

Suffering In The Flesh

1 Peter 4:1-6

1 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, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 3 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. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 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.

(1 Peter 4:1-6 (ESV))

Being the Christian that God wants you and me to be each day, to live as verses 1 and 2 instruct, “to cease from sin so as to live for the rest of our lives in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God”, that is truly a difficult task. Desires and temptations come at us from every quarter, the world, the flesh and the devil, and they abound within us and all around us.

Yes, it can be said that our “becoming a Christian” is easy, perhaps one of the easiest things we will ever do. That’s because the Lord Jesus has already done all of the “hard” things, the terrible suffering and death that it takes to bring us to salvation. And the only part of our initial salvation that is left for you and me to do is to surrender our hearts to Him . . . simply “surrender”. And though many even find surrender hard to do, it does not compare to the sufferings that Christ had to endure to bring salvation to us.

But with that being said, we also know that our full and complete salvation does not just begin and end with the one single event of our one-time “sinner’s prayer”. Salvation really only begins there! These scriptures actually speak of our “salvation experience” as being in three parts, the first part being our initial salvation when we first pray to receive Christ, but then there is a next part, the daily “working out” of our salvation, and then lastly, our final salvation comes when we enter into heaven. Some word it, “we were saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.”

And all of that is true according to these scriptures. Our “sinner’s prayer” and our initial salvation is only the beginning. And as our scripture text here warns, it is in the next part that life gets really difficult for us, the “working out of our salvation”. Those words in Philippians 2,

¹² Therefore . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Note very carefully in those words that this is where your and my part begins. Yes, Christ has saved us by dying on the cross. And yes, God's Spirit will continue to work within us "to will and to do according to His good pleasure". But here is where you and I must begin in earnest to do our part! We must begin to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling". This is the part that is spoken about in our text. Listen!

1 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, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 3 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. (1 Peter 4:1-3 (ESV))

Folks, you might never get caught up in some of these awful and sinful behaviors that are mentioned here, but may I assure you that each of us has a private list of our own, with many of our sins hidden deeply within the recesses of our minds and hearts. And this command, and may I emphasize that this is a "command" and not a request, this command to you and me is to "arm ourselves with the same way of thinking that the Lord Jesus had within Him, here described as the "will of God".

On that cross, Jesus died both for sin and to sin. And no, He had none of His own sin to account for, as we do, but because He had taken our sin upon Himself, every part of sin had to be dealt with and to be "killed out" within Him. And so must it be "killed out" in you and me. We must die to sin!

And that is especially difficult for us because, unlike the Lord Jesus, many of our sins have become entrenched within us. I am 70 years old and some of these wretched thoughts and habits and behaviors have been a part of me for a lot of my years. And yes, unfortunately, and sinfully so, I still do hang onto some of them tightly, my ego, my ideas, my principles, my philosophies. And yes, I have, over time, been able to soften some of the edges of those ideas and principles and philosophies to the point that they are acceptable to me and even to most other people, but listen . . . are they acceptable to God? Are they the "will of God"? That is the question that must be answered. Just because I have agreed with myself that some of my sins are acceptable does not make them acceptable to God. That is why we read the words here,

1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. (1 Peter 4:1 (ESV))

Folks, within our “thinking” is where sin most always begins, down deep within the hidden recesses of our minds. We are told that in James 1.

¹⁴ . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15 (ESV))

Can you see the progression that takes place here in these words? Sin starts as a thought deep within our mind. Here it is called desire, or lust or passions. Folks, desire and lust and passions take on many different forms, desire for attention, desire for approval, desire for things, and on and on. And “ego” seems always to play a huge part in our thinking. And if our errant thoughts are allowed to stay in our minds for very long, they begin to foment within us and to produce actions and behaviors that we should not entertain, and that is when the real trouble begins.

And that is the warning given to us here. Our old manner of thinking, needs to “die out” within us. We must not coddle it. It must be utterly “killed out” from within us, with no mercy shown to it, else it will continue to rear its ugly head and it will eventually regain control back over us.

Listen, when we are “born again”, we actually become completely new creatures, the old is gone, the new has begun. And we have no reason to continue to think and to act and to behave the way we used to. That is all “dead” within us. We are to now have the “mind of Christ” dwelling within us. In verse 5 of Philippians 2, we read those words,

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:5 (ESV))

In our salvation, God has given you and me the special privilege of actually being able to have the very “mind of Christ” dwelling within us, His intimate and “manifest presence”. And no, I don’t fully comprehend that, but it’s true. When you and I receive Christ as our Savior, His Spirit and His mind actually comes to dwell within us. And His Spirit ministers to our Spirit telling us what to think and to say. It’s miraculous and it is real.

How can we know that it’s real? Folks, if we will be careful to listen, we will actually hear His voice speaking to us, not audibly so, at least I have not ever heard an audible voice from God, but I sure do hear Him speak to me through my thoughts and through my prayers and through my reading of His scripture. That is why Jesus said on several occasions, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

But folks again, the reality of the warning given here in our text is that this part of our salvation, the “working it out each day”, really does, at times, get to be so very difficult.

As I said a moment ago, I know that I have become fully entrenched in some of my ways of thinking and behaving, and I have my ego and it really is hard for me to change. But I must! I must! For me, my time for standing before Christ in Judgment is nearer than it has ever been. And I really don't want to bring any of this wretched stuff with me. I want to repent of it now, before I stand before Him in judgment. And no, I don't do many of these things mentioned here any more,

3 . . . living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. (1 Peter 4:3 (ESV))

But again, this is not a complete list for any of us. My particular sins are different and well hidden within me. And unfortunately, many of them are well hidden even from my own conscious mind. And it will require some diligent searching and prayer to find them out.

And no, this is not one of those exercises like the ones our modern day psychiatrists put us through, looking for "repressed memories" and those sorts of things. This is different. This is dealing directly with the Lord about such matters. Why would that be so"? It is because "sin" is against God and God alone, and He is the One who is best able to recognize sin.

But how do we do that? How do we search out such deep things of the mind and soul? We do it the way that is given within these scriptures. In Psalm 139, we find the prayer.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
(Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV))

And if we will pray this prayer each day, God will be faithful to reveal our hidden sins to us.

But then also, just knowing about our sins is not enough. We must then move on to the next step, and do something about them, and that requires "repentance". And that is found in Psalm 51,

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psalm 51:1-4)

And may I strongly encourage each of us to never treat any sinful way, any mannerism or condition, though they be small, as being insignificant. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, and He will be faithful to do that. And if He convicts you of a sin, then you ought always to respond with genuine “repentance”.

And may I give us an example of “how to repent” and “how not to repent”. It’s found in the parable that Jesus gave about the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple. Listen!

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’
(Luke 18:9-13 (ESV))

Remember that God knows every thought and every attitude of your heart. He knows if you are humble and sincere when you repent. You and I need always to be as this tax collector, crying out in humility, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Folks, again, this next step of our salvation, our “working it out” will surely be difficult. And for that reason, you and I need to have our understanding as clear as we can get it, else sin and the remnants of our old sin nature will come back in full force and vengeance, and then we will be in worse trouble than we were in before we came to Christ. Jesus gave a parable about just such a problem. There He said . . .

²⁴ “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ ²⁵ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.” (Luke 11:24-26 (NIV))

Unfortunately, this very kind of disaster takes place far too often. A person gets on their knees, or they walk an isle and they pray the “sinner’s prayer”. But then they fail to go on further in their faith. And this is what takes place. They are indeed in worse shape than they have ever been.

But that sort of thing need never take place. All we have to do is immediately begin to fill that void, that empty space, that is left in our soul when our sinful nature is “killed out”

within us. In 2 Peter 1, God gives us the perfect remedy to make sure that once we are free, we remain “free indeed”. Listen!

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness (virtue); and to goodness (virtue), knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-8 (NIV))

Folks, these are the next steps that must be taken immediately after we receive Christ as our Savior. And we must begin these steps without delay, else we will give the enemy an open door that we might never get closed. We must add to our faith, virtue, and to our virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. And we must do all these things in an increasing measure and never let up even for a moment.

And also, did you notice within these steps that there were no “don’t do this or don’t do that”, don’t get drunk, or don’t go to parties, or don’t get involved in sensuality. Why don’t we see those “don’ts”? It is because once you “put on the godliness of Christ” which is the character that you will build by doing all of these things, then you won’t even want to think about or to do any of these corrupt things. Your righteous behavior will be so satisfying that those corrupt behaviors will no longer appeal to you.

Folks, the Christian life really is a far better life, and it is more enjoyable without any of the pitfalls. I confess to you that I do truly love this Christian Life.

Please take these words with you. 2 Peter 1,

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7

and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
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