

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

The Memory That Shuns Sin, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1

Code: 60-39

The Memory that Shun's Sin, Pt. 1

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 4. To begin with, let me read you the first six verses of 1 Peter chapter 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, 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. 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, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries, and in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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."

In his rich book called The Plague of Plagues, written in 1669, a godly man by the name of Ralph Venning wrote this paragraph about sin, listen to it. "In general, sin is the worst of evils, the evil of evil and indeed the only evil. Nothing is so evil as sin, nothing is evil but sin. As the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us, so neither the sufferings of this life nor of that to come are worthy to be compared as evil with the evil of sin. No evil is displeasing to God or destructive to man but the evil of sin. Sin is worse than affliction, than death, than the devil, than hell. Affliction is not so afflictive, death is not so deadly, the devil is not so devilish, hell is not so hellish as sin is. This will help to fill up the charge against its sinfulness especially as it is contrary to and against the good of man." Then he says, "The four evils I have just named are truly terrible and from all of them everyone is ready to say, 'Good Lord, deliver us.' Yet none of these nor all of them together are as bad as sin. Therefore our prayers should be more to be delivered from sin and if God hear no prayer else, yet as to this we should say. 'We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord,'" end quote.

In a unique way with a strange but interesting choice of words does Ralph Venning help us to understand the evil of sin. It is worse than affliction. It is worse than death. It is worse than the devil. It is worse than hell.

Now it is true that a believer hates sin. It is true that a believer desires to flee from sin. It is true that a believer longs to be freed from sin. All of us at some point or another in our lives, in one way or

another, in some words or another have cried out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" We've all cried against our own wretchedness. We have all longed at some point in time to be delivered from the bondage of sin.

Now the question comes, since sin is the evil of all evils, yes, indeed the only evil, and since we hate it and long to be free from it, how can we avoid it? What is required of us if we are to stay away from sin?

Well obviously it is the major effort of our life. Would you not agree to that? It is the major effort of the life of every believer to avoid sinning.

Now in order to avoid sinning we must have three perspectives. In a sense we have to live in three tenses...future, present and past. Some would say to us, "In order to avoid sin you have to have a future look." What do we mean by that? You've got to be watching for that temptation which hasn't arrived yet, but you've got to be ready so you're not caught unawares. You have to look into the future. You need to do what the disciples failed to do and Jesus said to them, "Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation." We have to be on the alert. We have to be watchful, careful, always looking ahead anticipating what might come, walking circumspectly, walking wisely in light of the danger ahead.

We also have to have a present look. Not only are we looking ahead anticipating what might come, but we are looking at the present tense at what is surrounding us so that we are not duped unwittingly into sin. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:9, he says, "Hate what is evil, cling to what is good." That's present tense. Whatever you see that is evil, hate it. Whatever you see that is good, cling to it. Paul said, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Paul said in Romans 13:14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

So we are constantly looking to the future anticipating what might come of sin. We are also very carefully assessing the present so that we may shun sin. But there is the need, as well, to look to the past. One of the most faculties for dealing with the evil of all evils, indeed the only evil, is a good memory...a good memory. And that is really what's in Peter's words here. He is calling on us to remember some things that will enable us to shun sin. The key to the passage is in verse 2 where Peter says that we are to live the rest of the time that we're in this flesh no longer for the lusts of men but for the will of God. We are to live the rest of our lives shunning sin and living out the will of God.

Now in order to do that, yes, we must look ahead and anticipate watchfully that which might come, and yes, we must apprise ourselves of the present tense, but Peter's main point is we must look back, we must have a good memory. Now, remember where we are before we dig into this particular text. This whole epistle is written to people who were suffering. And it has reached a certain climax, actually, at the end of chapter 3, and the climax there was that Peter was saying in all of your

suffering remember this, suffering can be triumphant. You can be a victor even in suffering and the model for that is whom? Christ. And he shows us in chapter 3 verses 18 to 22 how Christ in the midst of unjust suffering triumphed, in fact He gained His greatest victory at the time of His greatest suffering. And we noted in our last several studies that when Jesus was being unjustly killed on the cross, when He was being unfairly treated, when He was being punished, the result of hatred, the result of rejection, at the very time when He was suffering unjust treatment, dying, the just for the unjust, He was triumphing over sin, He was triumphing over the demon forces of hell, He was triumphing over the judgment of God. And He was gaining for Himself the ultimate supremacy, as it says in verse 22, of being seated at the right hand of God.

So in the moment of His death He triumphed over sin. He triumphed not only over sin but He triumphed over the demon forces of hell. He triumphed over the judgment of God which He endured and came out victorious. And He triumphed over all created beings. And it was all in His greatest suffering that He gained His greatest triumph. Peter's point is that when you view your suffering, remember it may be the moment of your greatest triumph. So it was with the suffering of Christ and so it may be with you as well.

Now with that in mind, let's look at verse 1. "Therefore," which obviously ties us in to what he has just said in chapter 3, "since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose." That's really the summation of what he has just said, that's why the therefore is there.

You have seen Christ suffer in the flesh and His suffering was triumphant. So, arm yourselves with that same purpose. What purpose? To be willing to suffer in the flesh knowing it produces potentially the greatest triumph. That is a marvelous statement and that is the application of all that has gone before. It is better to suffer for Christ than to suffer with the world. It is better because in our suffering for righteousness sake when we suffer for doing what is right, when we suffer unjustly, when we're persecuted and treated unfairly and unkindly, it is that very suffering which can produce our greatest spiritual triumph. So we are to arm ourselves with that same purpose.

Now let me look more specifically at this statement so that you'll understand it because the verse itself can appear at the outset to be somewhat difficult. Please note that first statement, "Since Christ has suffered in the flesh." That simply means Christ has died. That's what it's talking about. It's talking about His death.

Back in verse 18 it says, "Christ died," at the beginning of the verse. At the end of the verse it says "That He was put to death in the flesh." Being put to death in the flesh in verse 18, suffering in the flesh here in verse 1, both refer to the same thing. They refer to His death. That's what Peter's been talking about. Since Christ died, implied, and had such great triumph in His death, then arm yourselves also with the same purpose.

Now what do we mean here by this "arm yourselves"? Well, it is a military term properly translated. It refers to a soldier putting on weapons to fight. And in Ephesians 6:11 a form of this word is translated "armor," or "the whole armor of God." Put on your armor, arm yourselves, take up your weapons. Why? For a battle. Your life is going to be a battle and you need to be armed with this ultimate weapon. What is it? Arm yourselves also with the same ennoia in the Greek. What does that mean? Same mind, same idea, same principle, same thought. What do you mean by that? Listen very carefully. Arm yourself with the same realization, the same idea, and the same principle that was manifest in the suffering of Christ. What is that? The principle that even in death I can...what?...triumph. That's the idea. Arm yourself with that great thought.

In other words, be willing, listen carefully, be willing to die. Arm yourself with that great thought. That's exactly what I believe Peter is saying here. It's a very simple statement. Christ died and you need to arm yourself with that same idea that you, too, are willing to die because you understand that in dying there is triumph. Now you have an alternative if you're persecuted and they threaten your life, you can just recant, you can just deny Christ, you can just bail out. But that's not an option, is it? So what he is saying here is...Look, just what Jesus said in John 16 is going to come to pass in many of your lives, some of you are going to be persecuted, some of you are going to be killed, some of you are going to be martyrs, arm yourself with that idea that as Christ was willing to die because He knew in it there was triumph, you have the same thought. Be willing to die for righteousness sake because you know it can be triumphant.

Now let me say it simply. Voluntarily accept the potential of death as a part of the Christian life. Now is that a new thought to you? It shouldn't be. Matthew chapter 10 verse 38 and 39 Jesus said this, "Take up your...what?...cross and follow Me." And He said, "If any man is not willing to take up his cross, having denied himself, he's not worthy to be My disciple." What did He mean by that? What does He mean take up your cross? What does that mean? That means be willing to die. There's nothing mystical about it, it isn't some spiritual dedication He's talking about. No. When He said to them, "Be willing to deny yourself and take up your cross," they knew exactly what He meant because a cross was where people got executed. He was saying be willing to die for Me...be willing to give your life. And for many, many Christians that has been a reality. Paul said, frankly, 1 Corinthians 15:31, "I die every day." What do you mean by that? I'm living on the edge. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4 as he talked about the character of his own ministry, he said, "We're persecuted, we're struck down, we're always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus. We are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake. Death works in us." In other words, he was always on the edge of death and one day he died for Christ, didn't he? But he was ready for that.

Remember when he wrote his last letter, he said, "I'm ready to be offered." You see, he had armed himself with this same idea. He had looked at the death of Christ and seen Christ triumph in it and so he armed himself with the same idea, that I am willing to die for Christ. And Peter here, like Paul, has

the same thing in mind. You will find, dear friends, that that is the ultimate weapon, that is the ultimate weapon. You say, "What do you mean that's the ultimate weapon?" Look, if...if the worse they can do to you is kill you, and from your viewpoint the best that can happen to you is to die, then you have ultimately thwarted them. That is the greatest weapon you possess. See, that is why so many martyrs throughout the history of the church have been willing to die, because they armed themselves with that same idea that there is great triumph in death.

Jesus died and triumphed over sin. And if I die, look at it in verse 1, "Because he who has suffered in the flesh," what does that phrase mean? To die. "Has ceased from sin." Did you get that? Is death so bad? You know what happens when you die? What happens? You don't sin anymore. That's good because you hate sin and you would like to be delivered from sin and you would like to be godly and virtuous and pure and holy and spotless. And you see, if I am armed with the goal of being delivered from sin and that goal is only achieved through my death, and the ultimate that anything anyone can do to me is kill me, they can only bring about that which is most precious to me, so I thwart them.

So he's telling these persecuted Christians to look for the triumph in death. The worse that the hostile, persecuting world can do is kill the believer and if the believer is willing to die, then that's no threat. You read through Foxes Book of Martyrs, or you read the story of John and Betty Stamm(?) or you read the story of the missionaries in Ecuador, or even more contemporary missionaries who were really killed for the cause of Christ or people in communist lands or pagan lands whose lives were taken because of their faith in Christ and you ask yourself, "How is it that they could endure that?" And the answer is, because they view death as triumph, they have armed themselves with that idea because they know that in death they cease from sin, then death has about it a certain sweetness, does it not? The one who dies has ceased from sin.

It's a perfect tense verb and it emphasizes a state or condition. You enter into a condition, a permanent eternal state free from sin. Is that bad? Not if that's the goal of my life. What am I trying to do through my whole Christian life? What am I trying to eliminate in my life? Sin. In one fell swoop it's gone. So if I have that idea in my mind...Hey, kill me and I'm going to be where I'm trying to get, free from sin...then all the fear is gone, all the threatening is gone out of persecution.

When a believer dies he enters a permanent condition free from sin. Christ is the model of that. This was true of Christ, by the way. You say, "Now wait a minute, He wasn't a sinner." That's right, He never sinned, He was without sin but He came...listen carefully...into a world and it says in Romans 8:3, "In the likeness of sinful flesh." And He came not only in the likeness of sinful flesh, but for sin. And then He subjected Himself to evil men doing wicked things to Him, so He felt the brunt of sin, didn't He?

And then on the cross, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He was made sin." And 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He bore our sin." He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. He came to receive the worst evil that sinful men could do to Him. He went to the cross and was made sin and bore sin but when He died, He was...what?...free from sin. And all of that which He suffered in His incarnation came to an end. He was no more in the likeness of sinful flesh. He had a glorified body. He will never again be subjected to the evil deeds by evil people and demons. He will never again bear sin. It was once for all. And so Christ also in His death ceased from sin. He has nothing more to do with it, it has nothing more to do with Him. And so, says Peter, arm yourselves with the same thought. You want to have the ultimate weapon, then understand when you die you are free from sin forever.

Now only a fool would look at that and say, "Nah, I'd rather have what I've got." Wait a minute. Impossible. But, beloved, cessation of sin is related to the death of the flesh. By the way, this verse is a good one to give a perfectionist, people who believe you can be perfect in this life. Peter says, "No, the only way you cease from sin is when you're dead." The only sinless people are dead in the flesh, dead to this world. Any of them who are alive in this world have sin in their life.

So, Christ by His death was freed from the sinful powers under whose sway He voluntarily placed Himself by identifying with man in the incarnation and by bearing the sin of man in the crucifixion. And I suppose that was in His mind when it says in Hebrews that He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. And what was that joy? Being forever free from sin. And we can also look forward to death because it frees us from sin.

Just to tighten that thought down a little bit and make it firmer in your mind, listen to Romans 7:5, "So while we were in the flesh the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in the members of our body." As long as you're in the flesh, sinful passions are at work. Romans 7:18, "I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh." Verse 23, "I see the law of sin which is in my members." Hey, as long as you're alive in this human body, you have a sin problem. And the only relief you're going to get is when you leave this body...when your flesh dies.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 15 and you'll hear the comparison. Verse 42, he's talking about the resurrection and he says, "Our bodies are sown a perishable body, raised an imperishable, sown in dishonor, raised in glory, sown in weakness, raised in power, sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body." Verse 49, "Just as we have borne the image of the earthy we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." It's not until we die that we get that imperishable, honorable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, heavenly body. And that's when the sting of death which is sin is forever removed, he says later in that same chapter.

Now, beloved, if you're a Christian you're going to get there sooner or later, right? Would sooner be too bad? Or would you rather wait till later and indulge yourself as long as possible in your sinful

flesh? Now do you understand why a deeply thinking Christian does not fear death?

We're all headed for that. We're all going to ultimately reach the blessing of sinlessness. And if you think about it, you ought to be saying...the sooner the better.

Now, since that is our goal and since that is our destiny, then we don't fear suffering because the worst that suffering can do is kill us and give us the best, the goal of our life. Bring us into sinless perfection. Now if you ever happen to be being burned at the stake, crucified upside down, suspended by pins between your ankles, or if you happen to be massacred or whatever and there's a slight chance, very slight I suppose, you can simply remind your persecutors that they are doing you an immense favor for in the process they are bringing you to sinless, perfect glory which is that for which you were saved in the first place and you can give them your deep appreciation for that generous gift which they have rendered in behalf of your eternal perfection.

Now if that all sounds very strange to you, it shows you how confused our thinking is, right? Now why do I want to be armed with this idea? Verse 2, I want to be armed with this idea "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." You say, "Well how does that tie in?" Just this way, look if the goal of my life is sinlessness, in the end then I've got to be on the way to that. I'm to live my life shunning sin. I'm to live the rest of the time in my flesh until the day that I cease from sin through death, no longer for the lusts of men but the will of God. Since that's the goal of my life, I've got to get my life moving in the right track now.

So what do I live for the rest of my life? To avoid sin, so as to live...that's the word from which we get biology, it talks about earthly life. I am to live on this earth, live out my human existence the rest of the time God gives me in this flesh not for the lusts of men but for the will of God. Whatever is left of the years of my life, whatever is left for me in this fleshly sinful body will no longer be for the lusts of men. No longer motivated, energized by epithumia, you know, that strong word that means evil desire. I'm not going to live that way anymore. I'm going to shun that for the will of God.

So this is very practical application of what Peter's been teaching. Christ triumphed in His death. You ought to have the same mind that you're headed toward a triumph over sin and it won't come to you either until your death so your death will be your greatest triumph. And since the goal of your life is the death that frees you from sin, then the present tense of your life should be the pursuit of the goal of your life which is to be as free from sin as you possibly can here and now. So for the rest of the time in the flesh, you don't pursue the lusts of men, you pursue the will of God.

Peter then is calling us to shun sin and not live any longer driven by our evil desire, rooted in our flesh. And if you want a good picture of that, you need only remember Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus where he says in chapter 2 describing the unregenerate, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of

the power of the air, the spirit that now is working in the sons of disobedience, among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind." It's the way we lived. But he says, "Now I'm a Christian and the rest of my time I will no longer live that way." So the goal of the Christian life is to avoid sin.

Now, Peter's going to help us a little bit in this passage to avoid sin. Not by giving us a forward look or even a present look, but by leaving us a remembering look, calling on our memories. Let me at least give you two points tonight and we'll finish it up next time.

One very important stimulus to shunning sin which we should do since that's the goal of our life, one very, very important stimulus is a good memory. And the first thing I would like to suggest that we need to remember is this, what sin did to Jesus Christ. Okay? We need to remember what sin did to Jesus Christ. That should help you to hate it. That should help you to shun it. That should help you to avoid it.

Now as the long years of our lives go by until we cease from sin through death, through all of this time we're going to do everything we can to avoid it, and in order to want to avoid it, I believe you've got to really hate it. And in order to really hate it, you've got to understand what it's like. And to understand what it's like, you need to start by seeing what it did to Christ.

What did it do to Christ? Verse 1, "Christ has suffered in the flesh." You tell me, what did it do to Christ? In one word? Killed Him...killed Him, cost Him His life. Can you enjoy it when you know what it did to Christ? When you realize that He was made sin, when you realize that He bore in His body our sins on the cross, when you realize the Bible says He was made a curse for us, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree in Galatians, when you realize that He was the spotless, pure and holy second member of the trinity who never had come in any contact with sin and who then was made sin and bore the sins of the world on His body and they took His life, they killed Him, they separated Him from God so that He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" When you realize that it put Him on a cross and nails were hammered through His limbs and thorns crushed into His brow and spit dripped off His body and a spear was rammed into His side. When you realize all of that and all of that was caused by sin, it ought to help you to hate sin, right? If you love Christ.

I watch people who are full of vengeance because somebody has harmed someone they love. I sometimes see an interview of a parent whose child has been killed by a drunk driver, a parent whose child has been killed by even a disease. I watch a spouse who has lost a partner in a crime where they were an innocent victim and I hear the bitterness and the vengeance and the hatred toward the perpetrator of the crime and as a father and a husband and a friend, I understand that. I remember the day when there was a knock on the door of my own home and a man on the porch with a butcher knife threatening to take Melinda when she was just a little tiny girl and I remember the feelings in my own heart in the fact that I had a baseball bat in my hand. In fact, I said to him, "If you come through

that door you're going to find your head in Encino," and I think that's a direct quote. And I know what I would have had to deal with in my own heart had she been able to open the door which fortunately was double bolted when she was trying to let him in. And I know what I as a father might have felt, except by the grace of God. I understand that when something very precious to us is assaulted and devastated and crushed and killed that there wells up in our hearts a hatred of that...if not a hatred of the person, a hatred of the deed.

And certainly if we understand that the murderer of Jesus Christ was sin then we should hate sin. Does not that seem a reasonable conclusion? So if you have a good memory, it might help you to shun sin and the first thing to remember is what sin did to Jesus Christ.

Second thing to remember. Remember what sin has done to Christians...remember what sin has done to Christians. And you say, "Well, what's that?" Well, I'll tell you what it's done to us, it's messed us up. In fact, it's messed us up so badly that we can't even get deliverance from it until we're...what?...dead. Don't you hate that? Wouldn't you like to have one week without sin? It's messed us up. Verse 1, "He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." What sin has done to us is so infect us that the only way we can cease from it is to be dead. Conversely, as long as we're alive we are assaulted by it. You read Romans chapter 7, and the Apostle Paul is crying out that I love the law of God with my inner man, but there's something else in me, there is something warring with that love for what is right. Sin that is in my flesh and the things I want to do I don't do and the things I don't want to do I do, O wretched man that I am.

Romans chapter 8, the whole creation groans waiting for the glorious manifestation of the children of God. You want to know what the whole creation is waiting for? Death and resurrection. It wants a new creation, just like we want a new life. No wonder Paul said when he wrote to Timothy, "I'm ready, I'm ready to be offered." He says in 2 Timothy 4:18, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom," isn't that good? Paul says I'm looking forward to the day when I die because when I die the Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His Kingdom. No wonder he said, "I've finished my course, I've kept the faith, I'm ready to go, get me out, I've had enough." And some people want to live on this world as long as they possibly can.

Titus 2:14 says He gave Himself for us so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession. Oh, let's be who we were supposed to be, right? I hate sin not only because of what it did to Christ but what it's done to Christians. I mean, that would be wonderful to pastor perfect people. Oh, to be a perfect pastor of perfect people. It's tough to be an imperfect pastor of imperfect people, to be a sinful leader of sinful people, very difficult, very difficult. And if I remember what sin does to Christians, I'll grow to hate it.

I'll tell you something, the longer you're in the ministry the more you hate it. The longer you live as a Christian, the more you hate it because you continue to amass a very, very large file on what it does to Christians. How it devastates their lives so that only in death can there be relief.

Well, that's only part of what Peter says here. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Lord, thank You for the reminder tonight that we should hate sin and arm ourselves with the mind of Christ who was willing to die because in dying He would cease from having anything to do with sin, it would all be over with. Lord, when we see what sin did to Him, when we see what it does to Christians, to us, may we hate it. May we hate it enough to arm ourselves with the same idea that we're willing to die because to die is to be delivered from sin forever...O unimaginable bliss and joy. Father, we thank You for the grace that would even grant such a gift to us, as to be forever free from sin. To think of the alternative is to think of an eternal hell which is the eternal presence of sin and only sin. Oh what an unthinkable, horrible thought. Thank You for the grace that has granted us the promise of an eternity where sin has forever ceased. What grace, we thank You in the name of our Lord. Amen.

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