

“The Surprising Life of the Christian”

February 12, 2012

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 4:1-6, ESV

Stewards of God’s Grace

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

When God created the heavens and the earth on days one through five, He declared the work of His hands “good”.¹ When God created Adam and Eve in His own image on day six, He declared the work of His hands “very good.”² God finished His work of creation and rested on the seventh day. God’s design for this world included a garden free of thorns and thistles. God’s design included a harmony between the lion and the lamb. God’s design included marriages that never suffered under argument or anger. God’s design included families that enjoyed the family relationships without any toddler tirades or teenage troubles. In short, God designed this world to be a utopia in which beauty, grace, peace, love, happiness, and worship was the order of the day. There was no ugliness to mar nature’s landscape, no war to kill the innocent, no hostility to tear apart families and friends, no sadness to weigh down a happy heart, no death to fear or to mourn, and no guilt to separate a soul from God’s love. Think of living a single day in Eden! Not one man or woman among us has ever experienced such a day in their entire life; not one. Oh, we have had some good days, but not one day coming close to a single hour in Eden. What happened?

Just as this perfect world was set in motion, almost inexplicably one of God’s created angels became jealous of God’s glory and rebelled against His sovereign authority. He deceived a multitude of other angels to follow him in his riot against the Ruler. The LORD quickly cast him out of Heaven and gave him and his minion’s boundaries to keep as they dwelt on God’s pure earth. God allowed this adversary to tempt the man and the woman to disobey God’s one command to them, the command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for the day you eat of it you will surely die”.³ Lucifer took the form of a serpent and he deceived Eve into eating the fruit. He convinced her to listen to his voice over God’s. He convinced her the forbidden fruit looked delightful and it would taste sweet in her mouth and even it would make her wise. She ate believing sin would pay desired dividends and she gave some to her husband to eat as well. That was the day the music died.

The melody of their pure innocence was lost and now they and their children would battle evil considerations all their days. The symphony of their communion with God was broken and no more could they fellowship with Him as friend to friend. From this day, they would be tempted to create and worship idols to fill their empty souls. The sweet tune of marital oneness became discordant and from that day they and all their children would suffer strain and brokenness in relationships for the rest of human history. Everything sad and difficult and dark we experience today can be traced to Adam and Eve’s disobedience on that day. Sin is God’s diagnosis of what is wrong with this world. All death and sorrow flow from it. This is not an acceptable diagnosis in our modern world. We have lost “sin” even as a category. Our world denies sin’s reality. Consequently, sin has little market value so even pulpits do not often speak of it, but sin is God’s diagnosis. There are no problems you have in this world not connected with sin. We will miss the cure if we miss the diagnosis, so let us say it to ourselves, “Sin is my biggest problem!”

When we read 1 Peter 4:1-6, we rightly ask, “If God is sovereign, why does this battle against sin and human passions exist in my and upon God’s good earth?” Friends, it was not always so. God did not design this world in this way.

¹ Genesis 1:1-25

² Genesis 1:26-31

³ Genesis 2:17

Our first parents opened Pandora's Box and we now we must fight this enemy of indwelling sin. Thank God we do not fight in our own resources and strength for God sent His Son Jesus to defeat sin for us. Peter has already taught us this in this letter. He has taught us our victory rests in Christ's finished work on the cross, in 1 Peter 2,

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. ²⁵ By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In thinking of Jesus' victory, one might protest, "But if Jesus defeated sin and Satan on the cross, why do we still struggle against sin?" The victory has been won, but it has not been fully realized in the days we live on this earth.

In World War II, after the war was won, there were islands in the Pacific Ocean that had not yet received the news the war was over. The fighting on those islands continued after the enemy was defeated. We live in an age in which God ordains the fighting to continue, even though the outcome has already been won for us. We must fight, for the enemy has not surrendered, but we fight with the certainty of victory, for the victory has already been established and the enemy has already been vanquished by Christ. We consider our text in this study and in the words of theologian Bruce Buffer, "Let's get ready to rumble!" That is the message; we must get ready to rumble. The fight is on!

We are, first going to consider this command Peter gives to prepare for battle,

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...

We must consider the word "therefore". It is important. I have shared with you the principle of sound Bible study: Whenever you see a "therefore" in a text, look to see what it is there for. It is pointing us back to something which has already been taught earlier. In this case, Peter is connecting this command to arm ourselves with the principles he has just taught us in 1 Peter 3,

¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil, ¹⁸ 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 made alive in the spirit...

The principle being taught is Jesus suffered for doing good; He suffered for His obedience to the will of the Father. He suffered for being righteous. He is an example of this and this is what is happening to the people who are reading this letter in the 1st Century; they are suffering for doing the will of God. Yet, Jesus shows us in suffering for the sake of obedience, for the will of the Father, that suffering actually becomes a path to triumph and victory. Jesus suffering became the path upon which sin was ultimately defeated. Jesus defeated not His own sin, for He had none, but He defeated our sin, and He set for us an example about this very principle: The path to gain victory over sin is the path of voluntary suffering for the will of God. Peter is connecting this commandment to arm ourselves with the principle Jesus has demonstrated for us.

Jesus willingness to suffer for obedience sake provided Him a path to triumph and if He got off of that path of obedience in order to get out of the way of suffering and pain, then He would be off of the path of triumph. Peter is communicating to us this is our path as well, "Therefore, since Jesus' suffering became for Him the path on which to triumph over sin, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." This is how we get ready to rumble the battle against sin.

Notice, first, the warfare language Peter employs. He wants us to understand we are in a fight for our lives against sin and Satan. He is going to bring Satan into full view in Chapter 5, when he says,

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him...

But here, in Chapter 4, sin is the major focus. Sin and Satan always tied together; they are enemies of our soul, yet I believe Peter first focuses on sin because sin is a far greater enemy than Satan. Why is that? Satan can afflict us from outside, but he cannot enter into our soul. God supervises him in his assault against us so he can only do that which

God allows, but sin is a source of soul wounds we commit against our own soul. Sin makes us guilty and culpable of our very sorrows. Satan's worst damage comes not when he afflicts us, but when he convinces us to sin; when he convinces us to open the door of our life to the greatest enemy of our soul. Only sin can rob us of the immeasurable joy of our fellowship with the Triune God. Satan cannot do that, but sin will.

Do you know what a great enemy your own sin is to the joy, happiness, and liveliness of your own heart?

This passage reminds me of Paul's words in Colossian 3,

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Therefore put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

The principle Peter is teaching us is: God urges us to make the major effort of our lives to kill sin in our soul. When we get up in the morning, we must say, "The thing I must do is kill sin." Friends, make this your first priority as you awake each morning. Let us awake with the prayer, "Lord, I want to kill sin today and walk with you in joy."

My son Jackson and I have been reading portions of the Puritan John Owens book entitled, Overcoming Sin and Temptation. What a great book. It is not an easy read, but it is spiritually brilliant and so helpful. Listen to John Owen talk about this war: "...the choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify (put to death) the indwelling power of sin...Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you. Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work."

John Owens is saying: You take believers, the choicest of them, the one's who are truly walking with God, and these, while they are assuredly free from the condemning power of sin, in other words sin cannot condemn the Christian anymore, even these must make it their business each day to kill and put to death the power of indwelling sin. And he comes up with a great bumper sticker: Be killing sin or it will be killing you! Just because we are a Christian, this does not excuse us from the necessity of killing sin in our life.

His work is an exposition of Romans 8, where God says,

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

How do we kill sin? Notice Peter's helpful counsel. There is much to that question, but we will discuss one small aspect of it. He tells us, "arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." This is how we put sin to death and this is how we make this battle successful. The beginning of all killing of sin begins in our minds, our way of thinking. We do not kill sin by going through rituals at a church, through ceremonies, through penances, through disciplines, or through some ecstatic, mystical experiences. We kill sin by first changing the way we think; "arm yourselves with this same way of thinking". Let us conform our thoughts to the thoughts of Christ. Let us think the way Jesus does. Specifically, we must renew our mind in this area of suffering for righteousness sake. We must say with Christ, "Kill my body if you will. If that is what the world desires to do to me as a result of my allegiance to Christ, let them, but I know if I persevere and obey God my soul lives, and this world cannot harm me."

I had a professor at Moody Bible Institute who began every class with this hymn. He was not a great singer, but I also remember he was not a great song leader. He would sort of wave his hand and lead us,

May the mind of Christ my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling

All I do and say.⁴

Arm yourselves with the mind which says, “It is reasonable for me to die for Christ if that is what He desires. I am willing, Lord.” If you are getting to the point you say, “I am willing to die for You and I am willing to lay my life down for you,” then sin will lose its power. Until we get to that point of arming ourselves with that mindset, sin has a huge power over us. Paul will say, in Philippians 1,

²¹ For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!

He models this for us, does he not? Christ’s call for discipleship, when He calls us, is, “Take up your cross and follow me. Deny yourself. Be willing to lay down your life.” Jesus says, in Luke 12,

⁴ *“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But fear him who has the power to kill both your body and your soul and send your soul to Hell.”*

Sadly, many Christians do not think in these categories any more. We have lost our Christian minds. We have forfeited the very core of genuine Christianity and biblical discipleship. This loss is not new; it has happened throughout the generations.

I have been reading a biography of German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He died a martyr for Jesus in a Nazi prison right before World War II ended. He counted the cost and he gave his life for Christ. In his classic work, The Cost of Discipleship, he saw the same kind of sloppy Christian thinking, which exists in our day, and he wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” Christ is taking volunteers. Who wants to come and die? That is the call of Christ for us. If we want to battle against sin, we must listen to that call and say, “Yes, that is me and I am ready.”

Notice the affects of arming ourselves with an attitude of willingness to suffer and even die for Christ. Peter says, in 1 Peter 4,

¹ “...for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...”

The New King James Version says, “has broken with sin” or severed ties with it. He is not talking about perfection and sin never having a part in the life of an individual who is willing to die for Christ, but he is talking about freedom from sin’s entanglement, from its stranglehold, and from its grip. They broke from sin and severed ties with it.

Our willingness to die for Christ becomes the foundation of our ability to say, “No,” to sin and to live for Christ. When we decide Jesus is worth suffering and dying for, sin loses its allure, it loses its principle hold upon us and we break from it. Paul is pointing to the same truth in Romans 12, when he says,

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

Have you armed yourselves with this mindset?

In seminary I heard a line which says, “As pastors you must be willing and able to preach, pray, or die at a moments notice.” That is really true for every believer. When we follow Christ all of us must say, “I am ready to preach, pray, or die at a moments notice. If I have an opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I am ready to share it. If I have an opportunity to pray for another person here, I am here to talk to God with them and on their behalf. If I have the opportunity where I must lay down my life, so be it. I am ready right now, today. I do not need to go home and sign a bunch of papers. I do not have to straighten things around. I do not have to have five or six more conversations of last words. If this is what God will is for me today, for me to die, I am willing.”

There are two reasons Peter gives as to why winning the battle is vital. The first is the joy of living for the will of God; that is the positive. The second is avoiding the sadness of living for human passion. This battle is absolutely vital to our joy,

⁴ “May the Mind of Christ, My Savior,” Kate B. Wilkinson, circa 1913, *Mission Bells*, (London, Children’s Special Service Mission, 1925)

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.

Why would we ever be willing to die for Christ? We willingly die for Christ Jesus only if we believe we are better living in His will than outside of it and our pursuit of joy determines we give ourselves wholly to Him. Whatever you believe will bring you joy and that is what you are going to live for. That is why this is a battle of belief. If we believe joy is going to be found in human passions, we will live after human passions, and we will even die for human passions. But, if we believe our joy is found only in Christ, then we will live for Christ and we will die for Him.

Now we see the brilliance of Peter's argument throughout his letter, particularly in the first two chapters. In the first two chapters he did not give us many commands or many instructions on how to live. What he did was to simply present to us the blessings and benefits which come to us in Christ. In 1 Peter 1:3, he tells we have been made new by God's mercy and we have been born again to a living hope. We have a hope which will never die and a view of the future which is bright and perfect because of Christ. We have this new life and it is real life. Then Peter goes on to tell us we have an inheritance with Christ in God; an inheritance in our future, imperishable, unfading, and undefiled, and it is secured by God's power on our behalf.

In 1 Peter 1:7, he tells us we have a connection to the glory of Jesus at His Second Coming and we will share in that glory. Continuing in Verse 8, he tells us our eternal soul is saved and rescued. There is no more condemnation for our past sins because all the guilt, shame, weight, and dread of standing before God who is infinitely holy is gone in Christ. We are no longer slaves to the darkness. Peter tells us, in Verse 18, we have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ so He might bring us to eternal glory; we are no longer our own.

In Chapter 2, Peter begins to tell us of the treasury of a new identity we have, an identity in which we are God's holy priesthood. We are a spiritual family with God as our Father and we are members of a holy nation. We are God's precious possession and all of this and so much more is bound up in our living for the will of God. If you truly believe that, then what Peter says only makes logical sense.

Do you believe Jesus is worthy of dying for? Do you see why Paul will say, in Romans 12,

¹ It is in view of God's mercies I urge you to make your bodies living sacrifices.

He is urging us to be ready and willing to die, but it is in view of God's mercy and what we experience as a result of our union with Christ that makes this all worth while, and it makes this life even seem small. Jim Elliot was a missionary who died on behalf of Christ. Before he died he gave us these famous words, and they are powerful ones, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Peter tells us not only will experience the joy of living for the will of God, but we will avoid the sadness of living for human passions,

² ...so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions.

I like the phrase, "live for the rest of the time". Peter has already observed the temporary nature of this life. He wrote in Chapter 1,

²⁴ ...for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever."

For the believer the truth about the temporary nature of life, how quickly this human life, this physical life God has given us, is, this is not a dreaded and dismal thought we must avoid at all costs, but it is a precious one.

We were in a small group discussion recently and we were discussing birthdays. Someone in our group was having a birthday and one of the young women in our group, she was about my age (laughter), said, regarding birthdays, "One year closer to home." I was convicted by that because I do not think about birthdays that way, but that is what it is for us, is it not? Life is too short to waste it on things like human passions that are passing away. Jesus would say, in Luke 9,

²⁴ “...whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

The epicenter of this battle lies within our own soul. We each have human passions that act like fountains of wickedness pouring smelly sewage into the clean well of the spirit God has given us in Christ. These putrid fountains were capped when God, in His mercy, gave us new life and a new heart for Him. Now the goal of our life is to enjoy that purity and that cleanness.

We dare not fight this battle without being born again. New birth alone transforms the mind, heart, judgment, affections, priorities, and conversation. It brings us away from those lusts which used to be fashionable and brings us into God's very fellowship. We must begin this battle with true conversion. Ask yourself, “Am I born again? Have I experienced new birth in Christ? Has God made something alive in me which used to be dead?” But, understand a new birth does not cause these foul fountains of human lust to lie quiet in our soul. These fountains are still active and they are looking for fissures in our soul to bubble up and contaminate the whole. We must struggle to keep those cracks sealed by making the will of God the aim of our lives. The killing of sin is the goal!

Let us consider the expectations for us when we battle sin. First, there will be an expectation that unbelievers will be surprised,

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.

I love Verse 3 and I think of it often, “For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do.” Unbelievers do not have their desires changed; they are still connected to a life apart from God. Peter tells us the time for living like unbelievers is past for us.

How much time of your life did you living like an unbeliever? Someone may say, “I spent sixty years of my life living that way!” That is enough. Another may say, “I spent six years!” That is enough. Another may say, “I spent sixty weeks!” That is enough. Another may say, “I spent six minutes.” That is enough. Whatever time one spends living that way is time lost, wasted, and it is enough. Enough harm has been done.

If you ask a drug addict, “How long did you spend in that drugged up lifestyle,” whatever amount of time they say, if that person is born again, that person will say, “I wasted enough time.” Your sinful flesh will not give you that answer, will it? If you ask your indwelling sin, “How much time is enough,” it will say, “Just one more round! Just one more go! Just a little bit more, and then it will be enough. Then I will be able to close that book and close that chapter and I will be through with it. But, just a little bit more; one more party, one more fling, one more drink, and one more sensual indulgence.” Listen to what God says in Proverbs 27,

²⁰ Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

If you are living according to your lust, you will never be satisfied. The principle is: Sin is like salt water, the more you drink the more you burn with unquenchable thirst. This is not so with doing the will of God. Doing the will of God is like fresh water. Drinking from God's Spirit becomes good, healthy, refreshing, and satisfying to the soul. Consider carefully the words God uses to describe these human passions: sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

God is reminding us of the ugliness of sin and what it does to us. It messes up the Garden of Eden for us. It brings pain, misery, brokenness, shame, guilt, sorrow and isolation. As you fight, remember what sin always does,

⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery...

This is a picture of an unbeliever being swept away by the tsunami wave of sin. It is so powerful they cannot extract themselves from it. As you battle sin, remember what sin does to the unbeliever: it sweeps them away in this flood to their destruction. The evidence of this is all around us. I do not know what happened to Whitney Huston, but she was my age. I remember her once young, talented, sane, vibrant, and happy. Each time she was interviewed in recent years, I grieved and I thought, “Poor girl. Poor girl.” Sin sucks the life from those who give themselves to it.

Unbelievers are surprised you do not run with them and they malign you. Sin craves company. Unbelievers notice when you do not attend their drinking parties, when you do not speak with the same foul language, when you do not laugh at the same sexual humor, when you think and act differently in relationship to your sexuality. They notice when you love the things they hate and you hate the things they love, and they are surprised. You appear to them like an alien from another planet. They do not like to be reminded of their earthiness. Remember you used to run with them. Remember it is only God's mercy that rescued you.

As you battle sin, expect for unbelievers to malign you. Do not anticipate worldly esteem for your fighting and gaining victory over sin in your life. Not all unbelievers will malign you, but many will. God is working to redeem some unbelievers and these may be drawn to you and to your witness by your purity, but with the majority you can expect to be offended at your righteous way of living. To be sure we must avoid all self-righteousness and spiritual pride which is offensive to anybody, but understand this about the spiritual battle, you will be squeezed by people in this world when you choose to live for the will of God.

Second, understand unbelievers will be judged,

⁵ ...but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The only judgment that counts is God's. No one gets away with sin. All will give an account. This is a book keeping term which says there is a time when all the debts are going to be called in. In our battle against sin, we will do well to remember the journey for all those who walk on the path marked "sensual indulgence". In other words, as you struggle against sin, do not let Satan tempt you, "Well, life is unfair. I am trying to do what is right and it seems as though the people who are giving themselves over to sensual indulgence are the ones who are winning in the world." Keep the end in view, because in a short time God will say, "All will give an account of their lives and unbelievers will be soon called to the sad account for all of their curses, their foolish gestures, their slanders and falsehoods, their wild parties, and their sensual indulgences." Peter tells us to remember when we endure persecution from such people, sin does not pay. We are not to envy unbelievers, but we are to mourn for them.

Finally, unbelievers will be saved. There will be some who will be rescued,

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.

Peter is talking about people who were alive when they heard the Gospel, but who have died. Likely, these people who are dead are people who were martyred as a result of their faith. This is the reason why people who used to be alive, living like an unbeliever had the Gospel preached to them. They have died for Christ, but though judged by others for being Christians, nonetheless, they are living in the spirit the way God does. Unbelievers become believers and are given the life of God.

Peter's encouragement is two-fold. First, be the person who is judged by sinful humanity in this short life, but who escapes the Judgment of God for all eternity. Secondly, know righteous living provides a platform for the Gospel to have a powerful and liberating affect upon unbelievers around us. Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. The battle rages strong against your soul. What form sin takes is individual to the person, but sin, for sure, presses itself against us.

Here are some practical implications as to how we can do this and for us to think about and consider.

First, you must be born again. All attempts to kill sin without Christ are futile. You must find an interest in Christ. The Good News is, God promises if you seek after Christ you will find Him. If you plead in mercy and repentance before Him, He will forgive you sin and give you life. Have you come to Christ and found an interest in Him? Are you born again?

Second, no believer is free from the necessity of fighting. Make this your daily work and your daily goal.

Third, pray for a strong desire to be free from sin. No one overcomes sin without a strong desire to be free. This begins in our heart and in our mind. It is not in our hands. It must begin with the strong desire to hate sin, for what it does to each of us, for what it did to Christ, and the world around us. Hate sin and love God in His righteousness.

Fourth, recognize the occasions in which you are tempted to sin and avoid them. Paul tells us to make no provision for our flesh. Be smart.

Fifth, take time to get your soul happy in God each day! How vital this is. The joy of the Lord is your strength. Remember why He is worthy to die for. I believe if we do not do this, we will succumb to sin's power. To take time in the morning to make our soul happy in God we will find God is an awesome and glorious God. If we connect with Him in fellowship, we will become happy and joyful in Him. Take time for that and to nourish that.

Sixth, we need the Holy Spirit to fill us each day. Without the Holy Spirit's control of our lives, we are doomed. This calls us to submit and yield to His control daily.

Seventh, find another believer who will battle with you. God does not intend for this battle to be a lonely one. You have a church family. Find another believer who will battle with you to the glory of God and for our joy. Amen and amen.