

Sermon for Pentecost 9
August 6, 2017

“Live for God”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from the One who gave you new life through baptism, Jesus our exalted Lord. Amen.

Dear Christians, is being a Christian easy or hard? Can it be both? On the one hand, it's easy to be a Christian because God blesses you, and you have the peace of Christ. A Christian life is a good life. On the other hand, you follow Christ, who was hated, persecuted, and murdered. Jesus made no bones about it – if he's your master, then you as his servant can expect the same treatment. “If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you,” he explained. Christians expect to suffer, and that's hard.

We call that the theology of the cross. In so many ways God hides his glory, and therefore, also our glory as part of his Church, is often hidden with Christ waiting for the Last Day to be revealed. The theology of the cross means that Christians, like Christ, expect to suffer on earth before entering the glory of heaven.

Peter writes for us today about one of the reasons that causes suffering for a Christian—the fact that Christians live differently than non-Christians.

We're first going to look at the Law that Peter preaches to us. “because Christ suffered in flesh, arm yourselves with the same mindset, because the one who has suffered in flesh is done with sin.” In Christ, you are done with sin. Do you remember what Jesus said on the cross? “Tetelestai!” It is finished.

“2Do this so that you no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh for human desires but for God's will.” That's the huge difference between Christians and non-Christians – the goal of a Christian's life is to live for God.

“3Indeed, you have already spent enough time in the past doing what the Gentiles want to do: living in unbridled immorality, lusts, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and disgusting idolatry.” You have already spent enough time sinning. That stings doesn't it? You have spent time sinning, and not only does that mean you've done horrible things -we've got a list there that nails our culture as well as it did the Greek, gentile culture- but that also means that all the time you spent sinning you weren't living for God. But living for God is the goal of a Christian, not living for human desires.

But do you ever feel like, if you don't join in sinning, you're missing out?

If you say no to the drunken party, you don't get to hang out with you friends. If you say no to lust, you trade a pleasurable night for possibly a lonely one. If you say no to unbridled immorality, you might miss out on memories that your friends will talk about for years to come. Yeah, you're sinful nature hates the idea of missing out on sin.

Do you ever feel like, if you don't join in sinning, you might lose your friends entirely and get made fun of?

Peter says it's likely. “They are surprised that you do not plunge into the same overflowing river of filth with them, and they slander you.” It makes no sense to the sinful nature (which is all that a non-Christian has to work with) that you would ever say no to something that seems like

it'll be fun. It's viewed as a surprise at first, a curiosity, but often turns into slander later – making fun of the strange, prudish, boring, strict Christians.

All of those pull on you as a Christian, trying to bring you down and get you to go back to spending your time living for human desires, and not for God.

So why do you want to view your time as a precious commodity that you only want to spend for God? So why would you be happy to suffer because you're a Christian and you say no to sin and other people don't like that and your own sinful nature hates it too?

Verse one starts with the word “therefore” which is a long and important-looking word in English. In Greek it's only three letters long, but it packs a big punch. It's a connector word that answers our “why” question – you're gonna say no to bad human desires, you're not going to dive into the river of filth because of what we just said at the end of chapter three.

So at the end of chapter three, Peter reminds you: Christ suffered once for sins in our place. The righteous one suffered for the unrighteous ones. You have a connection to Christ, by which you are saved. It's baptism. When you were baptized, water was applied to you by God's command, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and you were given the guarantee that your conscience is clean before God through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The same Jesus who is exalted at the right hand of God.

Those who live for human desires “will have to give an account to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” You don't have to wonder if God is really serious that you need Jesus to save you from sin. It's true that God's glory is often hidden – we have the theology of the cross – and that it seems like people get away with all kinds of bad things, all the time. The judgment is real, but not yet.

But the coming judgment is the reason why, for people of the past who have now died, that the gospel message was preached to them. No matter how the world has judged Christians of the past, they are judged holy in spirit and are alive with God now in heaven.

It's the same reason that the gospel message was preached to you, because the judgment is coming, and God wants you to be ready. God wants you to be saved.

“The end of all things is near.” That judgment is always soon. Peter could say that around AD60, and it's still soon in AD2017. God's judgment is the very next step in his plan.

So how much time do you have left? Some of you here today might think, “I've only got, at most, 10 years left on earth to serve God.” Some of you might have only 30 or 40 years to go. Some might only have another 80 or 90 years left to serve God.

Or we might all have one day.

How can we go about living for God with whatever time is left before the end of the world? Peter gives us three principles for using our time wisely.

First, “Have sound judgment.” That means your thinking is accurate. You know right from wrong, and you know what's right and what's wrong in the situation you're in – because you know God's will revealed in the Bible and how to apply it.

Second, “Be self-controlled for the sake of your prayers.” Rather than panicking, or despairing, or grumbling, or complaining you know how to have a serious, heart-to-heart talk with God in faith.

Third, “Love each other constantly.” Peter says that to Christians about other Christians. Peter knows that living for God is nearly impossible without a team effort – a congregation working

together. Members of a congregation who love each other constantly forgive their fellow members, don't hold grudges, and can continue supporting each other to live for God.

Dear Christians, the end of all things is near. According to the theology of the cross, we know that we haven't reached the end yet, and that we're going to continue to struggle and suffer until the end arrives. With the time we have left, however long that is, let us with urgency live for God, with sound judgement, self-control, prayers, and love for our fellow believers as we wait for Christ, our life, to return in glory. Amen.

Text: *I Peter 4:1-8*

Though we live in a sinful world, believers strive to leave sin behind and live for God.

Therefore, because Christ suffered in flesh, arm yourselves with the same mindset, because the one who has suffered in flesh is done with sin. ²Do this so that you no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh for human desires but for God's will. ³Indeed, you have already spent enough time in the past doing what the Gentiles want to do: living in unbridled immorality, lusts, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and disgusting idolatry.

⁴For this reason, they are surprised that you do not plunge into the same overflowing river of filth with them, and they slander you. ⁵They will have to give an account to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶In fact, it was for this reason that the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, so that they might be judged the way people are judged in flesh and that they might live the way God lives in spirit.

⁷The end of all things is near. So have sound judgment and be self-controlled for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, love each other constantly, because love covers a multitude of sins.