

“Stop Sinning; Start Leveraging” // 1 Peter 4:1–11

// I am an Alien, #7

You know how there are some places you tune in to and expect to hear a really predictable messages?

- Talk radio is like that (if I ever turn on Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh I pretty much know what I’m going to get... never expect to hear them talking about how brilliant Obama is, or what a good idea he’s had; or,
- on the other side, you I never turn on MSNBC and expect to hear Keith Olbermann or Rachel Maddow talking about the virtues of the Tea Party; how they’re misunderstood. No, it’s predictable.

The reason I say that is because I feel like the message Peter gives in 1 Peter 4:1-11 is pretty predictable.

Peter has two main points:

- in the first 7 verses: “stop sinning;”
- in the last 4, “start serving God.”

That’s kind of the message you expect when you come to church, right? (None of you are like, “oh...” didn’t see that one coming! Better write that down). But the reasons that Peter gives you for those are profound!

So, first 7 verses, he tells us to stop sinning. And he gives you 3 things to remember to help you with that.

1. Remember the resurrection; 2. Remember eternity; 3. Remember that both these things are imminent

1. Remember the resurrection

[4:1] Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking,

- Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking...
 - Christ suffered to the point of crucifixion. And though it looked like things were out of control, and the bad guys won, we now know that God had the last word in the resurrection.
 - In the same way, many of you are in the midst of suffering, and it looks like things are out of control, and it doesn’t always seem like the good guys are winning. So you need to remember the resurrection, to arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, so that you can resist the temptation to quit following Christ and fall back into sin.
- That’s your second phrase: for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,
- The idea here is that there are 2 paths to follow. **The path of obedience, and the path of sin.**
 - Following Christ *always* means a level of suffering. Because to follow Jesus means you take up the cross.
 - For some people, like Peter’s audience, that means they are persecuted. The fact that they won’t give up their confession even when it’s costing them proves the genuineness of their confession.
 - For others, because you choose to sacrifice your money to be generous.
 - Giving up creature comforts
 - Weariness in serving God
 - Temptation to quit being generous; start being selfish.
 - Again, the fact that you would willingly choose sacrifice proves the genuineness of your faith. That you have ceased from sin because rather than ceasing to follow Jesus, you choose to suffer.
 - For other people, their suffering provides them the temptation to medicate with sin.
 - To deal with our suffering through alcohol, or pornography, or an affair.
 - But if you choose to suffer with hope in God rather than retreat back into sin, that proves the genuineness of your faith.

- Now, unfortunately, many people never make it through this test. (parable of the seeds). Shows our faith isn't genuine.
- So, Peter says, **“arm** yourselves with the same way of thinking that He had.” Think of it like a weapon you wield in battle. You are in the midst of suffering and you say, “Christ suffered. He faced what looked like defeat, what looked like God had forsaken Him. But look what happened. God resurrected Him.”
- That’s why the Apostles in the first days of Christianity were so indomitable! Nothing you threatened them with could scare them.
 - “We’ll beat you.” “I am convinced that the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed.”
 - “We’ll kill you.” “To live is Christ; to die is gain.”
 - “We’ll destroy your message by murdering you and all of your followers.” “That’s what you did to Jesus. How’d that work out for you?”
 - “Well then, we’ll just shut you up in prison.” Awesome. We’ve got some writing we wanted to do anyway.
- Arm yourself with the knowledge of the resurrection, the knowledge that Christ lived with, that God uses pain and suffering to accomplish His work on earth, and ultimately our pain, our defeat, will be swallowed up in victory, like Christ’s was.
 - **24 illustration:** Going back through 24. It’s great. I can’t remember what happens. Every episode, Jack nearly escapes death. I think, “Now how does he get out of this one?” Recently I was in the middle of season 3, and I was all caught up in it... Jack narrowly escapes by a hair’s breadth.... But then I think, you know... I’ve seen all the way through season 9. I know what happens. I know Jack makes it. But I’ve got 174 more episodes before then, which means 174 more “brink-of-death” experiences for Jack. So, two things I know watching this series: (1) I know that whatever happens, Jack Bauer will make it. (2) I know there’s a lot of bad stuff ahead. **Same thing here. Christ suffered in the flesh, and was resurrected. Arm yourselves with the same thought pattern.**
 - (**KS** had no idea he would become such a messianic figure for us all). Minus the torturing-others component.

[2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. [3] For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, (Gr: *epithumia*: cravings for various things) drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

[4] With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

- They can’t understand why you wouldn’t do these things. Why? Because tThey don’t have a hope that goes beyond this world; so naturally, they try to get the most out of this world: *Feel good. Chase your dreams. Make the most of what you have. Do what you want. Spend all your money on yourself and your children. Make a bucket list.* What else is there but earthly happiness?
- When you don’t live that way, it disturbs them, because it tells them the whole basis of their life is off. And they will malign you.
 - So they’ll start a show on TLC called “The Virgin Diaries,” where they say, “What’s wrong with these people? Who would wait to have sex before marriage?” And they find the dumbest, most ill adjusted people to represent our side so they can make fun of them.
 - I’ll tell you who waits to have sex before marriage! People who believe there is a God in heaven who makes the rules and to whom they have to answer to! And you’ll go on making fun of us because you don’t have any awareness of that God.
- Who would go to live in a UPG?
 - Who wants to live in another culture 12,000 miles from their family? (some of you may want that, but the reason is...) The reason is we believe there is a God everybody has to answer to and we have only one shot, only one life, to preach the gospel to them...
- Who would give away their money?
 - People who believe that there is a reality beyond this world, and a God we have to answer to,
 - ...and that there is an eternity coming that will make the nicest place down here like living in a garbage can, and so we pile up treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth.

[5] but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

- Peter's like, "they don't have the last word." God does. Keep your eyes on that.
- You're about to go into eternity which lasts forever! Which, if you don't know how long forever is, it's much longer than now. The Apostle James says that this life is like the mist on a mirror caused by your breath. Just there for a minute.

Which is #2: **2. Remember eternity (vs. 5-6)**

- Your belief in the resurrection should cause you to live in a way, to do things with your money—that is baffling.
 - Can I ask you: Is that happening? If not, you're not living as a follower of Jesus. You're more likely a cultural Christian who has added a little God to your life. Little more moral. Give a little bit of money.
 - Eternity, and the resurrection, redefines everything!

Peter develops this: [6] For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

- Confusing, right? First, let me tell you what this *doesn't mean*. This verse does not mean that someone went and preached the gospel to people after they were dead and they all got a second chance.
 - That would be against the whole point of this passage! Peter's whole point is to tell these people not to indulge the lusts of the flesh. He's not telling them "Don't worry; if you do sin a bunch, you'll have a second chance after you die." No, Scripture is clear. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment." There is no second chance.
 - The point of this passage is the gospel was preached to people **who are now dead when they were alive**. The gospel was preached to them when they were live, but they are dead now. And even though they died, often in poverty and under extreme persecution, like Jesus did, they now live like God did.
- Peter says, "Do you think they are glad now that they lived that way?" Kind of a dumb question. Of course. Nobody in eternity says, "I should have given up less and indulged sin more."

He's telling them to think about people that are dead and live in light of that.

- **Psalm 90:12**, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to learn wisdom!" One of Martin Luther's favorite texts.
- **Stats on death**: Saw an article on PBS estimating that a total of 107 billion people have been born on earth. 6 billion are alive right now, which means that 93.5% of all the people who have ever been born now are dead; and they are living in eternity.¹ All of their earthly accomplishments mean nothing; only the Kingdom of God and what they did for it matters now.
 - A few weeks ago I told you about an interview I saw with Steve Jobs. As he approached death, he was thinking about it a lot... because if all that happens when you die is you go into the ground, nothing he had accomplished would matter to him anymore. He is correct. All that matters is where he stands with Jesus.²
- Fast forward your life 100 years... and live from that vantage point. What will you wish you had done with your life in 100 years? Live for that now! The glory of God. The mission of Jesus. The souls of people.

¹ <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2002/HowManyPeopleHaveEverLivedonEarth.aspx>.

² Leo Tolstoy, *Confession*, "Something strange began to happen to me at age 50. I had a wife who loved me and whom I loved; I had a large estate which, without much effort on my part, increased; my name was respected, I enjoyed physical strength, and yet I could not live because of death. The question, which brought me to the verge of suicide, sought an answer without which one cannot live. (Here it is) Is there any meaning in life that my inevitable death does not destroy? Today or tomorrow death will come to those I love, and then to me. Soon not only I will not exist and but eventually no one will exist will remember anything I have written or done. Why then go on with the effort? What is all for? What does it all lead to? What difference does it make whether or not I do this thing or that thing or nothing at all? So I could give no rational meaning to any single action or even to my whole life. But what was so surprising was how we can fail to see this. For a time it is possible to live intoxicated with life but as soon as one is sober, it is impossible not to see that life in the face of death is a fraud, and a stupid fraud. How often I have been told, 'oh you cannot understand the meaning of life so don't think about it, just live.' But I no longer can do that. I am indebted to Tim Keller's sermon on Heb 2, "Brother, Captain, King" here.

Vs. 7: 3rd motivation to stop sinning: [7] The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded...

3. Remember that both these things are imminent (vs. 7)

- The return of Christ is imminent; it's soon, and it could happen at any minute, and that should change how you live.
 - Question: If you knew Jesus was coming back tonight, what would you do?
- Now, you say, "Wait a minute!" Wasn't this written almost 2K years ago! How could Peter have thought Jesus' return was imminent if we're still 2000 years and waiting?"
 - Many people have taken verses like this one to say that Peter and Paul and others mistakenly predicted that Jesus was coming back in their lifetime. They scoff and they say, "See, the Apostles were wrong. Jesus didn't come back and He's not coming back!" But Peter doesn't say he's coming back in his lifetime.
 - He just tells them to live like Jesus is coming back, because he doesn't know when Jesus is coming back and neither do we, and it could be at any minute, and it is "near."
- **Think of it this way:** God's work in history has had several acts: the promises to Abraham; the Mosaic covenant; the coming of Jesus; the building of the church. The only one left is the return of Jesus. We're in the last "act." We have no idea when this one is going to be over, and we are to live like we could see Jesus at any minute.
 - Example: I'm sitting in my car waiting on my wife who is putting the finishing touches on her face... my kids and I are in the car. One of my kids says, "My kids have had to do this before. So they know we have an undisclosed amount of time, but no one knows when she comes through the garage door... While we are waiting on mom, let's run up to Dunkin Donuts." It's a 5-minute trip, tops. But if we do that, and Veronica comes out and we're no longer there, problem. Now, I know that based on past experience we could likely get up to Dunkin Donuts and back 3 times by the time she comes out. But no, I have to remain there like she's coming at any moment.

"Be sober." Living in light of the imminence of the end will make you live sober. It will help you keep your priorities straight.

- We always think of people who believe in the end as crazy...

Part 1 of Peter's message. Don't give your life to sin. It's just not worth it.

- Think about how long eternity is and remember that Jesus could come back at any minute and don't numb yourself with sin like everybody else does!
- I've explained this before, but many of us numb ourselves from the questions of eternity with incessant little distractions. Barreling toward a cliff; distracting yourself with scenery rather than reflecting on the reality that the cliff is coming. Pascal said that the problem is not that most people don't believe in God, it's that they don't think about God! What happens when they close your eyes and you are standing before God... and everything you obsessed about and worried about is just not important anymore!
 - Your bank statements: meaningless
 - Your reputation: insignificant!
 - Your spot on the org chart: meaningless!
 - Whether you had gotten married: not important!
- You are standing before God. That is as sure a future for you as any that you have! *Are you ready?*

(How much time do we have left?)

That's what to stop. 4 verses now (4 ½), telling you what to start:

[7] ...therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

- For the sake of your prayers. As God's people, you have a crucial role on the earth.
- Remember, when we studied 1 Peter 2, I explained to you that you are priests, and priests are people who release God's power into situations... and we talked about intercessory faith?
- You have a vital role. You are the conduit of God's power. **John Wesley.** "God does nothing on earth except in answer to prayer." All God's power on earth is bound up in you. That is an overstatement, but it is getting at something the Bible does talk about. You have a vital role, something only you can do.

- Summit, if we as God's people don't pray for this city that it find Jesus, who will? I know we're not the only church, but if we, God's people aren't praying for our city, who will?
- We need you to be sober-minded and alert. On guard, ready to intercede.

[8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

- Our love for other has a way of curing them of sin. This "covers" doesn't mean "hides it," but "covers" here means "takes it away."
- Kindness and love for others is the single greatest force for helping people to stop sin: When they see how you forgive. How generous you are. How we treat our spouses and children. When we are empathetic with one another's pain and excited in one another's joys; when we care for one another's needs.
- This is the great "secret" of the church. Our love for each other is the power of God that wakes people up from sin.
 - Romans 2:4 says that God's kindness leads us to repentance. Same with us: our kindness to each other leads them to repentance.

[9] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

- Again, we are extravagantly generous with one another and we don't complain about it.
- CMO, we give to the poor... Veronica and I feel like our first responsibility is the poor in this church. We have people in our church who are struggling.
- The book of Acts says that in the first church 'there were no poor among them.' When that happened, it says, "God added to their number daily" (Acts 2:47).
- If there were no poor among us, if we were meeting one another's needs, that would be the greatest and most evangelistically effective testimony in our world.
- *The generosity and love of the gospel on display is the greatest apologetic in our world.*

[10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

- You each have a gift to serve the body and the church. "Each has received" means you all have one.

- You have to take that seriously!
- This is how God does His work... Analogy with the body... (if you don't do it. We have itches in our body because there are deadbeat fingers.)
- *You've got to take it seriously... you are how God does His work on earth!*

[11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God;

I take what I do very seriously. The oracles of God.

- But look, it's not just me. "Whoever." You speak to one another.
- Why small groups and relationships are important: exhorting one another. You speak the "oracles of God" to each other.
- Something our church needs more of is people speaking the words of God to each other. I'm not supposed to be the only one.
 - 1 Cor 14:25 gives a vision of a church: In small groups and in church services.
 - This is not giving advice; speaking the word of God, the promises of God to each other.
 - Sometimes that is remind someone of a promise. Romans 8:28.
 - Sometimes it is when you feel a specific word for someone: "You are highly favored of God. You are cherished. As high as the heavens are above the earth..." I feel what God feels. The oracles of God (not that I claim to be God, I always say it sensitively); God is using my mouth.

whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—

- Others of you serve. Take it seriously – Jesus is doing it through you.
- Remember how Jesus washed their feet? Wonder what that communicated to them? Loved. He was was serving. Touched by Him.
- That's what you do to others. Communicate Jesus' love and touch to them. That's a weighty thing... and an awesome feeling, to be used by God.

in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

- Peter says the church is this body where people serve like Jesus by the power of Jesus for the glory of Jesus!

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- It's all about Him!

The whole point of this alien life we're living is to give glory to God.

- *Illustration for our staff: Bride illustration.*
- In the same way, when you use your talents to direct people's attention to you, you are stealing a glory that belongs to Jesus. He is the God who came to save us, without whom we would have lost forever, and who this whole thing is about... so we focus all of our effort on giving glory to Him.
- In all we do... **in pain... with our prosperity...** We direct people to the glory of Jesus. Is that the agenda of your life? Are you living that way?

We are to stop sinning; but that's not all; we are to start leveraging our lives to bring glory to Jesus!

Conclusion:

Once again, I'll close by pointing out that this is all built on the truth of the resurrection

- Peter really believed it!
- The resurrection should be the hope that pervades your every thought: evangelicals give it only a passing glance. In this letter, Peter builds every dimension of the Christian life on the resurrection. "Make sure you talk about the resurrection at Easter." It should be in almost every sermon.
- If I were going to subtitle this epistle I'd call it "the epistle of the resurrection."
- Do you believe it?

- Have you based your whole life and hope on it? It is the power of change. The power that brought Jesus up out of the grave is the power that transforms your life. The only way you'll stop sinning is by believing in the resurrection of Jesus; the only way you'll start leveraging your life for the glory of Jesus is by really believing in the resurrection.

Do you believe? The gospel is...

Have you ever yielded your life for the glory of Jesus? Saying to Him: "No more is my life going to be about me anymore. I dedicate my talents; my money; my pain, my prosperity.... All of it to you!" You may not know what He wants you to do with it yet, and that's fine. He'll tell you. But, right now, can you lay it on His altar and just ask, say, "God, it's yours. I'll do what you want me to do with it as You direct me?"

Bullpen:

- They can't understand why...
- Surprised. Thurs night in Frat Court. And Tues night. They think of you like you are an alien. And they malign you because your life is a condemnation to them.
 - But you say, "Well, I've got this figured out. I go as a witness, as a DD. If you are a believer who goes to these things... Be honest. You're flirting with temptation not pimping for Jesus."
- ~~(2 fold motive for giving glory to God: It's His by right of creation, and His by right of redemption).~~
- The 2nd idea at work here is that suffering has a purifying effect on us. Suffering helps us cease from sin.
 - Showing you how fragile the flesh is, and how quickly things can be taken away.

- Suffering provides a test for you. Will you turn to sins for comfort: Alcohol. Pornography. Compromise. Apathy. Giving up the mission.

And there is your first thing that helps you stop sinning: **1. Suffering (vs. 1)**. Suffering can help break you of the hope you put in the flesh. Most of us think, “If the flesh is happy, I’ll be happy.” If I’m well taken care of; if I’ve gotten everything I need; God comes along and shatters all of that, and you say, “Maybe the flesh is not a good thing to build my life on, so you start to value God more than the flesh.

- Puts you flat on your back
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- **Suffering (vs. 1)**: shows you how fragile you are.
 - God puts you flat on your back...
- **Reflection on eternity (vs. 6)**: people are dead now; all their accomplishments mean nothing, and the resurrection is all that matters now. A few weeks ago I brought up Steve Jobs’ biography. Nothing that he accomplished, which was substantial, really matters to him anymore (and he realized that before he died—I showed you that). All that matters is where he stands with Jesus.
 - How long eternity is?
- **The imminence of Jesus’ return (vs. 7)**
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- If you understand Christ’s resurrection, you don’t let worldly status, accomplishments, acquisitions, or creature comfort become measure of your life. You are less concerned with those things.
- Two distinct ways to live:
 - In the flesh: How much do you have? Are you comfortable? Are you obtaining what you want to obtain?
 - For the will of God: am I doing God’s will? Is God using me in His purposes.

So focus on the church!

- Devote yourself to the church; experience God’s power in the church
- Be salt and light
- Show hospitality

This church exists for God’s glory. Whose glory do you live for?

It’s all built on the resurrection

- It’s not a footnote
- **You see, there are two very wrong reactions we naturally in suffering:**
 1. *“God has forsaken me.”* Peter says God’s love was given to us as a gift in Christ, and we stand absolutely assured of it, so we have no doubts, even in our pain, that God loves us and is working for our good. We know that even Christ suffered, and so God is using even our pain for His good purposes.
 2. *“It’s not worth it.”* So avoid suffering at whatever costs. Avoid serving God; give up sacrificial living.
- Think like Christ did about these things. Trust that God is working in your suffering. Know that God’s approval, His promises in eternity, are worth it.