

Living *for* God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 3:8–12; Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 4:1, 2; Rom. 6:1–11; 2 Sam. 11:4; 1 Pet. 4:3–11.*

Memory Text: “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (*1 Peter 3:12, NKJV*).

The Bible writers knew the reality of human sinfulness. How could they not? The world reeks of it. Besides, they knew their own sinfulness, as well (*see 1 Tim. 1:15*). They knew just how serious it was, too; after all, look at what it took—the cross of Jesus Christ—to solve the problem of sin. That’s how deep and pervasive the reality of sin really is.

But the Bible writers also were greatly aware of the power of Christ to change our lives and make us new people in Him.

This week, Peter continues on this same track: the kind of new life that Christians will have in Christ after they have given themselves to Him and have been baptized. In fact, the change will be so great that others will notice it. Peter doesn’t say that this change will always be easy; indeed, he talks about the need to suffer in the flesh (*1 Pet. 4:1*) in order to have the victory that we are promised.

Peter continues a theme that pervades the Bible, the reality of love in the life of a believer in Jesus. “Love,” he writes, “will cover a multitude of sins” (*1 Pet. 4:8, NKJV*). When we love, when we forgive, we are reflecting what Jesus has done and still does for us.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 29.

Being of “One Mind”

Read 1 Peter 3:8–12. What point is Peter making here about how Christians should live? What does he repeat that he already wrote about in 1 Peter 2:20, 21?

Peter starts out telling them all to be of “one mind” (*homophrones*). He’s not talking about uniformity, in the sense of everyone having to think, do, and believe *exactly* the same way. The best example of this idea is found in 1 Corinthians 12:1–26. In these verses, Paul points out that the body is made up of parts. There are hands and eyes, but still together each part makes up the whole body. In the same way, the church is made up of individuals with different spiritual gifts. But all believers are joined together with the same purpose and spirit. They work together to form a united community.

Of course, such unity is not always so easy to achieve. The history of the Christian church sadly has shown this fact to be true all too often. So Peter warns believers against not agreeing with one another. Then he tells his readers how they can show this Christian ideal of being united.

For example, Christians should act with sympathy (*1 Pet. 3:8*). Sympathy means that when one Christian suffers, then others will suffer with him or her; when another Christian rejoices, other Christians will rejoice with him or her (*compare 1 Cor. 12:26*). Sympathy enables us to see the perspective of others, an important step along the way to unity. Peter then says we should “love one another” (*1 Pet. 3:8, NIV*). Jesus Himself said that the way you can recognize His true disciples is that they love one another (*John 13:35*). Furthermore, Peter says that Christians will have a tender heart (*1 Pet. 3:8*). They will have compassion for one another’s difficulties and failings.

“Crucify self; esteem others better than yourselves. Thus you will be brought into oneness with Christ. Before the heavenly universe, and before the church and the world, you will bear unmistakable evidence that you are God’s sons and daughters. God will be glorified in the example that you set.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 188.

How often do we do what Peter says here, especially the part about “not returning evil for evil” (*1 Pet. 3:9, NKJV*)? What kind of death to self must we experience in order to follow these words? How can we have that kind of death? (*See Gal. 2:20.*)

To Suffer in the Flesh

Yes, Jesus died for our sins, and our hope of salvation is found only in Him, in His righteousness, which covers us and causes us to be accounted righteous in the eyes of God. Because of Jesus, you are “accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

But God’s grace doesn’t end just with a pronouncement, a declaration that our sins are forgiven. God gives the power to overcome our sins, as well.

Read 1 Peter 3:18, 21 and 1 Peter 4:1, 2, as well as Romans 6:1–11. What is the link between suffering and victory over sin?

There is a small Greek word used in 1 Peter 3:18 that emphasizes the comprehensive nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. It is the word *hapax*, which means “once for all.” Peter uses *hapax* to emphasize the comprehensive nature of the suffering of Jesus and His death for us.

The phrase “forasmuch then” in 1 Peter 4:1 links 1 Peter 4:1, 2 with what has just been said in 1 Peter 3:18–22. In these earlier verses, Peter points out that Christ suffered for our sins in order that He might bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18) and that “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21).

Baptism, then, is perhaps the best context against which to understand Peter’s words, “for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Pet. 4:1). By baptism, the Christian participates in the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus; the Christian has made a choice to “live for the rest of [his or her] earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:2, NRSV). This can be accomplished only by the daily surrender of self to the Lord and the crucifying of “the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24, NKJV).

In Romans 6:1–11, Paul says that at baptism Christians are united with Jesus in His death and resurrection. At baptism, we have died to sin. We need now to make that death to sin real in our lives. Paul’s words, “reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11), give the secret of the Christian’s life.

When was the last time you found yourself “suffering in the flesh” in order to fight against sin? What does your answer say to you about your Christian life?

Born Again

In Christ, we have a new life, a new beginning. We are born again. If this means anything, especially for those who accepted Christ after childhood, it must mean that they will live differently from the way they did before. Who hasn't heard some incredible stories of those who, having been in the world, experienced a radical transformation because of Jesus and His saving grace?

Indeed, after talking about the death to self and the new life we have in Jesus (having been baptized into His death and resurrection), Peter then talks about the kind of changes one will experience.

Read 1 Peter 4:3–6. What changes will happen in a person's life, and how do others respond to those changes?

The terms Peter used that relate to alcohol abuse are *excess of wine* (KJV), *drunkenness* (NRSV), *revellings, banquetings* (KJV), and *carousing* (NRSV). To use modern phraseology, one's partying days are over. In fact, according to Peter, the change that a Christian experiences should be great enough so that those who knew the Christian in his or her past life will "think it strange" that he or she no longer takes part in those same dissipations (1 Pet. 4:4, NKJV). Thus, we can see here a chance to witness to unbelievers without having to preach. A godly Christian life can be more of a witness than all the sermons in the world.

What does Peter say in these texts about judgment?

Here, as elsewhere in the Bible (John 5:29, 2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 9:27), Peter makes it clear that one day there will be a judgment for the deeds done "in the flesh" (1 Pet. 4:2). When Peter talks about the gospel being "preached also to those who are dead" (1 Pet. 4:6, NKJV), he is saying that even in the past, people who are now dead had, when they were alive, an opportunity to know the saving grace of God. Thus, God can justly judge them, as well.

As a believer in Jesus, how differently do you live now from the way you did when you didn't believe in Him? What difference has Jesus made in your life?

Sins of the Flesh

In listing the wrong things that people had done in the past and that they stopped doing after becoming believers in Jesus, Peter also lists what could be called “sexual sins.”

Read 1 Peter 4:3 again. What else does Peter list there?

Two words have a distinctive sexual connotation: *lewdness* (*aselgia*, which means “sensuality”) and *lusts* (*epithumia*, which means “lust” or “desire”).

Yet, it is all too easy for Christians to give the wrong impression about sexuality. The Bible is not against sex. On the contrary, God created sex, and He gave sexuality to humankind to be a great blessing. Sexuality was there in Eden, at the beginning. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (*Gen. 2:24, 25*). It was to be one of the key ingredients that would unite a husband and wife in a lifelong commitment that forms the best background against which to raise children. And this closeness and intimacy would be a reflection of what God seeks with His people, as well (*see Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16, Hosea 1–3*).

In its correct place, between a man and a woman in marriage, sexuality is a profound blessing; in the wrong place, in the wrong context, it can be one of the greatest destructive forces in the world. The here-and-now devastating *consequences* of these sins are beyond human calculation. Who among us doesn’t know about lives ruined through the abuse of this wonderful gift?

What do the following texts have in common? 2 Sam. 11:4, 1 Cor. 5:1, Gen. 19:5, 1 Cor. 10:8.

Of course, one doesn’t need the Bible to know stories of the pain and suffering that these sins have caused.

Yet, we must be careful, too. Certainly, sins of this nature can have powerfully negative effects on people, and society tends to frown upon them. But sin is sin, and Christ’s death covers sexual sins, as well. As a Christian, you should be careful, especially in this sensitive area, to make sure that you “ ‘first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye’ ” (*Luke 6:42, NIV*).

Love Covers All

Even in the time of Peter, Christians lived with the expectation of the soon return of Jesus and the end of this present world. We know this because in 1 Peter 4:7 he writes: “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (*NKJV*). In other words, be ready for the end. In one very real sense, too, the “end,” as far as each one of us is concerned, is never more than a moment after we die. We close our eyes in death, and—whether thousands of years pass or just a few days—the next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus and the end of this world.

According to Peter, because the “end of all things” is at hand, how should Christians live? See 1 Pet. 4:7–11.

Besides being serious and watchful in prayer, Christians are to “maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8, *NRSV*).

What does that mean? How does love cover sin? A key is found in the text Peter is quoting, Proverbs 10:12, which reads: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (*NKJV*). When we love one another, we more readily and easily forgive those who hurt us, who offend us. Christ’s love leads Him to forgive us; our love should lead us to forgive others. Where love abounds, small offenses, and even some large ones, more readily are overlooked and forgotten.

Peter was certainly expressing the same idea as Jesus and Paul, who say that the whole law is summed up in the obligation to love God with our whole hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves (*Matt. 22:34–39, Rom. 13:8–10*).

Peter also urges Christians to be hospitable. The Second Coming may be near, but Christians should not withdraw from social relationships because of it. Finally, when Christians speak, they must do so as those who are speaking the words of God. In other words, the seriousness of the time calls for serious communication about spiritual truths.

“Love will cover a multitude of sins.” Who has sinned against you? How can you reveal the love needed in order to “cover” that sin? Why is it to your own advantage to do so?

Further Thought: “The love that suffers long and is kind will not magnify an indiscretion into an unpardonable offense, neither will it make capital of others’ misdoings. The Scriptures plainly teach that the erring are to be treated with forbearance and consideration. If the right course is followed, the apparently obdurate heart may be won to Christ. The love of Jesus covers a multitude of sins. His grace never leads to the exposing of another’s wrongs, unless it is a positive necessity.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 267. Think, for instance, of how Jesus handled the woman caught in adultery (*John 8:1–11*). We usually look at this as a story of Christ’s grace to a fallen woman, and that’s true. But there’s a deeper element, as well. In confronting the religious leaders who brought the woman to Him, why did Jesus write down the “guilty secrets of their own lives” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 461) in the dirt, where the words could instantly be obliterated? Why didn’t He openly accuse them, declaring before everyone what He knew about their own sins, which might have been just as bad as or even worse than that woman’s? Instead, Jesus showed them that He knew their hypocrisy and evil, and yet was not going to expose it to others. Perhaps this was Jesus’ own way of reaching out to these men, showing them He knew their purposes and thus giving them an opportunity to be saved. What a powerful lesson for us when we need to confront those who have sinned.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the question of unity as opposed to uniformity. Are there some areas in which we need to be in complete unity of thought in order to function as a church? If so, what are they, and how can we find this needed uniformity? In contrast, what are areas in which a diversity of opinion is not harmful but, in fact, could be helpful?
- 2 What has been your own experience with the concept of the need to “suffer in the flesh” in order to cease from sin? What does that mean? Does God’s power in our lives to change us mean automatically that we don’t suffer in the flesh in order to have victory? If not, why not?
- 3 Look around at the devastation that alcohol has produced in so many lives. What can we do as a church to help others see the danger of this drug? What can we do to keep our young people aware of what a mistake it would be even to experiment with a substance that can do them such terrible harm?