

Living for the Will of God

SERMON

By

Everett C. DeVelde

October 12, 2002

TEXT: 1 Peter 4:1-11

PROP: If sin has ceased for us as it has in Christ then we will spend our lives living for the will of God.

1 Peter 4:1-11 (ESV)

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 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 The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, 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; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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.

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

To this point Peter has been dealing with our responsibility to live godly lives even though we often must live under the authority of ungodly people. We are to submit to the authority of ungodly presidents, senators, employers, parents and husbands. However there are always limits to our submission to such people. Submission must never involve us with sin. It must never violate the will of Yahweh God who is the ultimate authority over everyone and over all things. We must live for the will of God even though we suffer for it. We must live for the will of God even though we must suffer torture and death and in this we have the sublime example of our Lord Jesus Christ. "*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,*" (1 Peter 4:1, ESV)

Jesus suffered in the flesh, the righteous for the unrighteous. He suffered the shame of the cross for doing good. He was reviled and slandered though he was utterly blameless and without sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered not for his own sin, but he paid the death-penalty on his people's behalf for he bore our sin in his own body on the cross. And we are to arm ourselves with this same way of thinking. Though it may mean our death we are to be faithful to our blessed Savior and we will receive the crown of life. Christ having been out to death for our sin has paid the penalty for sin and for him sin has ceased. Therefore, every believer ought to regard himself as having been put to death on account of sin. And as Christ our great Substitute who endured the cross in our place is clear of the guilt of sin, so are we clear from the guilt of our sin. If it were possible for some one to live again after he was put to death for his sin, he would not live under guilt and penalty of his old sin. So in that sense he has ceased from sin. Jesus suffered once for sin and having risen from the dead and having been highly exalted and bestowed with the name that is above every name, "*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,*" (Philippians 2:10-11, ESV) sin for him has ceased. So must it cease for us for whom Jesus died.

But there is another sense in which we have ceased from sin. In Christ we have died unto sin once, but now that we live unto God; we are as if we had actually died to sin, and had passed into a new state and condition by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ our Lord. But while this is true, there is a process of sanctification which we must undergo which we infer from Peter's command, to think in the same way Christ thought as he subjected himself to the unjust cross. Such a frame of mind is developed in us once sin ceases; once sin has no more dominion over us. We still have sinful hearts but sin is no longer our master. Our hearts cease from sin but our propensity for sin remains and so we arm ourselves to do battle with it and overcome it.

Those who have been caused to be born again to a living hope are unified with Christ. They are said to be in Christ and Christ is said to be in them.

Galatians 2:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. ²⁰ It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

If this is so then it follows that our way of living will reflect our union with Christ and we are moved by the Spirit of God to no longer live for human passions but for the will of God. Continuing to live according to human sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry does not comport at all with union with Christ. God by His Spirit works in us who are unified with Christ to turn us away from our sinful way of living. If

sin has ceased for us as it has in Christ then the rest of our time in the flesh will spent **living for the will of God.**

Peter continues in our text to define the will of God in ethical terms. Yahweh our God tells us, "*You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*" (Exodus 20:3-6, ESV) Therefore idolatry is essentially lawless, To worship anything other than the True and Living God is to act in an unethical or lawless manner. God's will for us is first that we should worship him and him only.

The Gentile or Roman society in Peter's day worshipped all sorts of gods or god concepts, such as the unknown god, all of which amounted to lawless idolatry. All the philosophies in ancient Greece and Rome were essentially religious propounding anything but the worship of Yahweh. Peter describes these religions and philosophies as a "flood of debauchery" for which they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. The temples of Rome were brothels and their entertainments; brutality and murder. The society in which we live today is no better. All religions other than the religion of Yahweh amount to idolatry and the most successful entertainments of our day depict the same Roman brutality, murder and gross immorality if not more so. Those who are not unified with Christ by grace are dead while they live just as Peter writes,

1 Peter 4:6 (ESV)

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.

The will of God is that we live in the spirit the way God does. The will of God is that we live in accord with his commandments. Paul puts it this way,

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (ESV)

³ For this is the **will of God**, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Again, Paul writes,

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the **will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Discernment of the will of God is impossible apart from conversion. No one will be careful to obey the law of God and walk in his statutes apart from conversion, and apart from conversion no one will be inclined to be godly. Our presuppositions will be invariably humanistic and self-centered. We will never discern what is good and acceptable and perfect and we will be thoroughly conformed to this world not only in our actions but in our world and life view. Though the apostles exhort us to live for the will of God and that this is most urgent and needful, apart from renewed minds we will not hear the apostles and we will not be able to discern the will of God.

Spurgeon put it this way, "Nelson could not see the signal for suspending battle because he placed the glass to his blind eye, and man cannot see the truth as it is in Jesus because he has no mind to do so. Ungodly men are, as the country people say, "like the hogs in a harvest field," who will not come out for all your shouting. They cannot hear because they have no will to hear. Want of will causes paralysis of every faculty. In spiritual things man is utterly unable because resolvedly unwilling."

Israel was constantly commanded by God to separate themselves from the idolatrous heathen around them because affinity with them would lead them into idolatry. This happened over and over again because the inevitable result of conformity in any respect with our modern world is lawless idolatry and a flood of debauchery. In order to discern the will of God and to do the will of God our minds must be renewed, we must be unified by grace with Christ. It is then that we begin to live for the will of God. It is then that we begin to love the law of God and see that it is perfect, reviving the soul; that it is sure, making wise the simple; that it is right, rejoicing the heart; that it is pure, enlightening the eyes; and that it is clean, enduring forever. We find that his law is not burdensome and that his law kept by those who been born again overcomes the world.

Conversion brings us to deal with the reality that the end of all things is at hand. There is immediacy to living for the will of God and a happy expectation that the consummation of all things is near. The bridegroom is coming. Our lamps are to be trimmed and full of oil. The marriage feast is near and we are to watch and be ready for we know neither the day nor the hour. But the end of all things may be far closer than we think. We do not know when Christ will return but with relatively few exceptions, we do not know when our days on earth will be over. We may be elderly or inflicted with a terminal disease so that it is clear that the time left to us on earth is short. A person, knowing that he will die in several months hastens to make the best use of his time. Perhaps he travels abroad to some place he has always wanted to visit or a child dying of leukemia wants to see one of his great sports heroes. For most of us in good health, death is often far from our minds. This is especially true for

children and young people. Your whole life is ahead of you and you make great plans for your future, what you want to be when you grow up. That you will die is scarcely on your minds. But we do not know when death will come to us when our days on earth will be over. We will all die and that is certain but we do not know when it will happen to us. So Peter's instruction to live for the will of God and not human passions is most appropriate. We all need to be self-controlled sober-minded. We all need to be good stewards of God's varied gifts, not later but right now because the end of all things is near. The Lord has given each of us gifts which we are to invest wisely so that we can give good return to our Master.

But the ungodly world takes a much different view and lives accordingly. They say that all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation and there is no one to whom they will give an account for what they do in this life. Since they are not held accountable for the immorality they do there is no reason to bring an end to their ungodly life style. Indeed they live for the selfish of reasons, their own personal pleasure. They want to continue their immorality and their abortion of unwanted children that result from it. They want to continue the abomination of homosexuality. But Peter tells that the end of all things is near. Those that believe to the contrary live as they please because, as they say, things will continue indefinitely as they are limited only by overpopulation, pollution the destruction of natural resources. There is no fear of God in their eyes. If there is a God he is only seen as a loving benign father who leaves men to their own pursuits. On the other hand many say that if there is a loving God he would not permit wars and rumors of war and seemingly interminable human suffering. The social problems in our nation they say are caused by those who oppose abortion and homosexual behavior; who insist on living in accord with the law of God. Anyone who speaks out or acts against ungodliness is committing a hate-crime. But the end of all things is at hand for all mankind. No one is exempt from the constraint placed upon our days on earth and for the ungodly to die in their sins means an eternity of punishment in hell. Except we repent we will perish. Except we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation we will die in our sins.

On the other hand God has been pleased to foreknow his people unto salvation. He has predestined, called, justified and glorified them therefore they live for the will of him who regenerated them unto a living hope. Such people certainly believe in Yahweh and know that the promises in his word are true and certain. They alone live or are even able to live for the will of God and look earnestly for his coming to receive them to himself. And it is to these that Peter gives the very practical exhortation to be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of their prayers. Who but God's people will worship him in prayer? Who but God's people will confess their sins, thank him for his tender mercies and bring before the throne of grace their earnest supplications? Who but God's people will see as their reason for existence, "that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ"? Who but God's people will say, "To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever?"

Will the ungodly say with the psalmist, "*Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*"? (Psalm 73:23-26, ESV) No! Of course not! Will the enemies of Christ say, "*The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken*"? (Psalm 16:5-8, ESV) No! They will not! But those to whom Peter addresses himself can do no other because they are enabled and moved by the sovereign Holy Spirit to desire the True and Living God.

We are to live for the will of God and we will live in this way because our sinful hearts have been changed by the sovereign grace of God. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is powerful indeed and it is certain in its result. We are exhorted to be good stewards of God's varied grace and we will do so by the strength that God supplies. Indeed, God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.