

Sermon – 1 Peter 4:1-11 – Leroy Coote 21st March 2021

For every reaction there is an equal and opposite reaction. This well-known saying can also apply to life. Where there is a bad way of living life there is also a good way. In the Bible, the good way is God's way in accordance with his word. But it is a good way that is the result of a transformed life. However, it is also not an easy way.

In our passage from 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 1-11, which you can follow in your bibles at home, the bibles you brought to church or even the Bible Apps on your electronic devices, we will look at the following:

1. What we follow is not easy.
2. What we used to follow is in the past.
3. The effect of past and present actions.
4. How we are to follow and why?

By the end of today, what will become very clear is that the focal point of our lives should be the will of God and that in everything that we do, God may be praised, displayed and get the glory for all we do. So, with all that I have said so far in mind, let us start with my first point of four.

What we follow is not easy.

It is not easy being a Christian because Christ suffered in his body as mentioned in verse 1. As was mentioned last week, the reason Christ suffered was found at the end of Chapter 3. Let me refresh your memories from verse 18, *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."*

Christ suffered for our sins in order to bring us to God. Again, Peter emphasises the point that our salvation wasn't because of anything we have done but because of what God has done. But he also mentions the fact that for us to be saved, Christ suffered for our sins because his suffering paid the price for our sins which was death. We've just been reminded that Christ suffered for us in Chapter 3 and in his body at the beginning of Chapter 4.

What then does this mean for us? It means that we should suffer in our body which is mentioned in the phrase "arm yourselves with the same attitude". This means that we should suffer in our bodies. What does Peter mean by this? Well friends it is tied up with why we should suffer in our bodies. We find the answer to that at the end of verse 1 when he says, *"Because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin."*

Why does Peter say that? Here is an explanation. When we become followers of Jesus, we embark on a lifestyle that goes against the human nature that we are created with. Human nature tends to naturally take us the way we want to go. However, human nature goes against the way God wants us to go. Therefore, the suffering that is in our body is our battle to follow God's way which goes against what our ingrained human nature wants us to do.

However, the beauty of being a Christian is that we have help to go God's way and that is the Holy Spirit who leads us in accordance with God's word. But The Holy Spirit and the internal suffering we undertake also provide for us a direction in life. Listen to what verse 2 says, *"As a*

result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

Human desires are considered evil in this passage. Let me explain that. They are evil because they go against what God desires for his people, and they take us away from the direction God wants us to go. So which direction are we to go in? The direction that follows the will of God. The will of God by definition is following what God desires in response to God saving us which is spelt out in his word – the Bible. In other words, the motive for holy living which is a strong theme through 1 Peter is because God saved us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Therefore, to live the Christian life in the 21st Century, it needs to be anchored in the saving work of Jesus Christ. However, as we have said earlier, it is not easy because we are going against our natural desires but God helps us to live according to his will with the help of the Holy Spirit and over time, because of the help God provides, what the Spirit calls us to do gradually becomes natural. That is the present and future.

But what about the past? This is put behind us.

But what was the past? Listen to what it says in verse 3, *"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."*

These actions are in the past because of the phrase, "For you have spent enough time in the past." All of these past actions are actions of self-satisfaction, excessive living and a focus on self. I'm not going to go into all of these but I will briefly explain detestable idolatry. The word "detestable" is often used as lawless in other translations of the Bible. The lawless aspect is that it is against God's law. God calls us to be following his law and his things from his word. Nothing more and nothing less.

What happens in the context of our relationship with God is that if we do hold onto idols of the past, they prevent us from following God as fully as God's word desires. If there is any idol that we have in our lives and have carried into our Christian faith, then this passage gives us an answer as to what to do with it – and that is to put it in the past so that as believers in Christ we can move forward following the will of God. However, there is a response from those who we used to cavort with in sin. Listen to what it says in verse 4, *"They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you."*

The Christians are getting abuse heaped upon them because they don't participate in the non-Christian lifestyle that is spelt out in verse 3. The believers that Peter is writing to have moved on from the behaviour expressed in verse 3 and onto a life of holiness. Essentially here is one of the potential costs that can happen as a result of following Christ because those who continue in the past lifestyle are left behind and are expressing their reaction. However, there is always scope to share the good news with them. Why do I say that?

Because they will be called to account before God which is another way of looking at their past and present action.

This concept of accountability is found in verse 5 which says, *"But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."*

Those whose behaviour is not in line with God's will, will be called to account by the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead and that is God. This means that all people will stand before God on the day of Judgement when it arrives. This is why the gospel needs to be preached as mentioned in verse 6, *"... even to those who are dead."*

The gospel is the vehicle used by God to measure accountability. In other words, have you accepted the gospel or not is the question that we need to answer on Judgement Day. What is good to know in the congregation listening to this is that many can which is a good thing. However, what was the purpose of the gospel being preached? The end of verse 6 provides for us an answer, *"... live according to God in regard to the spirit."*

Ultimately the goal is to live according to God in regards to the Spirit as that is holy living which is a strong theme within the book of 1 Peter and we will see what that looks like in the final section of the book. Why is this the goal? Because the right response to the gospel is to live according to God with regards to the Spirit. What then does this look like in practice? What are our motives for living out the gospel in holiness?

These two questions are answered in the final section of our passage for today entitled how we are to follow and why?

These are found in verses 7-11. The "whys" bookend the "hows" in these verses. In verse 7, we have our first "why". That is the end of all things is near. Jesus has promised that he will return which will be the end of things. When this was written, Jesus has not long ascended into heaven and it was anticipated that Jesus would return soon. We are still waiting which gives us and others a chance to get ready. How then are we to get or be ready? We need to be alert.

In this context we need to be on our guard with our heart attitudes and our lives in terms of where we are at with God. We need to be alert to things that draw us away from a holy lifestyle and ultimately, leads us away from a lifestyle that involves giving thanks to God. We need to be sharp in our minds on this as any time sin creeps into our lives it becomes dangerous and if unchecked, can lead us on a drift away from God. This is important to note as we need to be clear what the word of God really says and means and a good way to strengthen that is to join a bible study group. There is always room in the three we have running at the moment.

But to be alert, we need to have a sober mind which means we need to be clear headed so that we can think God's way in every situation that heads our way. And why do we need to be clear headed? So we can seek God's guidance and give thanks to God in prayer. We not only pray to seek God's guidance and give thanks to Him but also to strengthen our relationship with him. As Christians we are to have a strong relationship with Christ and that is the foundation of our walk with God. Once we have that strong foundation, we can build upon that.

What do the building blocks look like? Verse 8 tells us to above all to love each other deeply. Remember that Peter is writing to the people of the local church and it is a calling to the local church to love one another deeply and that means everybody who is in the church without exception because every member of the church is exactly the same in God's eyes and therefore, should be equally loved deeply. There is also an extension of God's love which is hospitality without grumbling.

Hospitality is the equivalent to the way we welcome people into our congregation and help them to come and stay part of congregational life. Hospitality helps people stay within a church

because they develop relationships with other Christians and thus, are more likely to stay as part of God's people with God's help. Unfortunately, COVID has placed a restriction on how hospitable we can be but there are ways around it, if we can find some creative people to make it happen. So we are to love each other and be hospitable. That is foundational. But what do we use to display this? Well, we don't need to go to Aldi or Coles for this because God has given each and every one of us gifts to serve Him with.

The first part of verse 10 tells us that we should use whatever gift you have received. This implies that God has given gifts to each and every person for a purpose. The purpose of these gifts is to serve others. In other words, to display hospitality and love. However, there is more to this and that how we are to serve others. The latter part of verse 10 helps us here by reminding us that we are to serve others, *"as faithful stewards of God's Grace in its various forms"*.

This means that our service is to reflect the abundant grace that God has given us. In practice, what this means is that when we serve others, those we serve should see God in the way we serve those we serve. This is an important concept to get hold of, because as Christians, we are God's representatives on earth and therefore, should be people who show others who God is through our lives. Do we do that? The concept that I have just talked about also applies to our speech. Listen to what verse 11 says, *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God."*

So therefore, not only do we serve as if we are representing God in a manner that is consistent with His word, but we are also to speak as if we are representing God in our word. In other words, we speak and do as if it is God speaking and serving. Is our speech consistent with what God would desire? But not only that, the beauty is, is that we do what is expected in the strength that God provides. We don't live God's way in our own strength because it would be impossible to serve people God's ways so isn't it a great thing that God provides for us the strength to love each other deeply, offer hospitality without grumbling and serve others?

I'm glad God helps us to be more like him. But what is the reason for serving Him this way and this is the second why that bookends all the "hows" that have just been mentioned? Listen to the rest of verse 11, *"so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."* You see that despite it being hard, it is worth it because everything we do as believers in Christ is done so that God is not just praised but shown to be the most excellent and the glory goes to God because he is the focus of how we live as Christians and he helps us.

Well let me conclude.

Being a Christian is not easy and nor is life according to Malcom Fraser. It is not easy because the Christian life goes against our natural, human nature which tends to lead us into sin. However, Christ rescued us from sin the hard way so that we could have a relationship with God and for that we should be thankful. We have a new life because of Christ – a life that puts sin in the past but puts a life of holiness in the present which is aimed at being holy the way God would live out holiness because that is the standard that he sets, and he helps us live this way. Therefore, let us be thankful to God in living this not easy Christian life but do so knowing that it is God who saved us, and it is God who helps us to live life his way with his attitude and passion.