

Our Choices: Living for God

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from 1 Peter 3, verse 18, and chapter 4, verses 1-11, as printed in your liturgy.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but being made alive in the Spirit.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry.

[1 : 19] They are surprised that you do not join them in their recklessness, wild living, and they heap abuse on you, but they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

For this is the reason the gospel is preached, even to those that are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard of the Spirit.

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and sober of mind, so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

[2 : 23] To him be the glory, the power, and the power forever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you so much, Will. Good morning, Christ Church.

It is really good to be back here with our church family today. If I haven't met you yet, I work here.

And my name is Jonathan, and I've been away for a little bit with our extended family.

We visited 45 family members in Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. And so that was a great respite, but, you know, it's good to sleep in your own bed. And we're glad to be back home as well. So, since I've been gone, has anything happened in the world? Any new stuff going on in the news cycle? I don't know. I haven't really been paying much attention.

But I know enough to know that we're living in some precarious and unpredictable times. And we're going to be praying about that later on during this service.

[3 : 24] But as, you know, as we open up this letter from one of Jesus' apostles, his chief apostle, Peter, we're reminded that Peter was living in some precarious and unpredictable times.

Right? He was writing this letter in the middle of the first century in the Roman Empire, a time and a place that was, if you can believe it, way more topsy-turvy than the time that we're living in.

And here's this Christian, this leader in the church, who's giving us incredible wisdom about how to live in precarious and unpredictable times.

And so, as usual, what Peter does is he draws our attention to this word that he uses in verse 6. It's the word, the gospel.

That's the focus of this entire letter. It's the gospel, the good news of what God the Father has done through his Son and by his Spirit to save human beings, to redeem his creation.

[4 : 30] And Peter wants us to think, in this passage today, he wants us to think about the gospel in relation to three critical aspects of our lives.

He wants us to think about our desire. He wants us to think about suffering. And he wants us to think about Christian community. And so that's what we're going to talk about.

The gospel and desire. The gospel and suffering. And the gospel and Christian community. You ready to dive back in? I've got to kind of relearn how to preach, so I'm going to need your help today.

Can you guys help me out a little bit? Let's talk about the gospel and desire. And I'll start with verse 1. It says, Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because those who have suffered in their bodies are done with sin.

As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. You see, the apostle Peter, he's writing to a group of people like the one that's gathered here today.

[5 : 32] And he's engaging them with this question that you heard in verse 2. It's in there. It says, How are you going to live the rest of your earthly lives? Whether you're 9 years old or 90 years old here today, all of us have a limited number of days with breath in our lungs and life in our bodies.

And, you know, none of us knows how much time we have left to live our earthly lives. And I've been thinking about that quite a lot this week because my mom passed away on August 2nd. That's the anniversary of her death. And she was 50 years old. And I'm turning 46 this month. And as I think about that, you know, how much longer do I have to live?

I have no clue. And neither do you. I mean, maybe I've got four years, four months, four weeks. Who knows? Maybe I've got 10, 20, 30, 40 more years to go.

But how many of us know how much longer we have to live our earthly lives? Anybody know that? And so Peter's asking us this question, how are you going to live the rest of your earthly lives?

[6 : 42] And what he does is he says underneath all the apparently endless options of how we could live, he says there's really only two ways to live. And did you see that contrast in verse 2?

He says on the one hand you have sinful human desires. And on the other hand you have the will of God. He makes the same contrast in verse 6.

He says you've got life according to human standards and you've got life according to God. And what's the difference between these two life systems, these two operating systems?

What's the difference between their structures of motivation and volition? Well, I want us to take a closer look. This word in verse 2 that Peter uses when he talks about desire, it's this great word called epithumia.

Epithumia is not just desire, epithumia is over desire. Epithumia is inordinate desire, disordered desire, desires that are misaligned with the will and the desire of God.

[7 : 51] And Peter gives us some examples of epithumia, of over desire in verse 3. Look at it with me. He says, For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry.

And for Peter, this is a list that basically sums up the dominant paradigm of the prevailing culture. This is how the majority of Greco-Roman, Gentile, pagan culture was living.

This is the way of life that was accepted and normal and expected. And notice how Peter begins and ends his list. What's the first word and the last word he uses? The first word he uses is this word debauchery or in classical Greek it's often translated brutality.

Brutality. To be brutal is to be harsh. It's to be cruel. It's to be heartless. It's like it's Twitter, right? Brutality is when you cast off restraint and self-control and you give full license to unbridled, shameless self-interest.

[9 : 07] Anybody ever done that in the past 24 hours at home with your family? Brutality is when you treat people as an object to be used rather than as a creature made in the image of God to be cared for.

Brutality is when you relate to other people in a way that debases and dehumanizes them. Does that connect a little bit with how the dominant operating system of the culture that Peter's talking about?

And then notice the final word, the climactic word in this series that he gives us. He says the cause of all of our human vices is idolatry.

And idolatry is when you turn a good thing into an ultimate thing. Idolatry is when you take a created thing and you elevate it and you put it at the center where only God deserves to be.

And what Peter's doing is he's looking out about him at Greco-Roman culture and the way that people have elevated the money god Mammon.

[10:18] And they've elevated the sex goddess Aphrodite. And they've elevated the power god Mars and the political god Caesar. Right?

And Peter's saying, look, if you're looking to these things, if you're looking to these idols, expecting them to do for you what only the living God can do for you, if you take all of your hope and you load it into your money and into the markets, if you load all of your hope into romance and sex, if you put all of your hope into your career and your achievements that can garner social power for you, if you're looking to politics and to the state or to the comfort and pleasure that food and drink can give you, Peter says you're going to have a broken heart.

If you're looking to any of these things to give you your sense of identity and belonging and meaning and purpose, it's going to break your heart. Why?

Because it's contrary to your human nature. It's contrary to how you were made. You were not made to put created things in the center where the creator is supposed to be.

Amen? Amen? Amen? So, what happens when we live against our human nature? I was reading a book a few weeks ago on a very hot beach in Florida, and I came across this sentence, and I just want to read it for you.

[11:55] This line stood out to me. It says, A man thought he could fly, so he jumped off the top of a ten-story building, and as he fell past the fifth floor, flapping his arms in the air, he was heard to say, So far, so good.

So far, so good. When we live according to our fallen human desires, when we give ourselves to over-desire, to debauchery, brutality, idolatry, we're not actually liberating ourselves in the way that we think we are.

We're destroying ourselves. We're jumping off that building, and we're not flying. We're falling. And Peter's telling us that if you want to be free, if you want to be truly liberated, it's not about living according to your human desires.

It's about living according to the will and the desire of God. And he says, When the gospel comes into our lives, when we become Christians, that means that you've been transferred from one life to another life, from one operating system to another operating system, and you are no longer living for human desires.

You're living for the will of God. Just to remind you, back in chapter 1, verse 3 of this letter, Peter says, God in his great mercy has given you new birth into a living hope.

[13:19] And later on in that chapter, verse 23, he says, You've been born again by the imperishable seed of the living and enduring word of God. And what he means when he says that, he says, When the gospel comes into our lives, and when you experience the new birth, when you're born again, born not physically, but spiritually, born not from your parents, but from God, you realize that God the Father has given you a new nature.

He's given you a new life. He's given you new desires. He's given you a new will. He's given you a new power to live according to the will of God. Right?

When you've been regenerated by the grace of God and by the power of God, and you've been united to the resurrected Christ, you've been filled by the very spirit of God, it kind of starts to dawn on you.

And you begin to say with Peter, You know what? I think that, I think I've spent more than enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do.

That's like a line that sort of comes across your heart. You say, You know, Now that the Holy Spirit's living in me, I think I've spent more than enough time doing what my culture says is normal and acceptable.

[14:43] And you begin to say with Peter, You know, I want to be done with sin. Do you hear Peter say that? He says, People who are done with sin, I want to be done with brutality. I want to be done with idolatry.

I want to be done with over-desire and self-interest. I want to be done with me, myself, and I. If I have any more days to live my life, I want to live the rest of my earthly life, not for these sinful human desires, but for the desire of God.

I want to live not for my will, I want to live for the will of God. And the question Peter's putting to us is, Has this happened for you? Have you experienced this vast difference between these two totally different operating systems?

Peter says when the power of the gospel comes in, it goes all the way down into our desires. It goes all the way down into our human nature, into the warp and the woof of how we are made as creatures in the image of God.

And it moves into those structures of motivation, those structures of volition, and it removes the old and it brings in the new so that we want to live the rest of our earthly human lives for the will of God.

[16:00] That's our new desire. Does that make sense? The gospel and desire, that's something Peter wants us to think about. But he also is talking here about the gospel and suffering.

This is a great theme of this letter, actually is how to suffer well, how to suffer as a Christian. And I want to bring you back to verse 1.

Peter introduces this great idea. He says, Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because those who have suffered in their bodies are done with sin.

What is Peter saying? Well, he's saying that the Son of God, when he stepped out of eternity into time, when he came from heaven to earth and he took on human flesh, he did that with a certain attitude.

He did that with a certain mentality, knowing that this was not going to be a walk in the park. Right? Jesus knew that in the incarnation, when he became a human being, that he was entering into a war zone.

[17:15] That he was going to be living in this battlefield. And that he was going into this cosmic conflict where the powers and principalities are arrayed against the living God.

And he knew that he was coming into a situation where humanity had tragically given itself up and over to these desires that led to brutality and idolatry and all kind of destructive self-interest.

And so what did Jesus do? Peter says he armed himself. Jesus armed himself. And of course, you know, this isn't the way that the world is supposed to be. God the Father made the world good and he made it pleasant and he made it wonderful.

But the world's fallen, hasn't it? The world has become this harsh and cruel place. This place of unbridled, shameless brutality that requires you, if you're going to be holy like Jesus, to be armed and to be equipped with a certain mentality and a certain attitude.

You see that? Jesus needed a spiritual armor to carry out his mission. And what was that mindset? What was that attitude that Jesus armed himself with?

[18:33] I think it was basically this. When Jesus came into the world, he said, if I'm going to come and live the way that the Father wants me to live, if I'm going to come and be a nonconformist to all the ways of this world, if I'm going to come and I'm going to live not for me, myself, and I, like everybody else, if I'm going to come and live not for human desires and according to human standards, if I'm going to come and rather submit myself to God's desires and live a life in obedience to the will of God, if I'm going to live, Jesus says, as if sin has absolutely nothing to do with me, as if self-centeredness is not going to be a part of my life, then I'm probably going to suffer.

then people probably aren't going to get what I'm trying to do. And Jesus says, living to, living that way, living to obey God rather than sin is going to cause me to suffer in my body.

That's what Peter says. That's the attitude. That's the mentality that Jesus armed himself with. Are you tracking with me so far? Now, I just want to make a little aside here because some Christians so overemphasize the divinity of Jesus and so underestimate the humanity of Jesus that we think it was easy for him to live a righteous life.

That, anybody ever had a conversation like that where it's like, yeah, of course Jesus, he was an obedient and sinless person because he's the son of God. But he was a fully human being. And the full humanity of Jesus meant that he actually was tempted in every way just as we are. He was tempted at every turn to live for himself and his desires, right?

[20:26] To take the easy path of least resistance, to sit loose to his calling from the Father. And because of these, this constant barrage of temptations from the very beginning of his ministry in the wilderness all the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus constantly had to decide that he was

going to obey God.

He constantly had to decide, you know what, I would rather suffer than sin. And repeatedly throughout his life, Jesus deliberately had to embrace his calling by God the Father even though it would mean suffering for him.

Even though it would mean, you know, if I do this, I'm going to be misunderstood. I'm going to be maligned. I'm going to be mocked. I'm going to be rejected. I'm going to even be tortured to death. And Peter's commendation to us is that we need to arm ourselves with that same attitude. If we're going to live the Christian life, we've got to have the same attitude that Jesus had.

Why? Because he says in verse four, they, the Greco-Roman, Gentile, pagan family members and friends and coworkers that you have, they're going to be surprised that you're not joining in to their reckless, wild living and they're going to heap abuse on you.

[21 : 54] They're going to malign you. We'll talk more about that next week, but basically what Peter's saying is that when you decide that you're going to be a non-conformist like Jesus, when you decide that you're not going to go along with self-centered over-desires and idolatries that are all around you, but rather that you're going to obey the will of God, when you decide that you're going to abandon the norms and practices that people are participating in, then Peter's saying do not expect for people to approve of you.

Don't expect their approval. That's not the mentality Jesus had. Jesus armed himself with a mentality that expected suffering. Jesus expected that when he didn't join in, when he didn't go with the flow, when he didn't just conform himself to the crowd, he was going to suffer people's disapproval.

He was going to suffer their criticism. He was going to suffer contempt. He was going to suffer condemnation. And Peter says to the church, arm yourselves with that same way of thinking, that same resolve of living.

Friends, if we want to be united to Jesus Christ, if we want to be filled by the Holy Spirit, if we want to obey the will of God the Father, if we're going to live as if we are done with sin, then we're going to feel some unpleasant discomfort.

That's what Peter wants to tell us. That unpleasant discomfort is what Jesus experienced his whole life long, all the way to the cross. And if we're going to follow Jesus in his way, if we're going to apprentice ourselves to learn how to live as he lived, if we're going to do what it says in 1 Peter 2.11, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul, if we're going to do that, then we need to arm ourselves with that same attitude and same mentality of Jesus that expects unpleasant discomfort.

[24 : 02] In a world that's not sympathetic to being done with sin, in a world that's rather irritated about this notion of the will of God and obeying the will of God, you're going to feel some unpleasant discomfort as a Christian.

In a culture that is going to give you some pressure and some heat, when you refuse to assimilate to its norms and values and practices, you're going to feel some unpleasant discomfort.

In an environment where you're going to abstain from human desires that society deems totally normal and acceptable but that are actually out of step with the will of God, you're going to feel some unpleasant discomfort.

And in a social situation where you're living according to the dominant metaphor of this entire letter we've been talking about for months and months, if you're living as elect exiles, if you're living as visiting strangers, or living as resident aliens in our broader culture, you're going to feel some unpleasant discomfort and that's okay.

That's what it means to be a Christian, Peter says. So arm yourselves with that. Equip yourselves with that. Prepare yourselves for unpleasant discomfort because that's what it means to follow a crucified Christ who said to himself, I'd rather suffer than sin.

[25 : 32] Wow. The gospel and our desire goes all the way down internally to our relationship with ourselves and our very desires and it changes what we actually want in our lives.

But the gospel not only changes us internally, it changes us externally in our relationship with our society and our culture and it gives us this new mentality that says, you know, I'd rather suffer than sin like Jesus.

But it also changes one final relationship and that is the relationship with the church. And I want to talk for a little bit as we close about the gospel and Christian community.

And here's Peter's logic. He's talking to people in a social situation in which their Christian beliefs and their Christian way of life was not greeted with approval but with disapproval.

It was not greeted with kindness but with contempt. And he's saying in that situation, how much more do you need the church?

[26 : 44] How much more do you need the church to be a refuge for you and a source of strength for you and a place where you can be sustained and supported in living this life according not to human desires but according to the will of God?

How much more do you need the church? And so Peter goes on and he says, well, here's how to strengthen your local Christian community. And here's what he says in verse 7.

He says, the end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. He says, if we're going to live with the end in mind, if we're going to live as if verse 5 is true, that God is ready to judge the living and the dead, if we're going to live in light of that coming reality, then the church as a whole needs to be sober and alert.

We need to see things clearly. We need to correctly apprehend reality. And it's that sober-minded attentiveness that is essential if we want to be a strong church that engages in the following priorities.

First of all, prayer. Peter says, so that you may pray. It's the very first thing in his list. And Peter learned from Jesus that this is always number one on the list of our priorities as disciples.

[27 : 58] Because without corporate prayer, the church will be without the vision of the Holy Spirit and will also be without the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out that vision.

And so the primary places where we pray corporately at Christ Church is in our midweek community groups. It is every Sunday at 930 in our boiler room just as you come in those outer doors and down the stairs.

Everybody's welcome to come and pray at that time before our worship service. We pray in a monthly prayer meeting on second Wednesdays at 7 p.m. And I just want to encourage you this morning as we're establishing, you know, our habits and our predictable patterns for this new school year ahead.

Prayer is on the top of Peter's priority list. Where is it on your priority list? And I want to encourage you to make it a number one priority in your life this year.

But what should we, what should be our next priority after prayer? Peter says in verse 8, he says, above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[29 : 12] He says the kind of love we need to be actively cultivating among ourselves is what he called back in chapter 1, sincere brotherly love, loving one another earnestly from a pure heart.

And he says this is the kind of love that covers over a multitude of sins. Now let me be clear that that does not mean that love ignores sin or that love denies sin or that love hides sin.

But what he's telling us is that this kind of love that Christians have for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is so gracious, it's so forbearing and patient and kind that it forgives offenses.

And it extinguishes sins. And it breaks the cycle of wrongs among us. Peter, you might remember, he asked Jesus at one point, he said, Jesus, how many times should I forgive my brother?

Wouldn't it be really generous of me, Jesus, if I forgave him seven times? And what did Peter say, Jesus say to Peter? He said, no, try 70 times seven times.

[30 : 15] So the primary place where we put ourselves in the position to practice this kind of forgiving love where we're actually encountering other sinners who are following Christ is in our community groups.

And again, I just, we're relaunching those soon. And I hope that as you're making plans for this next year that you would find a community group during the week where you can practice priority one, which is prayer, and priority two, which is forgiving love.

And then Peter says this, he says in verse nine, if you want to have a strong church, you got to not only pray and love, but he says, offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

And the word he uses there is an interesting word, it's *phylloxenia*. We all know the word *xenophobia*, that's fear of strangers. *Philoxenia* is love of strangers.

And what he's telling us is that we've got to keep an open heart and an open door and an open table for the new people that come into the church. And if you've ever been a part of an urban university church like ours, you know that there's two kinds of people.

[31 : 25] There's annuals and perennials. Right? There's sprinters and there's marathoners. There's people who have been here a long time and people who are going to be here a short time. And the way to make a church like this work is to love strangers.

It's to look for all those new people. And he says, I want you to do this without grumbling, which means with gladness. That you come early and you look for the people who are new. And you find them at the passing of the peace and you introduce yourself to them and you bring them to the coffee hour and you introduce them to other people and you invite them to lunch and you have them over to your house. And basically this love for strangers is about turning those strangers into friends.

That's how the church works, Peter says. And then finally he says, each of you should use whatever gift you've received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If you serve, you should do so with the strength that God provides. Peter says, if you're a Christian, the God of all grace has given you a gift or he's given you many gifts to build up the common good of the church and to enrich the life of the church.

[32 : 42] And you have this incredible privilege to be a steward of God's grace to God's people. That through you the grace of God might flow out more and more to the people around you.

And Peter says, if you have a speaking gift and you can teach a class or you can lead a community group or you can pray for other people or you can provide counsel for them.

He says, when you speak, make sure you're speaking in line with the truth of the word of God. It's not just a word for the preacher. It's a word to all the people of God who speak.

And then he says, if you have a serving gift to care for other people, you know, be sure you do that not in reliance upon yourself and your own resources. But be sure you do that with the strength that God provides.

And what's the point of all this? What's the point of having this new operating system where our chief desire now is to do and obey the will of God?

[33 : 47] What's the point of arming ourselves with this attitude that Jesus had that we'd rather suffer than sin? What's the point of investing in a church that prays corporately and loves forgivingly and welcomes strangers gladly and speaks God's truth and serves with God's strength?

What's the point of all of that? Peter tells us in verse 11, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.

Amen. That's the end game. The end game is that through our lives and through our church, more and more people would see and hear and experience just how praiseworthy, just how glorious, just how powerful God in his gospel of grace actually is.

May God enable us to be this kind of church. church. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.