

FIRST PETER

Lesson 18

Before and After

1 Peter 4:1-6

Most people in this world date their lives from the moment of physical birth to the moment of physical death. We see a tombstone which says, “John Smith: Born 1930; Died 1980” and we know that his earthly history was for 50 years. However, Christians date their lives differently. They look at their time before and after conversion to Christ.

The most significant event in the life of a Christian is not his physical birth or death but his new birth. His spiritual history begins when he is born again by God’s Spirit, placed into spiritual union with Christ, and the whole direction of his life is changed so that he now serves Christ rather than sin and self.

Someone has said that Christians are born twice and die once; that is, they are born physically and spiritually but only die physically. Spiritually they will live in the presence of God forever. However, unbelievers are said to be born once and die twice; that is, they are born physically but must die both physically and eternally, being separated from God forever.

In this section of Scripture (1 Peter 4:1-6), Peter is addressing Christians about their BC (before Christ) and AC (after Christ) experiences. His whole point is that Christ makes a difference in one’s life and it is impossible to live a life of sin after conversion to Christ as one did in his BC state. Peter, as well as other writers of the New Testament, insists that becoming a Christian not only changes one’s position from a citizen of earth to a citizen of heaven, but it changes one’s disposition making his life style on this earth different.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10)

“Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b-13).

When Christ invades a life, some radical changes begin to take place. No Christian is ever perfect in this life, but he begins to show the evidence of spiritual life by producing good works. At no time has a Christian arrived spiritually, even the most mature, but he keeps on moving forward for Christ until he dies or Christ returns.

“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by

Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14).

CHRIST DIED TO DEFEAT SIN AND CAUSE IT TO CEASE (4:1)

“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh”

The “therefore” refers to 1 Peter 3:18 where it says Christ suffered and died physically and spiritually for sins. *“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18).* Christ is our example of how to endure suffering from the world, for He suffered innocently and silently because He had the one goal of bringing us to God through His death. Christ was patient and submissive when undergoing unjust treatment.

“arm yourselves also with the same purpose”

When the Christian is undergoing suffering of any kind he needs to arm himself with heavy armor. The armor (protection) of a Roman infantryman was a shield and a pike (spear) or sword. The shield provided defensive protection while the pike or sword provided offensive thrust.

Notice carefully it says a Christian must arm himself, so this is something he must do to defeat the enemies of his soul—the world, the flesh and the devil. Christians must arm themselves with faith in the commands, promises and principles of the Word of God, and to do this they must know, memorize and meditate on them. When we are not saturated with God’s Word and operating on faith, our shield goes down and we are laid open to the subtle attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil. (Psalm 119:9, 11).

The Word must also be used offensively to penetrate the enemy just like the sword or the pike was used to get to the enemy before he got to the soldier. The best defense is still the best offense, and when we are using the Word of God, we are pushing back our enemies—the world, the flesh and the devil.

Paul made it clear that we must have a sword as well as a shield to defeat the enemy.

“In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:16-17).

When our Lord was being tempted by the devil, Christ used the word of God to turn him back. Quoting from Deut. 8:3, Jesus said to Satan, *“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”* Christ used the Word as a sword to push back the enemy, Satan.

Peter goes on to say that Christians are to arm themselves *“with the same purpose”* (thought, mind) of Christ in the face of suffering. We are to have the mind of

Christ in suffering; that is, we are to view suffering as Christ viewed it. It is our attitude in suffering which will determine how we are going to come out of it in the end. If we do not have a right attitude, then we are going to fail and learn nothing from a suffering experience.

How did Christ look at suffering? He looked at it through the eyes of God. He had a divine viewpoint, not a human one. How then do we get the mind of Christ in suffering? We must know God's Word and apply it to our lives by faith. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. We are to prepare ourselves for suffering by knowing God's Word, operating on faith daily, and scrutinizing the example of Christ, so that when suffering comes we will be prepared for it, able to handle it and learn from it the lessons God wants us to learn. We must apply doctrine to experience by faith so as to have a positive mental attitude or the mind of Christ in suffering.

“Because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”

The “he” in this verse seems to refer to Christ instead of the Christian, although the application is to the Christian. The word “ceased” means “to make an end of by death.” Christ suffered (died) once and for all that in His death He might cause sin to cease once for all.

In His perfect and complete death on the cross for all sin, Christ died for the one purpose of defeating or men from sin. Jesus died, was buried, and was resurrected to prove that He defeated sin, causing it to cease in that it will never reign as king again and will one day in the future be wiped off the face of the earth.

CHRISTIANS WILL HAVE A CHANGED LIFE BECAUSE OF UNION WITH CHRIST (4:2)

“so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lust of men”

It is difficult to get the exact meaning of this verse. We know that it refers to Christians, but the translations differ in various Bibles. The American Standard Version, using an alternate reading, translates it: “That ye no longer should live the rest of the time in the flesh.” This perhaps captures the meaning of the verse better than any other translation.

Christ's perfect death for sin had monumental effects upon these Christians when they first trusted Christ as personal Lord and Savior. First Peter 3:21 declares that “baptism now saves you,” a reference to Holy Spirit baptism which places a Christian into spiritual union with Christ the moment he believes in Christ. The Christian shares the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ because he is said to be in Christ.

The death of Christ to sin is shared by the Christian and the goal or aim of His death was to destroy or cause sin to cease; therefore, the Christian who is sharing Christ's death will have a new relationship with sin. Because the Christian has died to sin in Christ, there will be a radical break or breach with sin so that the sin principle will not dominate his life as it did before he was saved. Christ broke the power of sin in His death, and the Christian has had the power of sin broken in his life so that it does not dominate

any more. Sin still remains in him, but it does not reign over him, and it is being progressively defeated in his life.

Peter hinted to this truth in 1 Peter 2:24, *“And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”* The Apostle Paul also teaches this same truth of co-crucifixion with Christ.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Since we Christians are in Christ, we too have died—to the old life, the flesh in Adam, which used to dominate us. The flesh, while real and active in us, no longer has control over our lives as it did when we were unsaved when we always obeyed the sinful dictates of the flesh. We died in Christ “that we might no longer live in the flesh for the lusts (passions) of men.”

Death in Christ means a new kind of life for the Christian. *“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17).* This is not a perfect life but a new kind and quality of life where sin, while real and active, does not dominate us.

“but for the will of God.”

The Christian not only shares Christ’s death, which means a radical break with his past sinful life style, he also shares Christ’s life whereby he has new life and desires to do the will of God. Because of union with Christ there are new desires to begin to please Christ in this life. Again, this is not perfection, for we all fall short of what we could be and should be, but there are new desires, a leaning, a propensity toward a life of righteousness and the will of God. Before conversion to Christ, a person does his own will and the will of the devil. After conversion God makes it possible for him to begin to do the will of God.

You may ask, “Why is it that we don’t always turn from sin and do practical righteousness as Christians? The answer is found in the word “faith” as clearly taught in Romans 6.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over

Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:1-14).

The key word is in verse 11: “consider” or “reckon” which is a word of faith, meaning to give deep consideration to and count as true. When we are not operating on faith, we are leaning towards our old life in Adam, even though we positionally have been delivered from that old life. Believing that we died in Christ spiritually to sin and are alive spiritually in Christ to God is our responsibility. If we do not continue to exercise faith, we will be stunted and defective in our spiritual growth.

We Christians no longer have to obey sin as we did in our unsaved states, although we may not always operate on faith as we should in light of the fact that we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

Peter’s whole point is that a Christian’s union with Christ means a radical break with the sin of the old life and an entering into a new life because we share Christ’s resurrection. It is true that once we are saved we can never be lost, but it is equally true that once we are saved we can never be the same again. Why? We are crucified and resurrected with Christ.

CARRYING OUT THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH BEFORE CONVERSION (4:3)

“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles.”

The contrast between the lusts of the flesh and the will of God in verse 2 is explained in verses 3 and 4. This is also a contrast between the life which is past in Adam and the new life in Christ.

In their unsaved lives, these Asian Christians lived by their own wills and were slaves to sin in their lives. But salvation brought new life in Christ so that they became new creatures. There was a desire for new habits, new associates, new practices and new amusements. The sinful life before conversion began to pass away. The “desire of the Gentiles” was a carnal fleshy, self-indulgent life of sin, but since they were in Christ this was changed (1 Thess. 4:5).

These Christians had had plenty of time to indulge the flesh in sin. They had had enough of that life. They had tried the sinful life and there was no reason why they should indulge in it any more since they were in Christ.

Peter divides the individual Christian’s life just as history is divided into two eras—before Christ and after Christ. Something happens which changes the entire life. When Christ comes in, the past is past; there is a new quality of life, which begins at that point.

After conversion, we would be foolish to spend our lives in the things we did before we were saved. In fact, almost everyone who is saved later in life feels as though his unconverted years were wasted. Even though this is true and nothing can be done about those wasted years, when one is saved he can make every minute, hour, day, week, month and year count for Christ. We must remember that life is passing, time is fleeting and we must do what we can now to please Christ and further His kingdom.

“having pursued a course of sensuality”

Peter now sets forth a list of the passions of the flesh. It should be pointed out that the five things listed are sins of self-indulgence, sins of excess or fleshiness.

The first is “sensuality,” sexual acts that shock and disgust public decency, bold sensuality which disturbs even the moral pagans who do the same things in secret. Perhaps this is dealing with perversions in sex before marriage (pre-marital sex).

“lusts”

This refers to any past evil desire, but in context is probably talking about sexual lusts such as prostitution and adultery (extra-marital sex).

“drunkenness”

This word actually means “to overflow” or “bubble over” with wine. It may refer to getting high, for the word does not mean to be totally saturated with alcohol. The idea is an immoderate use of wine, drinkers who are proud of it and who brag about how much liquor they could hold.

“carousels”

This refers to “drinking parties” where there was revelry abounding. Some have translated this “night-clubbing.” The word was often used in merrymaking after supper when guests staggered into the streets and went through the city with torches, boisterously singing lewd songs in honor of Bacchus, the God of wine.

“drinking parties”

This is a word which means “drunken brawl.” It is a gathering together for the specific purpose of drinking alcohol.

Notice the close connection between the drinking of wine in excess and the perversion of sex. How many men and women have lost their virginity or involved themselves in all kinds of sexual debauchery and perversion when under the influence of alcohol, which they would never have done when sober. We are to avoid the sins of drunkenness—anything from a glow to total saturation.

“Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the

Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts”
(Rom. 13:13-14).

“and abominable idolatries”

The idol worship of the Gentiles was accompanied with lewdness, drunkenness, gluttony, all sorts of brutality and cruelty, and above all with sexual wantonness. Some of the mystery cults in the Roman culture were so vile that they were outlawed by Rome, which itself was corrupted by sin at every level.

These sins were all sins of self-indulgence that characterizes the life of any unsaved person apart from Christ. In some way or another, all unsaved men and women are going about looking for some way to indulge their flesh, to find pleasure. They seem to heap upon themselves pleasures that pamper the flesh. Peter’s point is that this is opposite to the kind of life a Christian should live.

It should be noted that before they were saved many of these Christians had a very sordid past. The early church was made up of a motley group, but conversion turned their lives around.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

How do we accept people who were guilty of the most vile sins before conversion, especially if they have not completely broken with the past in some of their dress and mannerisms? We tend to think of people in the New Testament church as extraordinary mortals, perhaps not subject to the same passions and drives and problems we have, but they were men and women just like us. They had the same kind of problems. Yet, the past is past—buried in the deepest sea—and our sins are put away as far as the east is from the west. When Christ enters a life there is a revolutionary change, not perfection, but new desires for Christ, righteousness, and godliness.

This verse shows us the power of the gospel of Christ to save a person who is entrenched in sin. Christians should not despair over loved ones or friends who are indulging in these vices now. If God could save these first century Christians who had been addicted to these gross and debasing vices, then He can also save our loved ones and friends who are captives to sin. Let us remember that the vilest of men can be reclaimed by the power of Christ.

CAUSTIC ATTITUDES OF THE UNSAVED TOWARDS THE SAVED AFTER CONVERSION (4:4)

“And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation”

The unsaved were shocked at the changed lives of those who had come to Christ, and they were astonished that they did not “run with the pack” any longer. They did not understand the reasons for this sudden and abrupt change to please Christ. They thought these Christians foolish to abandon a course of life which seemed so exciting for something that seemed gloomy and based on superstition.

It is obvious that the Christians had made a clean break with the past life or the unsaved would have never taken a stand against them. The unsaved did not understand that a new kind of life, a divine nature, had been placed in the Christians causing them to hate the things they once loved and love the things they once hated.

If we Christians live for Christ and display to the world this new quality of life, they will be astonished. As a matter of fact, the term Peter used for “surprised” really means “stranger.” They will think of Christians as strangers and no longer a part of their culture. Christians should never be surprised when the unsaved call them strangers.

Our unsaved friends may pull away from us after we are converted, but we should try to keep our contacts with them to be a witness to them.

“and they malign you”

The word “malign” really means “blaspheming” or in our vernacular “swearing.” The unsaved said awful and terrible things about the saved, even cursed them, because of their refusal to take part in the old sinful life styles.

Christians are often called fools, fanatics, or hypocrites because they truly desire to live a different kind of life, one pleasing to the Lord. When people do not understand the new birth, they are naturally going to say malicious and slanderous things and most of it is done in ignorance.

Many evil things said against Christians, however, come about because the unsaved are under conviction and do not want to give up their sin because they love it. They slander Christians to cover up their own evil deeds.

CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT FOR UNBELIEVERS WHO PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS (4:5)

“but they shall give account to Him, who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

“They” refers to those unbelievers who malign Christians. Those who speak evil of God’s children will someday give an account to God. Christians may suffer now at the hands of wicked men, but wicked men will someday suffer at the hands of a holy God. At the Second Advent of Christ, God will judge “the living and the dead.” No one will escape this final judgment. There is a tremendous lesson here for Christians. We do not have to be on the defensive when folks malign us; we do not have to set things straight ourselves.

In His own time and in His own way God will set things straight. He will take care of unbelievers in this life and at the judgment. Our task is to—be faithful to Christ, not giving ear to the criticism of unbelievers.

CERTAINTY OF ETERNAL LIFE FOR BELIEVERS IN CHRIST (4:6)

“For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead”

Some have thought that this means Christ went to hell to preach to those who were there to give them a second chance to believe, but this does not fit the context nor does the Bible anywhere teach “second chance” theology. Others have thought “the dead” refers to men who are spiritually dead, but that interpretation seems to be contradicted by verse five: “the living and the dead,” definitely referring to physical death.

In context this probably means Christians who had died physically after hearing the gospel and responding positively to it.

“That though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.”

Some of these Christians suffered so badly at the hands of wicked men that death resulted, that is, they were “judged in the flesh as men” by men. Yet, although their bodies died and were put in graves awaiting the resurrection of the just, their redeemed spirits were alive with God in heaven.

Believers may receive unjust punishment on the earth, but they will be rewarded with eternal life in the future.

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21)

“Knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6b-8).

This is why we declare the gospel to men--so their spirits may live eternally and pass into the presence of God at physical death, and their spirits may be united to their resurrected bodies at the resurrection of the just which will take place at the second **advent of Christ.**

CONCLUSION

There are some simple but profound lessons for those of us who are saved in this passage. First, we must prepare ourselves mentally, psychologically, and spiritually to suffer so that when suffering comes we will be able to cope with it and maintain a divine viewpoint.

Second, to be a Christian involves a changed life and a break from our old way of living before we are converted to Christ. The mark of one’s election to salvation is a changed life.

Third, Christians will always be called fanatical and fools for being Christians, and we just have to get used to it and go on serving Christ.

Fourth, God will take care of the unbeliever who maligns the Christian. Our task is to get the gospel out to the world so that men can become heaven bound rather than hell bound.

If you are not a Christian, perhaps you think you are too sinful for God to save you or that you have some habit or vice that will keep you from Christ. God saves sinners, not good men. He saves people who know they are sinful and who need forgiveness. Are you any more sinful than these Asian Christians were before they were saved? They were guilty of sexual perversion and moral debauchery of the worst kind. Yet, God saved them, and He will save you the moment you turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

Ask Christ to save you. Believe that He died for your sins. Bow to Him as your Lord and He will begin to give you a new kind and quality of life. Christ will set your course toward heaven. Jesus said, *“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners”* (Mark 2:17).