

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/18/93

I Peter 4:1-6 "How to Experience Fruitful Living in a Fallen World"

**Intro:**

This is a great time of the year. I enjoy fresh garden produce. Do you? Fresh tomatoes, sweet corn, green beans. One of my favorite desserts is strawberry shortcake. It's wonderful to see the signs of fruitfulness all around us.

Q: Are you experiencing a fruitful life? Lots of people aren't. It's not because they don't want to. I don't know of anybody who doesn't want to have a fruitful life. But the world is full of people, who if they're honest with themselves, are barren on the inside.

Q: How can we experience fruitful living in a fallen world?  
That's what I Peter 4:1-6 is all about.

**Proposition: In I Peter 4:1-6, we will learn that there are 3 truths we must implement if we are to experience fruitful living in this fallen world.**

- I. Truth #1: We ARE identified with Christ (1-2).
  - A. This Identification affects our Mindset (1).
  - B. This Identification affects our Values (2).
- II. Truth #2: We WERE enslaved to sin (3-4).
  - A. Our Past involved Sinful Conduct (3).
  - B. Our Past involved a Sinful Crowd (4).
- III. Truth #3: We WILL all face Judgment (5-6).
  - A. What that will mean for the Godless (5)
  - B. What that will mean for the Godly (6)

The Big Picture of I Peter

Notice the first word of v 1.

V 1 "Forasmuch" (NIV "Therefore")

Peter's counsel in ch 4 is linked to the earlier message of the letter.

I Peter is all about "How to be a Christian in a Non-Christian World." We've been digging into this epistle of Peter since March. We've learned that if we're going to live successfully in a non-Christian world, we need to get a grip on these themes...

Ch 1--Redemption 1:3

Ch 2--Responsibilities 2:11

Ch 3--Relationships a. Family (1-7) b. Church (8ff)

Last week, from the closing verses of ch 3, we learned how to be confident in life. True confidence is linked to the Person and Work of Christ. Truly confident people are those who are followers of Christ.

Now let's zero in on I Pt 4:1-6. If we are to experience fruitful living in this fallen world, there are 3 truths we must implement. They have to do with our present, our past, and our future conditions.

## **I. Truth #1: We ARE identified with Christ (1-2).**

V 1 "Forasmuch, then, as Christ has suffered..."

Right there's the heart of Christianity. Christianity is not a religion, nor a denomination, and it's not a list of rules. Christianity revolves around a Person.

"Christ has suffered for us."

Think about that. Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Triune Godhead, the Messiah prophesied in the OT. That Christ. Christ suffered. Oh, how He suffered. He suffered the rejection of men. He suffered the agony of execution of death by crucifixion. He suffered the wrath of God. Why?

Christ suffered FOR US. Let that sink in. He suffered for us, in our place, on our behalf. The Spotless Lamb of God sacrificed His life for us. He identified with us.

Key: My fruitfulness in life is linked to my Identification with Christ.

This identification involves 2 things...

### A. This Identification affects our Mindset (1).

V 1 "arm yourselves likewise with the same mind"

The verb appears only here in the NT. It's a military word, used of a soldier getting ready for battle. Can't you picture the Roman soldier putting on his armor? I can assure you he took his time! He put on his breastplate and protective belt. He picked up his shield and sword. And he carefully placed his helmet on his head. Every good soldier took great care to protect his head.

So should every Christian. Our identification with Christ must affect our Mindset. Peter says, "Arm yourselves with the same mind."

Listen. The battle in the Christian life is either won or lost in the mind. My constant challenge is to learn to think like Christ.

Ph 2:5 "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"

Ph 4:8 "Finally brethren, whatever things are true...think on these"

II Cor 10:5 "Casting down imaginations...every thought to obedience"

My identification with Christ must affect my mindset. Jesus Christ is our Model, our Guide, our Pattern, our Standard. We are His followers.

Quote: Chuck Colson wrote this in an article in Christianity Today, "What we DO must flow from who we ARE. We cannot export something we don't have. Before we can bring a holy influence in society, we must first BE a holy people." (quoted by James Dobson, March 1993 newsletter)

We must arm ourselves with the mind of Christ. His attitudes should be our attitudes. I must learn to think like Christ. Let me ask you this.

Q: What was Jesus' attitude towards sin?

V 1b "for he that has suffered...has ceased from sin."

The commentators differ as to who the "he" refers to at the end of v 1. Who has ceased from sin? Is Peter referring to the Christian? Or does the "he" refer to Christ?

Certainly, both are true. The Christian has "ceased from sin." Because of our union with Christ, we have died to sin in a legal sense. Paul put it this way in Gal 5:24, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

But it seems more natural to see the "he" as referring to Christ Himself. Christ suffered. Christ has ceased from sin. Christ came to earth to deal with sin. He finished the sin issue once and for all.

Illust:

Here's Peter's point. Since Christ was so concerned with the sin problem, shouldn't we be? Our identification with Christ affects our mindset, and secondly...

### B. This Identification affects our Values (2).

V 2 "That he no longer..."

There are 2 value systems in the world. On the one hand, there are the "lusts of men." In contrast to that, there is "the will of God." These two value systems are in violent conflict.

Our values affect every decision we make. There are two choices: either the lusts of men, or the will of God. Our values affect the way we use our time.

eg--If I choose to play a round of golf on Wednesday PM, instead of participating in our mid-week Bible study and prayer time, it reflects my values. I'm saying I value leisure more than spiritual growth.

Our values also affect the way we use our money.

eg--If I take a \$1500 vacation, but decide I can't afford to give my tithes and offerings to God, it reflects my values.

Peter's point is clear. If we are identified with Christ, then our greatest value in life is to do the will of God, not the lusts of men.

Christ could say in Jn 5:30, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father who sent me." Can you say that? Think of the decisions you made this week. Whose value system did your choices reflect, man's or God's?

eg--

Quote: More than 450 years ago, Martin Luther wrote: "If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." (quoted by James Dobson, March 1993 newsletter)

Tran: Fruitful living starts here. Truth #1--We are identified with Christ. That identification should affect our mindset, and our values.

## II. Truth #2: We WERE enslaved to sin (3-4).

Listen to what we WERE...

V 3 "For the time past of our life may suffice..."

Do you remember what your life was like B.C. (before I met Christ). It's not a very pleasant topic to consider. But sometimes we need to remember.

### A. Our Past involved Sinful Conduct (3).

V 3 (NIV) "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do."

Evidently, the Christians receiving Peter's letter had a dismal past. Before they were saved they engaged in horrendous living. Peter recalls the worst vices:

1. Lasciviousness--debauchery; living without restraints
2. Lusts--unbridled living
3. Excess of wine--drunkenness
4. Revelings--a village festival; orgies
5. Carousings--a drinking bout
6. Abominable Idolatries--image worship

What a past! A life of sex, drink, and wild parties. What a description of the age in which we live!

Do you know the most encouraging word in v 3? The word "PAST". That's what they USED to do. Until what happened? God saved them!

Listen. God can save even those whose lives were wrecked by vile sin!

Illust: I Cor 6:9-11 "...and such WERE some of you..."

Here's the point. Time is a precious commodity. We already "wasted" enough time with disobedient living before we met Christ. Can we afford to waste any more time now that we know Christ? No way!

If I want to enjoy a fruitful life, my past conduct has to go.

Q: Have you ever noticed how the fancier the restaurant, the darker the lights?! When you first walk in, having just come in from the brilliant sunlight, you can barely see.

Illust: On vacation this year, we spent several days in the Florida panhandle. The beaches are as white as sugar. When the sun is high in the sky, the reflection off of the sand and water is nearly blinding. Every time we'd return to our motel room from the outside, the same thing would happen. When we first got in the room, we could barely see. It seemed so dark. Then what happened? Our eyes got accustomed to the darkness. It doesn't take long to get used to the darkness.

Think about that for a moment. It's easy for us to get used to sin. It doesn't take long for us to start feeling comfortable around sin. We may not even realize what's happening.

Listen. There's no place for sin in our conduct. We already wasted enough time doing what the world does.

Q: Are you holding on to any sinful habits?

If you are, and if you know Christ, let me ask you this? Why are you holding on to those habits? Didn't you already waste enough time before Christ saved you engaging in sinful conduct?

Illust:

#### B. Our Past involved a Sinful Crowd (4).

V 4 "In which they think it strange..."

Did you catch that? When I get serious about living in obedience to Christ, how will my old crowd respond? Are they going to pat me on the back? No way. Don't expect the world to applaud your righteousness in life.

The word "strange" is an interesting word. It's root means "to surprise." It's related to the word meaning "to receive a guest." Have you ever been surprised by an unexpected guest? "What in the world are you doing here!"

That's what your crowd thinks of your new Christian life. They think it strange that you don't run with them any more.

Notice carefully those words "run with." It's Ok to spend time with non-Christians. They need Christ. But it's not Ok to "run with" them, to hang out with them. Why not? Because we've got a different mindset and set of values.

Q: What kind of impact will your distinct life have on the sinful crowd?

A: v 4b "speaking evil of you" (blaspheme; NIV "heap abuse on you")

Illust: Last fall, Wade and I travelled to Columbus for the state conference of the OARBC. The conference brochure listed several motels. Of course, the one with the cheapest price caught my eye. We found the place, and asked the manager if we could see a room. He grabbed a key and walked with us to the back of the complex. We entered the room to look around. The first thing that caught my eye was a door leading into another motel room. I asked about it. He said, "Oh, no problem, that door is locked." To prove his point he reached for the handle, and turned it. The door opened. I saw the bed in the next occupant's room! The manager quickly pulled the door shut, and locked it. Wade and I had a good laugh. This definitely was a low budget operation.

We took the room. When we returned to the checkin desk, I nudged Wade and pointed to a sign on the lobby wall. It was the Motel's advertisement logo. I wrote down what it said, "When you're sleepin', we look just like those big, fancy hotels."

Later in the evening, while in our room, we had to kill a couple of bugs that intruded our room. I chucked and said to Wade, "Hey, just remember, when the lights go out, and when we're sleeping, this place will look just like one of those big, fancy hotels!"

I know too many Christians that live their lives like the motto of that motel. They want to be just like the world. They want to fit in. But listen. If you're a

Christian, and that's your aim, you'll never be fruitful in life. You know why not? Because that's what we USED to be.

Tran: If we am to experience fruitful living in a fallen world, we must implement 3 truths. We are identified with Christ. We were enslaved to sin. And...

### **III. Truth #3: We WILL all face Judgment (5-6).**

This is a sobering truth. The day is coming when every person will appear before the Eternal Judge. Every person.

Q: What will it be like?

#### A. What that will mean for the Godless (5)

V 5 "Who shall give an account..."

In this life, the critics of Christianity blast us with their words. In the newspaper, on the screen, in the picket lines. The assault of vicious, slanderous speech is rampant against the righteous. It's the "in" thing today to verbally abuse the Christian.

But mark this. What will those who abuse Christianity with their words inevitably have to do? "they shall give an account to Him"

At the Judgment, the Godless will have to give a verbal account to God. In this life, the godless will judge us, but one day God will judge them.

Illust:

#### B. What that will mean for the Godly (6)

V 6 "For, for this cause..."

Here we come to another controversial text. When was the gospel preached to "them that are dead"? One commentator said that this verse implies there is a second chance for salvation after death. But nowhere does the Bible teach that. Rather, the Bible repeatedly stresses the sobering truth that there is no opportunity for salvation after death.

If we're going to interpret v 6 rightly, we need to remember the context. As Wiersbe points out, it's a context of suffering. Peter is writing to Christians who were suffering for Christ. Many had lost their homes, and their businesses. Some had even been martyred for their faith.

"Them that are dead" means "them that are NOW dead" (NIV). It's literally reads, "The gospel was preached to the "dead ones." Peter has in mind believers who had died. They had been persecuted for the gospel.

The point is this. What the world says about us really doesn't matter. What matters is this. The final Judge is the Lord God.

### **Conclusion:**

Illust: I read a story in a recent letter by Donald Wildman, the president of the American Family Association. "Why Eagles Fly and Chickens Flutter."