

In this passage, Peter exhorts his audience to choose to live in the way of God, even if that choice results in suffering. When I pastored in France, we took church retreats to the Cevennes region of France. The Cevennes region is linked with the persecution of Protestants that occurred in the 17th century. It is home to one of the only museums in the country commemorating the sacrifice of people who had to worship in secret. On display are Bibles the size of matchbooks and wine barrels that unfold to create a preaching podium. The museum tells the stories of men and women who were jailed, enslaved, and put to death because of their practice of religion.

One of the activities we did was hike to a cave. It was a not a well-traveled path, and steep at some parts. Young and old, slipping and sliding, we reached a small entrance that opened to a massive cave in which Protestants worshiped in secret. A cross carved in the back wall, rock that formed a natural podium—it was a spiritual experience when we would sing a cappella in the cave, joining with the voices that sang over 300 years earlier.

As we met together at the end of the weekend, I would ask our group to share a memorable experience from the weekend. Not everyone in our group was a Christian, not everyone came from the same background or culture, but everyone talked about the museum and the hike to the cave. What was most memorable was learning about people who made a choice to follow God, even if it meant suffering. They lived with passion that endured no matter what came to them.

I think that theme was impactful across beliefs and cultures because we all long to live with passion. We want our children to grow up and do what they love, our spouse to live fulfilled, our coworkers to work hard. We long for all of those things in each of us. And more than that, we want a passion that will endure no matter what happens. What struck our group was that, in the light of our seemingly unbearable trials today, there is a way to live with an intentionality that will endure no matter what may come.

### **Resolve Like Christ**

**Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives**

**for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).**

Peter begins with a foundational statement: Christ suffered in the body. Not metaphysical, not spiritual, but physical suffering. Jesus did the will of His Father, was without sin, yet what He received from the world was suffering. In light of that, Peter writes, “arm yourselves also with the same attitude.” The original word for “arm” means to ready or equip yourself, as a military unit would do. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are to arm yourself with the “same attitude.” More than a positive attitude, the original language invokes a willingness or intentionality. A commentator refers to this concept as “an unswerving resolve to do God’s will” (Bible Knowledge Commentary). Peter charges the followers of Jesus to steadfastly make a choice to live as God designs.

And if your choice to follow God results in suffering, Peter explains a benefit: those who suffer because they choose God’s way are “done with sin.” Sin is life outside of the design of God. The Bible describes human nature as sinful—something in us from birth and what we produce that alienates us from our Creator and the life that He has for us to live. Those who put their faith in Jesus have a new nature. Though they are still tempted by the way of sin, they are a new creation.

To be done with sin is not to become sinless. Rather, the person who has embraced their new creation and makes a choice to live as God designs, has made a break with sin. Their unswerving resolve to live as God would have them live is at the same time a rejection of the life of sin. They would rather face suffering than to embrace sin. That’s what Peter describes in verse two. This person no longer lives for “evil human desires.” There is a maturing of their desires, pursuits, and purpose.

### **You Have Spent Enough Time**

**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. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you (verses 3-4).**

Peter then describes his audience’s former way of living. He writes, “You have spent enough time” living outside of the design

of God. What a fascinating phrase—"you have spent enough time." Maybe you need to hear that today. Maybe there are situations that you continually fall into and you need someone to say, "you have spent enough time." Maybe there are relationships that continually lead you astray and you need to hear, "you have spent enough time." Maybe there are decisions outside of God's best for you and you are in danger of going down a destructive path of sin. "You have spent enough time. You've gone along for far too long. Now it's time to move on. It's to move forward."

Peter lists several activities in which his audience formerly participated. The first three are personal and the last three are communal. Rather than an exhaustive list, Peter highlights the destructive life that they are called to leave behind.

Ancient Romans were notorious in these types of exploits. Several years ago, I visited the ancient city of Pompeii, which was preserved under volcanic ash in the last part of the first century. In Pompeii are signs announcing (even graphically) the type of events that Peter lists. Read a history book on ancient Rome and you quickly learn that people were property, sex was about power and exploitation. Peter's audience may have formerly participated in life outside of the design of God, but they are now made new as a result of faith in Jesus.

But the community in which Peter's audience lived are surprised (shocked, astonished) that they would not join in "reckless, wild living." This phrase is better translated as a "flood of dissipation." The life of sin was, and still is, an excess waste of your life. In their shock, the unbelieving world heaped abuse on Peter's audience.

Interestingly, we have historical records of some of the abuse heaped on Christians. One of the audiences of 1 Peter was the region of Bithynia. Forty years after this letter, that region had a Roman governor named Pliny. Pliny, writing to Emperor Trajan, describes how he dealt with Christians, some of whom very well could have been part of Peter's original audience. *"They had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind; but they had in fact given up this practice since my edict, issued on your instructions, which banned all political societies. This made me decide that it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave women, whom they call deaconesses. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths. A great many individuals of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to*

*continue. It is not only the towns, but villages and rural districts too which are infected through contact with this wretched cult."*

There is a lot in that excerpt, but here is what I want you to understand: Peter's charge to have an unswerving conviction to live as God designed was not a simple platitude. Even in their suffering, the church grew and "infected" the region.

### **What Will Matter in the End**

**But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit (verses 5-6).**

Peter raises the stakes on the importance on making a choice to live as God designed. We all will have to give an account for what we did with what God gave us. Those who heap abuse will have to give an account, but all of us will account for what we did with what God gave us. In Peter's words comes an implication for those who are Christians: you have a choice on how you will live. You can live outside of how God designs. It's easier, seemingly, no one will criticize you, but it's ultimately a wasted life. Or you can live in the way of God. It will be more difficult, people will not understand, but, when you give an account, you will see a life spent on things that will matter for eternity.

But, someone may ask, what about those who have lived with faith but suffered and died? Doesn't their death prove that their God-centered life was a waste? Peter writes that those Christians—who heard the gospel preached to them but are now dead—are alive eternally with God. The world judged them according to human standards. In other words, they faced suffering and death at the hands of the world. But that's the not the final verdict on their life. The final word is that they live with God forever. Following God was not a waste because, in the end, only God remains victorious.

This is what we see in Jesus. He was obedient to the will of the Father, but suffered and died at the hands of the people who heaped abuse on Him. But He was raised to life, victorious over the worst the world could bring. Because Jesus chose the way of His heavenly Father, you can put to death a life that is an excess waste. You can live as God designed you to live, even if what you receive in return is suffering.

### **What Will You Do?**

What will you do with the life that God has given you? We all live with some sort of passion, some sort of resolve. The question: is what you live for a waste or a life worth living? One of the examples that most inspires me is a young adult named Jim

Elliot. As a student at Wheaton College, Jim heard and obeyed God's call to share the message of Jesus with people who had never heard the gospel. In 1952, at the age of 24, Elliot sailed with several friends for Ecuador. Their destination was a remote tribe that few had encountered. In January of 1956, Elliot and his four friends made contact with this a scout from the tribe. A few days later, they saw movement from the village as the entire tribe came toward them. They waited on a small sandy beach in the middle of the jungle, praising God for the unique opportunity to share the message of Jesus. Several days later, the bodies of Elliot and his friends were found in the river, speared to death by the tribe that they came to serve.

You may think that's a waste of a life. Twenty eight years old; there is so much that they could have accomplished in this world. That's not a waste. What would have been a waste is if they never went at all. What would have been a waste is if they heard the call of God to go with the gospel and ignored it. That would have been a waste. Jim Elliot put his passion in words years earlier at the age of 19 when he wrote this: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

In our context, you are not likely going to be put to death because you follow Jesus. But you are still called to live with the passion of Jesus. Tomorrow at work you have a choice to work as God

has called you. Today with your family you can live as the father and mother, as the child in the way that God has designed you to live. In your singleness you can live with an undivided pursuit of the beauty of Christ.

Or not.

You don't have to do any of that. You can choose to live a life that matters or you can waste your life. It's your choice. Life on earth isn't forever, but what you do with your life can be. Your life can be spent in a way that will spur others to see and savor Jesus. Your life can be poured out for people and pursuits that will be a part of God's future. Don't waste the life that God has given to you.

Jesus died so that you can be done with sin, and He was raised to life so that you can live as God designed you to live. The empty cross and empty tomb means that Jesus stands victorious. Evil celebrated for a weekend, but love was not done. Death's victory was interrupted by grace's triumph.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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