

Pursuing Purity (Part 1)

I Peter 4:1-2

INTRODUCTION:

If you would open your Bibles this morning, in a few moments we will be reading from I Peter Chapter 4.

Do you want to make a difference for Jesus Christ in the world around you?

I trust that the answer to that question is yes.

But then we have to ask, "What is it that we as a church need to make a difference for Jesus Christ in the Greenwood area? What is it that I as an individual needs more of in order to have an impact with my neighbors, and my friends, and my family in this fallen world full of suffering and difficulties. We live in a world that is increasingly opposed to the things of Christ.

How is it that we can make a difference in this kind of world? It is that quest that Peter begins to answer for us this morning. Remember that Peter is writing to people who are suffering. People who are specifically suffering under persecution. Living in a world that is hostile to the things of God.

As we turn to chapter 4, he gives them a command. He reveals to them something that they need. The ultimate goal that we see there in verse 2 is that we are "to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." We will see here in a moment that this is a call to purity.

One of the things that we greatly need as a church, as individuals, and as an entire country in order to make an impact for Jesus Christ is a greater personal purity.

So this morning as Peter makes a plea for purity, even in the midst of suffering and persecution.

This, again is a two part message. In these messages, I want us to note three ways by which we can achieve purity in our lives.

The Passion for Purity

The Path to Purity

A Portrait of Purity

Follow along with me as we read the first six verses of chapter 4, though we'll only study the first two this morning.

All Stand and Read Scripture

1 Peter 4:1-6 (NASB)

4 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³ For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; ⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.

Prayer

Look with me again at verses 1 and 2.

1 Peter 4:1-2 (NASB)

4 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, (Or as some translations read, with the same MIND) because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

As we look at this plea for purity, I want you to note The Passion for Purity.

BODY:

I. THE PASSION FOR PURITY.

Peter tells us where a passion for personal purity in the life of a Christian comes from.

It is the first phrase that we find here in verse 1.

1 Peter 4:1-6 (NASB)

4 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh,

We as believers should be passionate for purity because Jesus Christ has died upon the cross for us. He took our sin and has become our "ARK" as we saw last week. That is what moves us to seek personal purity.

Understand this! The believer does not seek to be pure in order to be accepted by God. The believer seeks to be pure because of the thankfulness that he has of being **made** acceptable through Jesus Christ. You don't seek to be **pure** or **righteous** or **holy** or **to do good things** in order to be **justified** by God, you seek to be **pure** because you have been justified (or made righteous in the sight of God) through Jesus Christ.

Let's make it very clear, if you are seeking a personal purity today in order to be **acceptable** to Jesus Christ, you will fail. I promise you.

We know this for a couple of reasons:

1. You cannot be pure enough. The standard is sinlessness and there is nothing you can do to take back your past impurities. You have no time machine! You cannot change it.
2. Not only that. You cannot be perfectly pure from this time forward. You can try really hard, but that sin will well up in you because that sin is deeply rooted. You cannot be pure enough. You will fail and not meet the standard.
3. But, not only that. If you are seeking to be pure in order to earn acceptance with God, I also guarantee you that your motivation will not last. You will quit!

The going will get tough, the temptations will mount, pressures and suffering will come and you will throw in the towel because the desire to gain God's acceptance is not a sufficient motivation to be pure. You will quit!

No, **the genuine believer desires personal purity with a passion because they have experienced the suffering of Jesus Christ on their behalf!**

That is why Peter tells us in verse 1: "**Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh**" for our sin, **THAT** is the reason that we are to "**arm yourselves also with the...mind**" of Christ and seek this purity!

How can one read this scripture and NOT see the hand of God as the author of it! What human being could have possibly come up with such a concept! And what is amazing is that, as characteristically unhuman this teaching is, this same divine teaching is consistent throughout the entire New Testament and even foretold in the Old Testament.

Can I just pause for a moment and suggest three ways in which the suffering of Christ on the cross creates a Passion for Purity in a genuine believer?

1. Because the cross creates a new creation with new desires.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Through the new birth in baptism, we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. And the scriptures tell us that...

- we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit;
 - we are born again;
 - we have different desires than we had before. That is because the Spirit lives within us and we are told in Gal. 5:17 that the Spirit wars against the flesh. So, if someone claims to believe the Gospel and their response is "This is great, I can sin all I want without consequences", I am telling you, they are not saved. They have not understood the Gospel. Because when you believe the Gospel, you are born again and made a new creation with new desires. Something fundamentally changes that causes you to want to turn from your past sin and live for Jesus Christ.
2. But beyond the fact that the cross transforms us into a new creation, it also creates a desire for personal purity because the cross reveals the wickedness of our sin. When we turn and look at Jesus Christ on the cross, we get a glimpse of just how wicked each of us are! When we grasp all of the physical pain and all of the mental anguish that Jesus endured, we realize that that is what MY sin deserves!

We begin to realize that each time that our pride raises up in us, every time that I begin to get selfish, IT TAKES THE CROSS TO PAY FOR THAT SIN! Every time I tell a little white lie or when I have a little lustful look, IT TAKES THE CROSS TO PAY FOR THAT SIN!

When we understand how awful our sin is, we begin to say "**I don't want it!**" That sin is nailing Christ to the cross. It teaches us to see the wickedness of our own sin and to hate it. It no longer has the allure that it had before you started following Christ.

3. The cross creates a passion for purity, not only because it creates a new creation and because it reveals the wickedness of sin, but it also creates a desire for the glory of Jesus Christ.

You see when the believer looks at the cross, they not only see the wickedness of their sin, but they also see the magnificence of the Savior Who took the wrath for them. You look at the ARK and says "What an amazing ARK!" What an amazing Savior Who took my guilt on that cross! **He died for me! He has redeemed me! He has purchased me! He has saved me!** And something builds up inside us that convicts us that we want people to praise and worship that great Savior **Who rescued me!**

Something happens. We reach a point where we want to avoid anything that brings shame and mockery to our great Redeemer's name. We seek to live our life in such a way that it will bring praise to His name and cause people to want to look to Him.

Understand that when you look at the cross, it does not give you the freedom to sin, it causes you to hate sin and long for purity to the glory of Jesus Christ.

If we as believers are going to be passionate for a personal purity, we are going to have to fuel the fire in our hearts by looking at the cross of Jesus Christ.

That is the passion for PURITY! Next let's look at...

II. THE PATH TO PURITY.

1 Peter 4:1 (NASB)

4 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

Let's stop here and consider the phrase " he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,".

What in the world is Peter talking about?

There are a number of different interpretations. Let me share four of them with you.

1. Some people think that this phrase refers to the suffering of Christ on the cross. "**He who has suffered in the flesh**", they think refers to Christ. He has suffered and "**ceased from sin**". The first problem with this is that Christ was sinless, so He could not cease from something that He never did. Another problem is that the grammar and syntax make it almost certain that the same person that is to "**arm yourselves**" is the same person who has "**suffered in the flesh**".
2. A second interpretation is that Peter is referring to death. They think that the phrase suggests that when someone has died, they have ceased from sin. There is a truth there. When the believer dies, we are glorified and freed from this body of sin. But that doesn't seem to be what Peter is saying. He doesn't say that when

someone has **died**, they are freed from sin, he says it happens when they have **suffered**. Plus if we are to accept this understanding, it makes it hard to understand the point of what Peter is saying. How does "**arm yourselves also with the same purpose**" fit in for a dead person?

3. A third interpretation is that the suffering referred to here is a spiritual uniting with the suffering of Jesus Christ. In other words that take it to be a parallel to what Paul teaches in Romans Chapter 6. That we have been united in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and because of that union we are dead to sin. But again, there are some problems with that. First Peter does not develop the theme of our being united with Christ in the same way Paul does. So he does not have that to refer back to. More importantly, though, Peter talks of those who have "**suffered in the flesh**", not someone who has suffered spiritually in union with Christ.
4. That brings us to a fourth interpretation. That is that Peter says "**he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin**," he is saying that suffering is a tool of God's process of sanctification. He who has armed himself with the mind of Christ and suffered with that mind has had the power of sin severed from their life.

I think that is what Peter is saying here.

Let me point out, first of all, that this is a spiritual truth. That suffering is something God uses to free the believer from the stranglehold of sin.

James 1:2-4 (NASB)

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Consider it a joy when you encounter trials. WHY? Because it produces patience. And when patience has triumphed, it cleanses you. Peter, himself, has already made this point about suffering.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Peter says rejoice if you are distressed by trials. WHY? Because that suffering is doing two things.

- a. It is proving the genuineness of your faith.
- b. It is purifying it so that we face God in judgment, our faith will be found worthy of glory honor and praise.

Suffering is used to free the believer from the stranglehold of sin. It sanctifies (or purifies) the believer.

So as we look back at chapter 4, I think that is what Peter is saying when he speaks of those who are suffering has ceased from sin because it fits with the context of physical suffering by believers. It also makes sense with the point that Peter is making.

He said "**arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin**". And then he continues in verse 2...

1 Peter 4:2 (NASB)

² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

So, what Peter is telling us here is that we are to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ even when we are suffering, because through that process the power of sin is severed in our life.

Now, you may ask, "**Does this mean that the believer becomes sinless in this life?**"

The answer to that question is "**NO!**".

We know that the scripture clearly teaches that the believer never becomes sinless.

The apostle John, writing to believers so they can know they are saved says this:

1 John 1:8 (NASB)

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Let me paraphrase John, "If you claim to be sinless, you are either a fool or a liar, because you are not sinless".

We read in Romans chapter 7, Paul's own testimony of his battle with sin.

Romans 7:19-20, 24a (NASB)

¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

²⁴ Wretched man that I am!

If **Paul** says that he is a wretched man and he does not do what he wants to do sometimes and he does do things that he does not want to do, who of us wants to claim that we are doing better than Paul!

So, we don't become sinless. So what does Peter mean when he says we have "**ceased from sin**"?

I believe Peter is using the term "sin" here in the same way the apostle John does in I John chapter 3 and in the same way that Paul does in Romans chapter 6.

???, to not refer to **each sinful act**, but to refer to the **desire to sin**.

1 John 3:6 (NASB)

⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

Wait a minute! John just said that if we say we do not sin, we deceive ourselves and then he says that if we abide in Christ, we do not sin.

How can that be?

Well, we lose it in translation. John's word for sin is in the present tense. It is emphasizing a continuing ongoing action. He is referring to sin as something that is controlling us and we keep sinning because we can't stop.

Paul is saying something similar in...

Romans 6:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.

He is not saying that we are dead to sin and we no longer feel temptation, but the power of sin has been severed and we have been freed from it.

ILLUSTRATION:

Let me try to make it practical for us.

We all struggle with pride. If that root of pride has grown to a point where it controls us, we are a prideful person. Often, the only way that we get freed from that controlling sin of pride is for God to take everything away. To rip away the things that give us pride and humble us. It takes suffering to sever that root.

If we are struggling with a lack of faith, we continue to put our faith in all of the things of the world such as, bank accounts, retirement funds, prestige, etc. Often God will have to strip all of those things away from us and free us from that sin.

That is what Peter is saying. Arm yourself with the mind of Christ even in the midst of suffering because that suffering is going to sever the root of sin so you may be able to live the rest of your time here not following the desires and lust of the flesh, but by living according to the will of God.

That is the pathway to purity.

Next week we are going to continue with the **Path to Purity** and consider, what is the mind of Christ and how can we attain it?

CONCLUSION:

These words of Peter reminds us of what Paul wrote.

Romans 6:3-4 (NASB)

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

One of the sufferings of Jesus was His death on the cross. We are to arm ourselves with the same mind and realize that we too have died, not physically, but to our old self of sin. When we live in "newness of life". we no longer have the desire to sin because we see Christ's death on the cross and what he did for us and have no desire to shame Christ. So as those who are dead to the world we are no longer to live the remainder of their lives according to human desires but according to God's will.

Do you want to make a difference for Jesus Christ? Seek purity in your life!

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, do it today. Don't wait until you have cleaned up your life. **You don't clean yourself up to come to the Christ; you surrender yourself to Christ, to let Him clean you up!**

God be with You.