

# **Sermon: Live for God!**

**Text: I Peter 4:1-11**

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**Introduction:** I can think of no better life-goal than to live for God. We all probably have known people who lived for themselves. How did they turn out? Usually these people end up lonely, miserable, and with no hope for anything after this very short life indeed.

Some people choose to marry and maybe even have children. These milestones can certainly change a person's perspective on life and on who is the most important.

I attended a "creative writing" class last week at CCBC and was asked regarding the Gerbert project what my goals were. And I said "well, I don't have any; we are just going to see what happens." Right? Of course not, that would be foolish - just like living life without a purpose and goals would be.

One question that will keep coming up in your life, even daily, is: "For Whom are you living?" The earlier you get this question worked out, the happier you will be.

In I Peter 3 we are reminded that Jesus died for our sins (3:18). Because of this sacrificial act, those who have faith and have been baptized want to follow Jesus' example of victory over death and follow him to heaven (3:22). Here is what he says next:

**I Peter 4:1-11 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. <sup>2</sup>As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. <sup>3</sup>For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. <sup>4</sup>They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. <sup>5</sup>But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. <sup>6</sup>For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. <sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup>Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup>Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

<sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

The Apostle Peter had worked out the answer to this question (for whom will you live?) long ago. Peter decided he was going to *live for God*. In this passage Peter shares not only the *reasons* for his life-decision, but also the *strategies* for achieving this goal and the *results* of having been successful.

If you decide to live for God there must be:

## **I. Reasons**

Faith is not irrational.

A. Jesus suffered for us (v.1a, c).

Jesus gave up everything, became a servant, was humiliated, beaten, crucified - all for us. The question is what will we do for Him?

We *may* need to suffer in *our* walk, following God. Yet death, divorce, financial ruin, loss of health and other events may actually provide a witness to others. (Enns, *Exodus*, pp.73ff.) Suffering is not the problem; it is the context. How we deal with suffering will speak volumes about the quality/genuineness of our faith.

**Illus.** Take the person who falls into a swimming pool full of water. The water is certainly a consideration (how deep, how cold, etc.), but the real issue is how the person deals with the water. Can he swim? How well? Is there anyone who can throw him a lifeline?

Suffering is not the problem. It is an opportunity for a Christian to bring life and encouragement to others.

**Romans 5:1-5 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

If a person has been truly saved and given new life through the Spirit,

B. The new life is to be lived for God (v. 2b).

What does this mean? One of my Sunday School students said this is like WWJD.

**Q.** And what is the reason a person would try to follow God's will?

**A.** Love, an appreciation for what God has accomplished in us through Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we no longer have to worry about judgment even though:

**C.** Judgment is near (vv. 5-7a).

The Church has been persecuted and suffered at the hands of pagans (even Jews are called Gentiles, unbelievers). But vindication is coming because judgment is coming. Jesus is coming! The end and goal (τέλος) of human history is coming!

Judgment is now and will be universal. No one will escape. It is for those who have already died and those still living.

**Q.** What does God need to do to finally redeem mankind?

**A.** Come back! He has done everything else. We are in the "last days."

If God is ready to judge, the question must be also: am I ready to be judged? Just like the old game of hide and seek, I can hear God say: "Ready or not, Here I come!"

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## **II. Strategies**

Christians must:

**A.** Think like Christ (vv. 1b, 7b).

The idea of "arming oneself" is battle talk. God is a mighty warrior. We are in a cosmic conflict between good and evil and there are only two sides.

**Ephesians 6:10-12 (NIV)** <sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Christ's attitude and way of thinking had sinful man in mind. His hope is salvation, not judgment for all his creation.

He loves us and in return expects us to:

B. Love the members of Christ's Church (vv. 8-9).

Wayne Grudem suggests another translation: "keep loving one another earnestly." Love is shown in hospitality and service.

Q. Why should we do this?

A. **Proverbs 10:12 (NIV)** <sup>12</sup> Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

It is easy to overlook sin when you love the person. "But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding and conflicts abound - to Satan's perverse delight." - Grudem, I Peter, pp. 173-174

Another strategy is to:

C. Use your God-given gifts (v. 10).

These are spiritual gifts and abilities that the Holy Spirit has given us. The Apostle Paul gives us many of the lists for these gifts. One place is:

**I Corinthians 12:4-7 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. <sup>7</sup>Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

i.e., gifts are not for personal benefit or to be a source of pride, but every gift we receive from God is for others and to be used for their good.

If you decide to live for God there must be:

### III. Results (Fruit)

A. A Christian Comes to His Senses (v. 2a, 3).

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 is an example of just that. After living the kind of life described in our text it says he "came to his senses" (**Luke 15:17a**).

In our text in **I Peter 4:3** the word translated "enough" means really "more than enough." When "living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry," and this is a partial list, has run its course and consideration is given to what God, the Father offers, *some* come to their senses.

**I would like to pursue a thought with you here. It is not that people who do these things are condemned because we all know wonderful Christians who used to act that way (I Cor. 6:9ff).**

**It is not so much what pagans do, (we all like to recite the lists of sins we are not involved in) but it is why. Non-Christians say “there will be no accounting. I can do whatever I want.” When a person speaks against faith and God’s ministry to the Church through the presence of his Holy Spirit, they are in “grave” danger.**

**Matthew 12:31-32 (NIV) <sup>31</sup>And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup>Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.**

**B. Not Everyone Appreciates a Good Example (v. 4).**

**Have you ever noticed?**

**People don’t like to be made to feel guilty by a “good example” or to be in situations where attention is brought to their sinful condition. Quite frankly, that’s why some do not attend worship services.**

**Sometimes if we lead holy lives and make correct decisions, it will convict others of their sin. But just like in the time of Noah there will be scoffers, and not everyone will respond to God’s demands on his life. We, however, need to do the best we can to provide a life in which Jesus is seen.**

**C. God is praised (v. 11c).**

**Everything we do as Christians is equivalent to worship. We have been equipped with God’s word and His power to live a life that will result in His praise and honor. When we speak or serve others, it should be God-honoring. Having God praised is our reason for living. This worship touches every aspect of our lives.**

**Paul has an even broader explanation:**

**I Corinthians 10:31-11:1 (NIV) <sup>31</sup>So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. <sup>32</sup>Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— <sup>33</sup>even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. <sup>11:1</sup>Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**

**Conclusion:** Whether we are paid professional staff or Christians with other vocations, our lives should be spent loving and serving God and others to his glory. We must follow Christ's example.

**Illus.** When I was in fourth grade, I was offered a job as a paper boy. It didn't pay much money, but I knew having a job would build my character - so I took it, good character being important to fourth-graders. My lessons started the first day on the job. A customer paying his bill asked me if I wanted a tip, and I said, "Sure." He said, "Stay away from wild women."

One of my customers was a lady named Mrs. Stanley. She was a widow and not prone to wild living, so I took to lingering on her front porch during my rounds. She'd watch for me to come down her street, and by the time I'd pedaled up to her house, there'd be a slushy bottle of Coke waiting for me. I'd sit and drink while she talked. That was our understanding -- I drank, she talked.

The widow Stanley talked mostly about her dead husband, Roger. "Roger and I went grocery shopping this morning over to the IGA," she'd say. The first time she said that, the Coke went up my nose. That was back in the day when Coke going up your nose wasn't a crime, just a mite uncomfortable.

Went home and told my father about Mrs. Stanley and how she talked as if Mr. Stanley were still alive. Dad said she was probably lonely, and that maybe I just ought to sit and listen and nod my head and smile, and maybe she'd work it out of her system. So that's what I did. I figured this was where the character-building came into play. Turned out dad was right. After a few summers, she seemed content to leave her husband over at the South Cemetery.

Nowadays, we'd send Mrs. Stanley to a psychiatrist. But all she had back then was a front porch rocker and her paper boy's ear, which turned out to be enough.

I quit my paper route after her healing. Moved on to the lucrative business of lawn mowing. Didn't see the widow Stanley for several years. Then we crossed paths up at the Christian Church's annual fund-raising dinner. She was standing behind the steam table spooning out mash potatoes and looking radiant. Four years before she'd had to bribe her paper boy with a Coke to have someone to talk with; now she had friends brimming over. Her husband was gone, but life went on. She had her community and was luminous with love.

Community is a beautiful thing; sometimes it even heals us and makes us better than we would otherwise be.

**I live in the city now. My front porch is a concrete slab. And my paper boy is a lady named Edna with three kids and a twelve-year-old Honda. Every day she asks me how I'm doing. When I don't say "fine," she sticks around long enough to find out why. She's such a nice lady that sometimes I act as if I have a problem, just so she'll tarry. She's lived in the city all her life, but she knows about community, too.**

**Community isn't so much a locale as it is a state of mind. You find it whenever folks ask how you're doing because they care, and not because they're getting paid to inquire.**

**Two thousand years ago, a church elder named Peter wrote the recipe for community: "Above all else, "he wrote, "hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins' (I Peter 4:8). That means when you love a person, you occasionally have to turn a blind eye toward their shortcomings. Kind of like what my dad told me about the widow Stanley. Sometimes it's better to nod your head and smile.**

**Psychiatrists call that "enabling denial," but back when I delivered papers, we called it "compassion."**

**(*Community* by Philip Gulley taken from the book "Front Porch Tales" -1997)**