**Week 8**

***Self-Controlled & Sober Minded***

***1 Peter 4***

**31 May and 6 June 2022**

**Practical Advice for Then and Now –** Peter moves from talking about suffering to a practical list of behaviors that we should either *start* doing or *stop* doing. As we begin a closer examination of this chapter on how we should live, keep in mind the big picture. Peter wrote this entire letter as an encouragement to people undergoing persecution for their faith, so what would have been the message of encouragement that his original hearers would have taken from what he says? And how do we draw encouragement from it in our current context?

**Alive in the Body –** The phrase “in the flesh” in these verses means “while alive in the body”. Peter has just talked about how Christ suffered while He was on this earth, and now he urges his readers to *arm themselves* with the same attitude Christ had. Peter uses this battle imagery to remind us that we need to arm ourselves for spiritual battle with a particular kind of *thinking*. Change in our lives begins with right thinking, which leads to right feelings, and then to right actions. So what was Christ’s attitude? He was willing to suffer to the point of death.

**What About Us? –** Most of us have never faced the prospect of dying for our faith. We may live our entire lives in relative comfort and safety, so what does Peter’s exhortation mean to us? If we are not facing the threat of physical death for our faith, what should we do? **Is it not incumbent upon us to focus on daily dying to self?** It seems that the very least we can do is to put to death the sins that beset us and so follow the example of Christ’s obedience to His Father. We may be tempted to think that there is nothing for us to take from passages like this one since we are not facing persecution ourselves. So we need to ask ourselves, “What needs to die *in my life* so that I can be more like Christ?”

**Ceased from Sin –** Why on earth does Peter say that those who have suffered in the flesh have “ceased from sin?” Certainly he doesn’t mean that we never, ever sin anymore after suffering. The point he is making is that the longer we live in the flesh and witness the awful fallout of sin, the less appeal it has for us. As we grow in holiness, the more we regard our sin as something that we don’t want to run back to any more. We will never turn from away from a sin that we do not absolutely hate.

**Suffering Teaches Us –** Some of the benefits of suffering are that it teaches us obedience and that it teaches us holiness. In fact, scripture even says that Christ Himself “became perfect” through suffering. He was completed in His perfection through the process of suffering. Suffering was *ordained* for Him and was part of the perfect life that He was called to live. Scripture also tells us that Christ “learned obedience” through His suffering…but how can God *learn* anything when He already knows everything? This is part of Jesus being fully man as well as fully God. Baby Jesus had things that He had to learn as He grew up. Obedience, even perfect obedience, was a learning process for the man Jesus. So anyone who has suffered in the flesh is *learning:* they are learning obedience and holiness, and so they begin to regard sin as an untenable option.

**The Will of God Versus Our Passions –** Our sinful desires are always opposed to the will of God, so we cannot depend on our feelings to tell us right from wrong. The thing that feels the most natural to us is usually the thing that is most destructive for us. We have to let a renewed mind guide our emotions.

**Judgment –** In verse 4 Peter warns his listeners that the people around them will be surprised at first when they don’t join in their sinful activities, but that surprise will quickly turn to maligning the believers. Why? Because the believers’ lack of participation speaks a silent judgment on them whether the believers intended it or not. Peter reminds his readers that the just Judge sees and will one day judge those around them for their sinful actions. So it is not our job to pronounce judgment on our fellow man. There may be times when it is appropriate to warn others about their conduct, but ***our primary role* is to continue to trust the just Judge and to live the right way.**

**Those Who Have Died –** Verse 6 looks a little difficult at first, but a little reflection clears up the meaning. When Peter says that “the gospel was preached to those who are dead,” he is referring to *believers in the church who have already died*. They had heard the gospel preached from the apostles or missionaries and trusted Christ, but subsequently died…just as everyone dies in our fallen world. But even though their body has died, they are alive in the spirit.

**The End IS At Hand –** Why does Peter say in verse 7 that “the end of all things is *at hand*”? We think about the fact that over 2000 years has gone by since Peter wrote his book and think that he surely must have been mistaken. But actually the end of all things IS “at hand”. In God’s eyes 2000 years is like a couple of days, and scripture repeatedly talks about our “light and momentary” afflictions. So we who are living in 2022 must remember that the end of all things is at hand for us as well. We know that “the great and glorious day of the Lord” is coming for each one of us sometime in the next 80-90 years whether the Lord has returned to earth bodily before we die or not. So Peter’s “be prepared” message is for all of us since we will *all* be meeting Him soon.We might think that is a rather ominous statement. But Peter meant it as a message of encouragement for people who are suffering greatly and would welcome the news that relief is not far off.

**For the Sake of Your Prayers –** Peter tells his hearers to be sober-minded and self-controlled “for the sake of your prayers”. Why does he say that? People who are NOT sober-minded and self-controlled bring many difficulties into their lives as a consequence of their behavior and bad choices, so their prayers are probably consumed with, “Lord, help me out of *this* mess!” But those who ARE sober-minded and self-controlled can pray for others as well as themselves. They can expand their vision beyond their own immediate crisis.

**Above All, LOVE –** There will be a “multitude of sins” large and small even within the body of believers as we continue living in this world. So Peter urges his readers to keep on loving each other earnestly, so that love can cover these sinful frailties with grace and mercy.

**Hospitality Versus Entertaining –** The problem with hospitality is that it is expensive and it is inconvenient. It impacts our schedules, our comfort, and our wallets. The real problem, however, is that we haven’t distinguished the difference between *hospitality* and *entertaining*. As Jen points out in an article she wrote, “**Entertaining** involves setting the perfect table…after an exhaustive search on Pinterest. It chooses a menu that will impress and frets its way through each stage of preparation. It requires every throw pillow to be in place…[and] every child to be neat and orderly. It plans extra time to don the perfect outfit before the first guest touches the doorbell on the seasonally decorated doorstep. And should any element of the plan fall short, entertaining perceives the entire evening to be tainted. *Entertaining focuses the attention on self.* **Hospitality** involves setting a table that makes everyone feel comfortable. It chooses a menu that allows face time with guests instead of being chained to the cooktop. It picks up the house to make things pleasant [but] doesn’t feel the need to conceal evidences of everyday life. Hospitality sometimes sits down to dinner with cake flour in its hair. It allows the gathering to be shaped by the quality of the conversation rather than the cuisine. Hospitality shows interest in the thoughts, feelings, pursuits and preferences of its guests. It is good at asking questions and listening intently to answers. *Hospitality focuses attention on others.*

Entertaining is always thinking about the next course. Hospitality burns the rolls because it was listening to a story. Entertaining obsesses over what went wrong. Hospitality savors what was shared. Entertaining, exhausted, says, “It was nothing, really.” Hospitality thinks it *was* nothing—really. Entertaining seeks to impress. Hospitality seeks to bless. But the two practices can look so similar. Two people can set the same beautiful tablescape and serve the same gourmet meal, one with a motive to impress and the other with a motive to bless.

**How can we know the difference?** Only the second of the two, hospitality, would invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, [and] the blind to pull up a chair and sip from the stemware. Our motives are revealed, not just in how we set our tables, but in who we invite to join us at the feast. Entertaining invites those whom it will enjoy. Hospitality takes all comers.”

**Serve One Another –** Verse 10 is a logical transition from what Peter has just said about hospitality, which is one way to serve others. He now talks about other ways to serve the body of Christ. He chooses a couple of representative spiritual gifts (speaking and serving) as examples to urge people to use whatever gifts and resources they may have to serve others and so glorify God.

**Suffering –** Verse 12 is a hard one to read. Peter is saying, in effect, that suffering for Christ is part of our expectation as believers, and so we should really only be surprised when we *aren’t* suffering. But all too often when suffering comes into our lives, we revert immediately to a kind of *works-based* understanding of our relationship with God. We wonder why this is happening to us when we have been trying so hard to obey God. We need to remember that sometimes suffering “just happens”. We should also use those “surprising times” when we aren’t suffering personally to find ways to minister to those who are. God gives us times free from suffering so that we can be a source of comfort to others.

**The Holy Spirit –** Peter has already referred his listeners to the account of Noah and the ark as a picture of their salvation experience. What was the sign that it was safe to come out of the ark after the flood? It was a dove. And when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop, Peter was there to witness the blazing glory of God resting on Him. Peter’s Jewish listeners would have been very familiar with the concept of the shekinah glory of God resting on the temple, and so would have instantly known what Peter was saying in verse 14: “That same glory now rests on *you* because the Holy Spirit indwells you!”

**Don’t Suffer for Your Own Wrongdoing –** Peter tells his listeners that the suffering in their lives shouldn’t be because they have been involved in some form of wrong doing. He begins with murder, which sounds shocking. But as Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount, we can “murder” people with our words even if we never resort to a gun or a knife to physically kill them. We can easily understand why thievery and evildoing are on Peter’s list, but what about *meddling*? **Meddling involves gathering information about someone else’s life so that you can use it in a harmful way.** It is a form of control of someone else. But we don’t *need* to know everything about another person: the just Judge already does. There will be enough for us to deal with in the things that just fall into our laps without us going out and digging around for trouble in the lives of other believers.

**Purification for the Believer –** When Peter says in verse 17 that “it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God”, he is not referring to judgment as condemnation but a process of purification and strengthening. We could reword the verse to read, “For it is time for *purification and strengthening* to begin at the household of God.” We can trust God to deal with the evildoing of those outside the body of Christ, so we should focus our attentions where it can do the most good.

**Entrust Our Souls –** Notice that in verse 19 Peter tells those who are suffering for the cause of Christ to entrust their *souls* to their faithful Creator. He does not say “bodies”. He is saying that we should entrust that which is imperishable to the imperishable One who made it.

**Take Aways –** There are four things we can take from this passage of scripture.

1. Live life in the Spirit.
2. Live as if the time is short.
3. Learn to expect fiery trials.
4. Entrust your soul to your Maker.