

I'm a servant of the secret fire, rector of the flame of Anur. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you flame of Udun. Go back to the shadow. You cannot pass.

He knows that he might be inviting his own death, right? In fact, he does die from that, from that fight against the Balin. Yet he stands his ground and says, you cannot pass.

It's that kind of resolve, that cutting off and saying, hey, for him, going through that bridge was no longer an option, right? So he's like, you shall not, but that was the end of that quest. He was not going anywhere, even if Balin were to destroy him and go through him, right?

[14 : 24] So in the same way, a believer, when he says that, you know what? I will suffer in my workplace. I will suffer in my marriage. I will suffer in my life, among my neighbors, so that I don't have to sin, so that I can obey God and do good for his glory.

That's the kind of attitude that he's portraying here, that when you have demonstrated that you're going to suffer for his sake, then you have ceased from sin, right? Not in the sense that you're sinless, but that you have shown that resolve.

You have shown that that's what it takes to take up the cross and follow Christ. And that mindset, that Jesus calls us to take up the cross and follow him, right? Follow Christ. And that's not the mindset.

That's not only the call of super Christians, right? In fact, that's the call of every single Christian, to take up the cross and follow him. And if we're not willing to take up the cross and follow him, to give our all to follow him, then we are not in a real sense being a Christian.

Because that's what it means to be a Christian, is to take up our cross and follow him. I think this is what the author of Hebrews also has in mind in chapter 12, verse 4.

[15 : 28] He says, In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood, right? I don't think he's telling us, teaching us self-flagellation like, you know, some other ethno-religionists do.

He's saying that you need to bleed in order to stop from sin. I don't think that's what he's saying. I think what he's saying is comparing us to Christ's obedience. He says, Jesus obeyed to the point of shedding his blood on the cross.

And we as believers, the people that the author of Hebrews is addressing, they're persecuted, but they haven't resisted sin to the point of shedding their blood, the point of suffering and dying like Christ did.

That's basically what Peter is calling us to, right? And are we Christians who seek to obey all the way, or are we Christians who only seek to obey to a point?

And I think that's an important question that we have to ask ourselves this evening, because do we obey only until our life is threatened? Do we obey only until our jobs are on the line?

[16 : 31] Do we obey only until we're offended? Do we only obey until our comforts and convenience must be sacrificed? I mean, brothers and sisters, if you're a believer here this evening with you, we are not called to be half-hearted, half-committed Christians.

We're not supposed to be like an out-of-shape couch potato who runs a race, runs the first 50 meters of the race, and is out of breath, and has to stop for a drink. We're supposed to run like a horse that runs and runs and runs and runs at its master's bidding, and doesn't stop.

In fact, the horse will run itself to death until it dies of a heart attack, or dehydration, if the master keeps telling the horse to run. That's how we are to be as Christians.

Not half-heartedly, half-committedly saying, oh no, I'll do it up to a point, until it gets difficult to be a Christian, until it gets hard, until it's impinging on my comfort. No, we say, no, we go and run and run and run, until, even if it means, our suffering and death.

In fact, that's what countless Christians have said throughout the ages, and have given their lives attesting to this truth. So Peter continues in verses 3 to 4.

[17 : 48] For the time that is past, suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do. Living in sensuality, passions, and 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. So, the first five words in that list all refer to some kind of unrestrained desire.

It's food, eating, drinking, sex, it's all common, it's lack of self-control he's referring to. So then, in what areas, in what ways are we lacking self-control?

Are we refusing to follow, take up the cross and follow him? Refusing to suffer even to the point of death? If everything in our lives are not directed to glorifying him and honoring God, then that's lawless idolatry, right?

Peter's talking about here. Because we are putting created things before the creator. We're putting, prioritizing ourselves, our lives, or other people's lives before God and what he's calling us to do.

[18 : 53] That's idolatry. And the language of idolatry, you have to know, like we hear this a lot, I mean a lot of Christian books talk about what are the idols of your heart? So we've become so accustomed to it. But this would have been shocking language to the readers and to the audience in this day and time because it's a thoroughly polytheistic culture.

It's a pluralistic culture. It's a Roman Empire. So, you know what? Everybody's worshipping different gods and you might not like the gods that they worship, but you would never question that they are valid gods.

I mean, that's the polytheistic culture. They're all, they're legitimate. And I think worshipping their own gods can be good for society because it ensures good order. That's what, that's how these people think in the Roman Empire.

But only the Judeo-Christian tradition, Christianity, right, and Islam too, but because that's a heretical offshoot of Christianity, right, but it's only the Judeo-Christian tradition that says certain religious activities are idolatrous.

It's not just, I don't like that. It's not my preference. No, that's wrong. Those are not just, you know, religions that I don't personally have, prefer, but no, they're wrong, they're false religions.

[20 : 05] That the gods that you worship are not just some other gods that I don't like to mention. They are false gods, right? This is a radical statement to say, and as C.S. Lewis writes about in his book Mere Christianity, it's, the question of religion is a lot like arithmetic, right?

There is only one right answer to a sum, and all the other answers are wrong, right? And this is not unlike the religious pluralism that we live in, right?

And you guys may have heard the analogy of the elephant, right? They say that there's a big elephant out in the room, and that elephant is God. Let's say that that elephant is God, not the elephant is God, but imagine that the elephant is God.

And all the people who follow different religions, we're all just blind men who are groping about and feeling different parts of this elephant. So one blind man feels the leg and says, no, the elephant is big and strong and it's hard.

That's what an elephant is. Another blind man touches the trunk and says, no, the elephant is long and it's nimble and it's flexible like a snake, right? And then, and so the pluralist using this analogy says, well, that's how religion is.

[21 : 17] Everybody sees just a part of the truth and we're all worshipping the same God, right? That's what a pluralist would say. The problem with that analogy, the fallacy of that analogy lies in the fact that in order for it to work, somebody has to see the whole elephant, right?

The pluralist is not saying that every religion is just as valid. He's saying that his pluralist religion is superior and more valid because he alone sees the whole picture saying that, oh, you guys are all only worshipping a part and I just happen to recognize it while you don't, right?

So it's not any more tolerant than what we're saying. In fact, I think it's simply more honest for us as Christians do have and have been saying for centuries and millennia that other religions are false religions.

Other gods are not real gods. They are false gods. And this will make us unpopular at times. But it says in verse 4, with respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you.

It's surprising for them that we don't join them. But we shouldn't be surprised that they malign us as a result of that. And this happens even in our day when our vision of good and human flourishing is inconsistent with other people's vision of good and human flourishing.

[22 : 33] When we tell people that a sinful lifestyle is not just as good as a life of holiness. And we will suffer unjustly as a result. But in that, we have to remember that whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

So as to live for the rest of the time, not just some of the time, but the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. And it says in verse 1, we are to arm ourselves with this same way of thinking.

Isn't that a very cool word? I love the fact that Peter used the word arm. It's like an armor that protects us when we have this mindset that whoever has suffered has ceased from sin.

That we're willing to go all the way to say, I will suffer for the sake of the gospel. I will suffer for the sake of Christ. That serves like an armor to protect us from temptation, to protect us when we are maligned.

So that's how God calls to, that we can suffer rather than sin. And the reason that Peter gives further is that God will judge both the living and the dead.

[23 : 45] So that's in verses 5 to 6. Verse 5 says, But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

So that phrase can be confusing for some people as well. But the living and the dead is a literary device called merism. Which basically takes two extremes of a subject or a concept to convey something that is inclusive of everything in between.

So for example, in Genesis, when it says heaven and earth, that means it's everything in creation. That's all creation. It's a merism. Or when Revelation describes God as the alpha and omega or the beginning and end, that means he is occupying eternity, all time.

So it's inclusive of everything. So when he's saying living and the dead, basically it's code for all humanity that's ever lived in the history of mankind. All of humanity, the living and the dead, he is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Right? And this is why Peter says in verse 6, 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.

[24 : 55] This verse can be easily misinterpreted because, in fact, some do misinterpret it. So for example, I think Mormons have a big practice of getting baptized on behalf of the dead or preaching to the dead and things like that.

But I don't think that's what it's referring to here. In order to understand this verse, we have to understand the context in which it was written and that's that pagans of this day didn't understand and didn't teach accountability after death.

So when you died, it was pretty much over. So in that context, they're asking these questions that we began with at the beginning of the message. So look at that high school girl that suffered and died of breast cancer.

Look at that man who suffers at his workplace and dies just like everybody else. They just died. What are we going to do about that? And they critiqued Christianity in this way.

What good is Christianity? When you restrain yourself and live this holy life and have nothing to show for it. They just died like everybody else. In this context, what Peter is telling us is that it's not over when they die because the God who called them to holiness is going to judge both the living and the dead.

[26 : 11] So the fact that they die doesn't mean that that is final and that that is over. The fact that they're never going to get vindication. No, in death they will be vindicated because they will be raised with Christ in their resurrection and because God will ultimately judge all humanity that's ever existed in the course of history according to his righteousness.

And that's John Calvin puts it this way. He says, we see that death does not hinder Christ from being always our defender. It is a remarkable consolation to the godly that death itself brings no loss to their salvation.

Even if Christ does not appear as deliverer in this life, yet his redemption is not void or without effect. For his power extends even to the dead.

That God's power, God's redemption extends even to the dead. And that's why our suffering and obedience in this life will not be for naught. We will be rewarded and that's why we can suffer rather than sin because we know that God will ultimately judge both the living and the dead.

And we are assured of this because as we talked about last week because as verse 1 starts here, since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh. Christ suffered in the same way while he lived in the flesh on earth in his incarnation, he suffered and died in the same way and now he is exalted above the heavens with all authority and power submitted to him under his feet.

[27 : 42] And that gives assurance, that reminds us as we love God and love Christ who died for us and saved us, this is that we have a goal to look forward to, we have an end to look forward to knowing that we will ultimately be vindicated.

Let me close by reading an excerpt from one of my favorite hymns, it's called Be Still My Soul. It says, Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side.

Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain. Leave to thy God to order and provide. In every change he faithful will remain.

Be still my soul, thy best, thy heavenly friend. Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we do want to be fully sold out, obedient believers. In fact, Lord, we acknowledge that that is the only way to be a believer is to completely entrust ourselves to you.

[29 : 13] So we now ask for your help. Fill us with your spirit. convict us so we may repent of ways in which we may have settled and sinned.

Forgive us for balking at the face of suffering and failing to obey you. And now help us by your power to suffer rather than sin knowing that you are the righteous judge.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.