

## Living for God - 1 Peter 4:1-11

*As Christians we are called to be finished with sin by being willing to face the ridicule and pressure of those we used to hang around with. This is to live for God. Yet, God does not leave us alone in the world he gives us a Christian community to embrace.*

### Prepared for the Future

Are you prepared for the future?

I guess the answer is, probably not!

We don't know what the future holds and so it is very hard to be prepared.

Mostly, we just assume that things will go on as normal, and don't necessarily prepare for things going wrong.

- **Coronavirus...**

That's why the Coronavirus pandemic was such a shock.

Although, some scientist had repeatedly warned that a pandemic was inevitable sooner or later,

many governments including ours weren't prepared for it.

The NHS was not well enough stocked with PPE, there was no infrastructure to track and trace large numbers of infected people and no contingency planning about how to manage a pandemic.

Apparently now a lot of work is going into make sure we are prepared for the next pandemic!

- **"The end of all things is near."** (1 Peter 4:7)

In the middle of our passage, Peter throws in at what first glance seems like an out of place comment: "The end of all things is near!"

Yet, actually this statement about the future is fundamental to all that Peter is saying.

When we realise that the world as it is passing away, that God has something far better planned

but that before we get to that point God is coming to judge the world,

then surely it should affect the way we live now in this life, so that we are prepared for the future.

Our government needs to make a number of changes and investments so we are prepared for a future pandemic. Noah had to build an ark so that he was ready for the flood.

What do we need to do to be ready for 'the end of all things'?

Put simply we need to be finished with sin and living for God.

### Finished with Sin: Rejecting Pagan Life

As Christians of course, there is a sense in which we are already finished with sin.

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..." (1 Peter 2:24)

Jesus has taken the punishment for our sins, so that we are no longer in dread of God's judgement.

Our eternal inheritance is secure:

"... and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you," (1 Peter 1:4)

But, as Christians we are also finished with sin, not just in the sense of being forgiven, but in the sense given in the rest of 2:24:

"...so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24).

### **The Problem with Living for God: Judgement by People**

But, the big problem with finishing with sin, is not just the temptations we face, but the pressure from the world around.

When we live for God, there will be moments when the world around us will be upset with us for doing so. This is the issue Peter faces head on in verses 1-6.

And what can make that hard is that a lot of people who you used to share those attitudes or behaviours with will find it odd that you no longer share them!

In Peter's time that would have been particularly acute. The drunken orgies of the day were often connected to important social celebrations for families or guilds or the like. To not join in with those may well have appeared as a rejection of deeply held traditions.

To reject idolatry may well have been seen as provoking the wrath of the gods and endangering society as a result.

To not join in with these practices, because you are a Christian would have put you in a very difficult position in your society - especially if you used to do that.

In our society the situation may not be so stark, although some people when they become Christians may find themselves distanced or ridiculed by old groups of friends who they used to go out and get drunk with. Or in a world post-sexual revolution we might be lambasted for having a very clear view on sexual ethics.

Living for God can be tough because of people's reaction.

### **The Perspective for Living for God: Judgement by God**

What we need then is the perspective for living for God. That is not to focus on the present judgement of people, but the coming judgement of God.

#### **Jesus, vs. 1**

This is where Jesus's example comes in. In the previous Chapter, Peter spoke of Jesus as the great example of someone who suffered for doing good.

He was so rejected by the world, that they crucified him, even though he lived perfectly according to the will of God.

Jesus's attitude was he would obey God no matter what suffering would result. No matter how much he was rejected. And Jesus did he obeyed God even though it meant going to the cross.

Peter says if we have that same attitude. To obey God, no matter how much the cost, then we will be truly be finished with sin!

### **Old Testament Martyrs (The Dead), vs. 6**

Jesus is not the only example for us to follow. Verse 6 is a tricky verse to understand and there is a lot of debate about what it means.

However, I think it is best to take, 'the dead' as a reference to those believers of God who lived before Christ and have now died. Yet, they too heard a form of the gospel and trusted in God, even though it meant that they were abused for their faith. This was true of Noah and many of the Old Testament heroes. Many of whom died for their faith. They too are examples to us to be willing to face the judgement of people rather the ultimate judgement of God.

### **Us**

We need to have this same perspective. If we are just concerned for our immediate safety and acceptance by other people, then when the pressure comes we will just follow the crowd and not live for God.

If however, our focus is on God's ultimate judgement and acceptance by him, then we will be resolved to live his way, no matter what people in the world say. In so doing we will be finished with sin.

### **Living For God: Embracing Christian Community**

Having said that God does not expect us to go it alone in a world without God.

Becoming a Christian may mean being in some way rejected by your non-Christian friends because you won't join them in doing all the same things as before, but positively it means embracing and being embraced by the Christian community, God's people.

And so Peter, having talked about the rejection of non-Christians in verses 1-6 and being finished with sin, moves on in verses 8-11 to show us how we can live for God as part of a Christian community.

And there are three key things he encourages us to do!

#### **Love - vs. 8**

The first is to love each other as Christians.

This is something he has mentioned twice before:

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." (1 Peter 1:22)

"Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king." (1 Peter 2:17)

But now it becomes a central point. And what is more it is this love for one another that can help us to be finished with sin. Peter says, 'Love covers over a multitude of sins.'

God's love for us was shown most profoundly in sending his son to die for our sins. Forgiveness is costly, but God was willing to pay the cost for us to be forgiven.

In the same way our love for one another will mean that we are willing to forgive each others sins.

One of the dangers of lockdown for us as a church community is that some of us have not seen much of each other. It is very easy when we do not meet up with people for petty resentments or upsets to grow. We can feel forgotten about if others have not contacted us or perhaps upset by some words used by others in one of the videos. These upsets and resentments may in a sense be justified. Perhaps people should have made more of an effort to contact you or they have said the wrong thing.

When we love each other, however, we will be willing to forgive others their many failings and maintain the relationships. This will perhaps take more effort as the lockdown goes on and we feel more estranged from one another. It is a real test of how well we love one another as a Christian community.

### **Welcome - vs. 9**

The second thing that Peter encourages is that we offer hospitality to one another or we welcome one another.

Now offering hospitality costs money! The early church depended on hospitality in two ways:

- they had no church buildings, so someone with a large enough house would have had to welcome the church community to gather together there.
- visiting preachers and speakers needed to be given somewhere to stay and fed.

These days we think of welcome and hospitality as saying hello to people coming into church and offering them a tea or coffee after the service or possibly having them around for a meal. These are all good things to do.

But actually when you give financially to the work of the church you are really ensuring a 'welcome!' Nearly all the money given to the church goes on paying for the running of the building we meet in or the cost of housing and feeding the vicar.

- So when you give financially to the work of the church you are paying for the vicar to be welcomed into Ramsgate by providing a house and enough money for him and his family to live on.
- You are also paying for people to be welcomed into our meeting place the church building. By paying for maintenance costs and heating and lighting. One or two people have said to me - I think jokingly: do we really need to fix the boiler, couldn't people just come wrapped up? Well they could, but that wouldn't be very hospitable!!

Being part of a Christian community means being willing to pay the costs of hospitality.

### **Serve - vs. 10-11**

Finally, embracing Christian community means being willing to serve. Here, as in other parts of the New Testament talks about gifts or 'charisma' God gives us. Only Peter is very vague. He mentions two broad categories of charisma: speaking and serving and even then tells us to do the same with both.

The point of these gifts, is that God has gives us strength so that we can use them to serve others.

If we are gifted in speaking, whether that's preaching, teaching in a small group, singing a hymn or song for the YouTube service or offering words of comfort over the phone, he encourages us to see this as part of God's work. This is God speaking to others to encourage them!!

If we are gifted in serving, whether that's helping to maintain the church buildings, offering help at the food bank, dropping supplies around to those who need it, offering lifts to people or whatever, remember you are doing it in God's strength. You are being God at work in the world!!

And we are doing it not for ourselves, but for the sake of others. This is service!

### **Glorifying God**

Becoming a Christian and committing to living for God, can be difficult. Especially if your old friends and family are upset that you no longer join with them in activities that you now feel you can't as a Christian.

But we have the eternal perspective. We care much more about the judgement of God, than the judgement of man.

But we also discover a new role to play! Not in wild partying, but in helping to build a loving, welcoming and serving Christian community!

All of this helps to fulfil Peter's main aim: that God and Jesus Christ will be praised!

As our mission statement at St. Luke's says:

"Growing in Christ to glorify God and enjoy him forever." (cf. vs. 11)