

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter

Lesson 7: Living for God's Will, Not the Flesh -- 1 Peter 4:1-11

There comes a moment in every real change when a person makes up their mind. Not a vague wish to be different someday, but a settled decision, a kind of inner arming for battle. The recovering addict who decides, today I do not pick it up. The person who has nursed a grudge for years and finally resolves to forgive. Peter uses exactly that kind of language here. "Arm yourselves," he says, with the same way of thinking Christ had. He knows that the Christian life is not drifted into; it is decided on, and then defended.

Peter writes to people who had real pasts. Before they met Christ, many of them had lived like everyone around them, given to drunkenness, sensuality, idolatry, the whole catalog of a culture with no anchor. Now they have turned, and their old friends are baffled and even offended. "They are surprised when you do not join them," Peter says, and they malign you for it. If you have ever felt the strange loneliness of being the one who left the party early, who stopped laughing at the joke, who could not go where the crowd was going anymore, Peter is writing to you. He understands the cost of the turn, and he tells you it is worth it.

But this passage is not mainly about what we have left behind. It is about what we are living for now. "Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin," Peter says, so as to live "for the will of God." The point of dying to the old life is not just to stop doing bad things; it is to be set free for something better, to pour our remaining days into the will of God. And Peter gets practical fast: love each other earnestly, because love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality without grumbling. Use whatever gift you have been given to serve. He is describing a community so full of love and service that it becomes a foretaste of heaven.

And over it all hangs a bracing reminder: "The end of all things is at hand." Peter is not stirring up date-setting panic. He is doing what a wise person does when they remember life is short, he gets serious about what matters. Be clear-minded. Pray. Love. Serve. So that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. Read this passage as someone who has limited days and wants to spend them well. Peter will show you how.

Group Discussion: Peter says our old friends are "surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you" (v. 4). Why does a changed life so often provoke not just confusion but hostility from others? Where have you felt the pressure or loneliness of no longer fitting in with a former crowd?

Personal Reflection: Peter says, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (v. 7). If you truly lived as though your time were short and Christ's return certain, what is one thing you would start doing, and one thing you would stop?

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11

Study Questions

1. Peter says, "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" (v. 1). What does it mean to "arm yourselves" with the mind of Christ, and how does a settled resolve to suffer rather than sin actually break sin's power in our lives?
2. Peter says we should live the rest of our time "no longer for human passions but for the will of God" (v. 2). Where are you still tempted to spend your time and energy on "human passions," and what would it look like to redirect that area toward the will of God?
3. Peter says, "The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do," and lists the old way of life the believers had left (vv. 3-4). What does this teach about the decisive break conversion makes with the old life, and why does Peter speak of the past as something already "sufficient" and finished?
4. Peter notes that former friends "malign you" when you no longer join them (v. 4). How do you typically respond when you are misunderstood or criticized for your faith, and how might Peter want you to respond instead?
5. Peter says even the dead will be judged, and that the gospel was preached so that people "might live in the spirit the way God does" (vv. 5-6), reminding us that everyone will give account to God "who is ready to judge the living and the dead." What does this teach about the certainty of judgment and the seriousness with which we should live?
6. Peter calls us to be "self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (v. 7). How is the health of your prayer life connected to your self-control and clear-headedness, and where might a lack of one be weakening the other?
7. Above all, Peter says, "keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins" (v. 8). What does it mean that love "covers" a multitude of sins, and why does Peter rank earnest love "above all" the other commands in this passage?
8. Peter commands, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (v. 9). How open is your life and your home to others, especially to those who cannot repay you? What keeps you from greater hospitality, and what would a first step look like?
9. Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace," so "that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (vv. 10-11). What does this teach about the purpose of spiritual gifts in the church, about every member having a part, and about the ultimate aim of all Christian service being the glory of God rather than ourselves?
10. Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from arming our minds, to leaving the old life, to living for God's will, to love, hospitality, and service for God's glory. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 1 Peter 4:1-11 do you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 6:1-14, dead to sin and alive to God, no longer slaves to its passions; Ephesians 4:17-24, putting off the old self and putting on the new; Romans 12:3-8, the varied gifts given for serving the one body; Hebrews 13:1-2, showing hospitality to strangers; 1 Corinthians 10:31, doing all things to the glory of God