

How to Live for the Will of God

- 1 Peter 4:1-6
- Peter continues his encouragement to elect exiles who are suffering because they are saints. They are reviled and persecuted and maligned because they follow Christ and do not participate any longer in the human passions that they absolutely lived for in the past. Peter writes not just to give them encouragement and hope, but to give them a strategy. He doesn't offer platitudes but gives them a biblical plan. Let's look at this passage under three points: A New Mindset, A New Purpose, and A Settled Promise.
- **A New Mindset (verse 1)**
- This is another difficult verse and one that has been twisted and turned into false teaching, so let's make sure we understand what Peter is saying. He starts with two words that force us to look back in his letter. "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh." Or, "Because Christ suffered in the flesh." This takes us back to 3:18, "For Christ also suffered once for sins." That verse is speaking of Jesus' death on the cross. The passion of Christ, the suffering of Christ that was done once for sins was his death. Then he says, "Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Same way of thinking. What way of thinking did Jesus' have when he suffered? That takes us back to 2:21-23. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." Arm yourselves with that way of thinking.
- Too many Christians live with a peacetime mentality. And it is far too easy just to coast or drift through life. But there is a battle raging and we are in it. The most vulnerable person in any battle is the person who does not even acknowledge that there *is* a battle. So, Peter says we are to arm ourselves. Not with guns but with right thinking. He said it in chapter 1:13, "Preparing your minds for action." Take up arms, prepare your mind for action. Why? So that you will cease from sin. Jesus had no sin to die to, so he did not cease from sinning. No, he suffered in the flesh; he died and was finished with our sin. "Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Jesus' one act of suffering put an end to sin. But, you say, we still sin! Yes, but we are to arm ourselves with the biblical truth that "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24) And that we have died with Christ! And have been risen with Christ! Paul wrote, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ...Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions." (Romans 6:6-8,12)
- We will never cease to sin while in these mortal bodies, but the Bible tells us we can have a mindset that we will cease *from* sin. We are dead to it. We joke around with people and say to someone who doesn't like the same team that we do in sports, "I'm dead to you." But let's not joke around with sin. Let's tell it, "I am dead to you." That is because we have...
- **A New Purpose (verses 2-3)**
- The Lord of the Rings movies began with Galadriel saying, "The world is changed." And we know what Tolkien was going for there, but the world is not changed! It is always the same and there is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon said. But *we* have changed. We are not the same anymore. Peter writes to the Gentiles who have come to Christ to encourage them that they have a completely different purpose. They once lived solely to satisfy the flesh and all its desires, and they may have winced as they read the descriptive but not exhaustive list: sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry." Sounds like Friday and Saturday night at most college campuses! But

those times are past, and I like the translation here: “suffices.” It is enough! What you did in the past is in the past and it is over. Enough of that! There is hope here and not condemnation. Peter reminds us that our purpose is no longer to see how much we can satisfy the flesh, medicate our pain, escape from reality, or bury our faces in the cesspool of the world. We have a new purpose. I remember being in Kenya many years ago when one of the men on the trip was walking through the Kibera slum. His worst nightmare happened when he lost his footing and fell into the side ditch, filled with raw sewage. Charlie managed to spare the Bible he was carrying by holding it over his head, but the rest of him was covered. When he got back to the room where we were staying, I smelled him before I saw him. Charlie knew as soon as he hit that cesspool that he didn’t want to be there. We have all been in the cesspool. Maybe ours was not filled with raw sewage, but cesspools come in all sizes and shapes and substances. Greed can suck us in and hold onto us. Unforgiveness. Lust. Even self-righteousness, with proud hearts praying, “Thank God that I am not like other men.” The real danger being in a cesspool is when we get numb to it and don’t really care anymore about getting out.

- Here’s the bad news. Sin always leads us into a pit, and sin is always going to be part of the story. Here’s the good news. Sin is not the end of the story. God is. He can rescue you and me out of the deepest pit. Corrie ten Boom said, “There is no pit that is so deep that God is not deeper still.”
- Warning: You may well be in a pit and not realize it because your heart is dull of feeling and hearing. If Charlie had not thrown his clothes away and showered “Kibera” off of him, he would have eventually gotten used to the smell. But nobody around him would have.
- Our new purpose is no longer human passions but the will of God. It is a daily goal and a life goal: to align my life with God’s purposes. To live according to his will, not mine. Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” On earth. And in my life.
- Edmund Clowney wrote, “They (these elect exiles) now knew a better way, a way that their scornful friends could not imagine. Fervent love for brothers and sisters in Christ had replaced lust, alert awareness of the times had replaced drunken stupor; but, above all, the joyful adoration of the risen Lord had replaced the folly of idolatry.”
- How much these former pagans wished they could go back and erase the years they spent living for the flesh. How much I wish the same! But here’s the thing. We cannot ever go back but we can always go forward. Each day is a new opportunity to live for the will of God. We wake up every morning and the Lord says, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Ps. 118:24) That leads us to...

- **A Settled Promise (verses 4-6)**

- Peter reminds us that even though we live with a new purpose, those around us who are still living our old lifestyle are surprised that we will not join them anymore. If they see even a hint of wobbliness in our walk, they will do everything in their power, which is also the power of the enemy, to pull us back in. Or back down. And you know the old saying, it is a lot easier to pull someone down into the ditch than to pull someone up out of it. So we arm ourselves day by day with this new way of thinking. I am dead to sin and alive in Christ. If our old friends see resoluteness in us because of Christ, then they will malign us. They will heap abuse on us. They will revile us. The word literally means they will blaspheme. So if we are to have the mind of Christ when this happens, what do we do? We have already seen it! “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” (1 Peter 2:23) Jesus loved them while they heaped abuse on him. The only way we can do that is to entrust ourselves to him who judges justly. Peter says to the exiles in effect, “Be encouraged! No matter how long their abuse lasts, no matter how long they live, seeming to have everything and do whatever they want without repercussions, God will not forget. God will judge the living and the dead.” You see that in verse 5? They, the ones who malign you because you serve Christ, will give account to him who judges justly, to combine that thought with 2:23. The living and the dead does not mean the alive in Christ and the dead in sin. When Christ returns, the living and the dead will be judged. Some who are alive will

belong to Jesus, and some who are dead will belong to Jesus. The others will not. But they will all be judged. Then Peter says something that has confused many.

- “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.” The dead who are preached to are not unbelievers who are given a second chance. No! Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” No, the dead here refers to Christians who have died. Remember, first century Christians were very concerned and confused about believer they knew who had died and Jesus had not come back yet. Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Thessalonica to mainly address that issue. Peter is doing the same here. The settled promise is for those who have died in Christ, and their brothers and sisters in Christ who are concerned for them. Peter says they may be judged by the pagans around them who are saying things like, ‘Ha, where is your savior now? Where did Matthew or Lydia go? They followed your so called resurrected Jesus, and now they are dead! And for what? They could have enjoyed life like we do but they wasted the last years following a myth.’ But Matthew and Lydia will live in the spirit the way God does. And to all the rest of you, if we die before Christ returns for us, we too will live again. We have died with Christ and we will live again with Christ. Saints, this is not just something we read at funerals, but something we remind ourselves every day about THAT Day!
- Let’s put on a new mindset. Let’s live for a new purpose. Let’s rest in a settled promise.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another