

"Breaking Free" - 1 Peter 4:1-6

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:10)

I am quite sure that it is a very bad idea to call the Creator of this universe a liar, but that very thing has been happening since humanity's fall. In fact, original sin was precipitated by Satan calling God's word into question.

*Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "**Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?**" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "**You will not surely die.** For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:1-5)*

In our culture today, it has become incredibly unpopular to talk about sin. Oh, we might talk about values. We might talk about tolerance. But if you point out that certain behaviors are an offense to God, you'd better stand by. "That's intolerant! What's wrong for you might not be wrong for me. Right and wrong are culturally determined, you know. How dare you judge me!"

Even when the culture agrees that certain behaviors are unsavory and wrong, the tendency is that it must be somebody else's fault. It must be environmentally caused. Often the blame is laid on parents, but we have a whole list of people and institutions we can blame for our own bad behavior. It's the media, it's the government, it's poverty, it's racism, it's video games, it's gambling, it's pornography. I don't deny that these can all be bad influences, but they are not the root cause of your bad behavior. You had better not stand before God on the Day of Judgment and say "It's the government's fault." You will be held accountable. It really doesn't matter what bad influences you've had in your life. It doesn't matter how evil the culture is. You are going to be called to account.

We all have a sin nature. We are inherently rebellious. I don't really care what secular psychology says; I don't care what too many Christian counselors say. Human beings are not fundamentally good, pure, holy creatures. The root of your bad behavior is not what is happening in your environment. The root of your bad behavior is you. We have met the enemy and he is us! You are absolutely enslaved to your sin nature, unless ... You have been set free by Jesus Christ. And if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed!

Jesus Christ will first set you free from the penalty of your sin. Then, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He will set you free from sin's influence. Finally, at our promised resurrection, He will set you free from the very presence of sin.

The Christian life is all about **breaking free** from the sin that so easily ensnares us.

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, (1 Peter 4:1a)

We need to drill down on this first phrase because it is the foundation upon which Peter's entire argument is built. It bridges the gap between the end of Chapter 3 and what follows. Remember that pivotal verse from the last chapter?

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, (1 Peter 3:18)

Jesus suffered and died to pay the penalty for sin. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) Sin brought death into the universe and because sin persists, death persists. Since every one of us sins, we are all subject to death. That body that you lug around is going to die, but there is a far worse death waiting for those who refuse the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15)

Jesus describes hell as a place where your worm will not die and your fire will not be quenched. It is an eternity of perpetual death, perpetual suffering. Dying, you will die.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Jesus suffered and died to bring us back to God. He experienced your death penalty and He offers redemption, forgiveness and reconciliation. The only thing you have to do is believe. Just accept it by faith.

For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:13)

Offer this prayer: "Jesus, I admit I am a sinner and I deserve eternal death but I believe you died to pay for my sins. I believe you were raised on the third day so I can have a living relationship with You. Will you be my Lord and Savior?"

You see, the work of God is to simply believe in the One He sent.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

The moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you break free from sin's penalty. You no longer have to fear the Lake of Fire, the second death because when your body reaches its end, you will be transported into the presence of your Lord and Savior. And you will be with Him forever.

So Christian, you no longer have to worry about sin's eternal penalty, but you do have to worry about sin's continuing influence. You need to break free from sin's influence. You don't have to do it alone, but you do have to participate in the process. Look at verse 1 again.

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (1 Peter 4:1)

First of all, Peter tells us to arm ourselves. That's a military term. We need to take up arms, pick up our weapons. But he is specific here; we are to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ. We are to think about the world as Jesus thinks about the world. We are to take His perspective, share His goals.

But what is this business about ceasing from sin? I know sin is not a good idea, but can I actually cease from sin in reality? Well, yes you can ... in theory. If you followed the Spirit's leading every moment of every day, you would lead a really righteous life. But as long as we're alive, we're going to mess up. We're going to continue to sin.

Notice the parallelism here: Jesus suffered in the flesh ... and He died. Your fleshly suffering will also end in death.

... it is appointed for men to die once, (Hebrews 9:27)

Women too, by the way! ☺ When your body dies, you will cease from sin, but in the meantime, there is a sanctification process you must cooperate with.

... that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (1 Peter 4:2)

What are you living for? Who are you living for? You see, that's the question. Are you living for the lusts of men, or are you living for the will of God?

Peter gives us a list, a sampling of behaviors we really need to work at avoiding:

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. (1 Peter 4:3)

To walk in lewdness is to give oneself over to the worst desires of our flesh. Lusts refers to a longing for something that is forbidden. Drunkenness, or literally, “overflowing with wine” is self-explanatory. (By the way, scripture does not forbid the moderate consumption of alcohol, but it consistently condemns intoxication. Don't get drunk! Don't get stoned!) Revelries probably refers to the practice of a nocturnal procession of drunken folks carousing in the streets, singing praises to Bacchus, or some other pagan deity. Drinking parties – a gathering specifically designed to promote intoxication. It's like what we call a frat party on our college campuses. If the goal is to get everyone wasted, it is lewdness. Abominable idolatries – the practice of worshipping the creature rather than the creator. Anything that is more important to us than God is an idol. We can make idols out of anything. Even the good things God has graciously given for us to enjoy can become an idol if we misplace our focus.

With regard to all these activities, Peter says “Enough!” Our duty as Christians is to live for the will of God, not the lusts of men. If you do that, you are going to stand out and you might take some hits for it. Have you found it to be true?

In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:4-5)

Yeah, Peter says, if you live for the will of God, you probably won't fit in, but don't worry about it. Don't push back, God has it under control. They're going to have to face the judgment seat. God is ready to render justice.

We, on the other hand, are to live for the will of God. That means you have to know what the will of God is! It's not that tough; the Lord wrote it down for us.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

If you will immerse yourself in this Book, if you allow yourself to become saturated with Scripture, slowly, but surely, you will cease to live for the lusts of men.

Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)

Are you called by the name of the Lord God of hosts? Are you called by the name of Jesus? Then break free from sin's continuing influence.

When you turn to Jesus in faith, you break free from sin's penalty. When you cooperate with the Holy Spirit and immerse yourself in the word of God, you progressively break free from sin's influence. And one day, Praise God, we will break free from the very presence of sin.

For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Peter 4:6)

This is a challenging verse, because of the phrase "those who are dead". Is Peter referring to souls in hell? Is he talking about those who are spiritually dead? I don't think so. I think he is simply talking about those individuals who believed the gospel, became Christians and passed on.

Christians die all the time. In fact, it has been my experience that Christians die at exactly the same rate that non-Christians die. In fact, that physical death is actually a judgment. Remember, before sin came into the world, there was no death. But Christians view death in a much different light than do non-Christians, or at least we should. For us, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, which is far better. (2 Corinthians 5:8) And we have the promise of a resurrected body that is absolutely free from the presence of sin.

Paul writes these words to the Thessalonians:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the

Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Our resurrected bodies are going to be like Jesus' resurrected body. They will be designed to inhabit the New Heaven and New Earth where righteousness will dwell.

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5)

Break free, my friends! Trust Jesus and break free from sin's penalty. Seek the will of God by immersing yourself in His word, and break free from sin's influence. Look forward to the New Heaven and Earth; look forward to breaking free from sin's presence.