

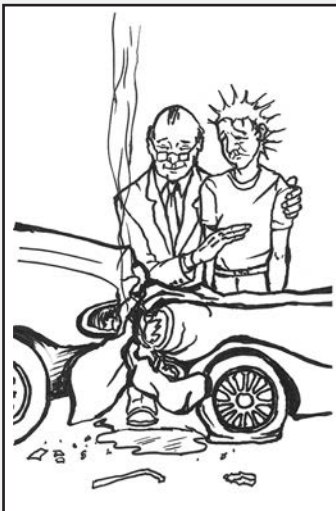
Living for God



SABBATH—APRIL 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Peter 3:8–12; Galatians 2:20; 1 Peter 4:1, 2; Romans 6:1–11; 1 Peter 4:3–11; 2 Samuel 11:4.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord’s eyes look on godly people, and he blesses them. His ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord [does not] bless those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12, NIV).



When we love and forgive, we show what Jesus has done and still does for us.

THE BIBLE WRITERS KNOW how real and terrible sin is. How could they not? The world stinks of it. And they know how sinful they are themselves (read 1 Timothy 1:15). They know just how serious sin is, too. After all, look what it took to solve the problem of sin. It took the cross of Jesus Christ. That is how deep and widespread the problem of sin really is. But the Bible writers also are greatly aware of the power of Christ to change our lives and make us new people in Him.

This week, Peter continues on this same track. He writes about the new life that Christians will have after they give themselves to Christ and are baptized. In fact, the change will be so great that others will notice it. Peter does not say that this change will always be easy. Indeed, he talks about the need to suffer in the flesh (1 Peter 4:1). In other words, we must suffer in the flesh in order to have the victory that we are promised.

Peter also continues a theme that runs all through the Bible. That theme is how real love is in the life of a believer in Jesus. “Love,” he writes, “erases many sins by forgiving them” (1 Peter 4:8, NIV). This is because when we love and forgive, we show what Jesus has done and still does for us.

AGREEING WITH ONE ANOTHER (1 Peter 3:8–12)

Read 1 Peter 3:8–12. What point does Peter make here in this verse about how Christians should live? What does he repeat that he already wrote about in 1 Peter 2:20, 21?

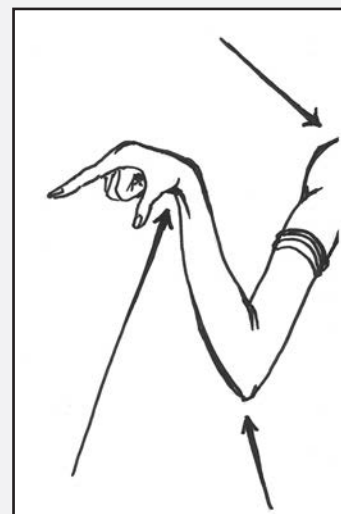
Peter begins in 1 Peter 3:8 by telling Christians, “I want all of you to agree with one another” (NirV). Another way of saying “to agree with one another” is “to be of one mind.” The Greek for “one mind” is *homophrones*. Peter is not talking about everyone having to think, do, and believe *exactly* the same way. The best example of this idea is found in 1 Corinthians 12:1–26. In these verses, Paul points out that the body is made up of parts. In the same way, the church is made up of individual believers with different spiritual gifts. They work together to form a united church.

Of course, such oneness is not always so easy to achieve. So Peter warns believers against not agreeing with one another. Then he tells his readers how they can show this Christian ideal of being united.

For example, Christians should act with sympathy (1 Peter 3:8). Sympathy is the feeling that you care about and are sorry about someone else’s trouble, sorrow, or pain. You show sympathy for a person who suffers by sorrowing over his or her pain. Sympathy is an important step along the way to agreeing with one another. Peter then says we should “love one another” (1 Peter 3:8, NirV). Also Peter says that Christians will have tender hearts (1 Peter 3:8). They will have mercy and pity for one another’s difficulties and failings.

“Put self to death on the cross. Think of others as better than yourselves. In doing so, you will be brought into oneness with Christ. Before the heavenly universe, and before the church and the world, you will give clear proof that you are God’s sons and daughters. God will be glorified in the example that you set.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies¹ for the Church*, volume 9, page 188.

Peter says, “Be kind and tender. Be humble [not proud]. [Do not] pay back evil with evil” (1 Peter 3:8, 9, NirV). Why must we die to self in order to follow these words? How can we have this kind of “death”? (Read Galatians 2:20.)

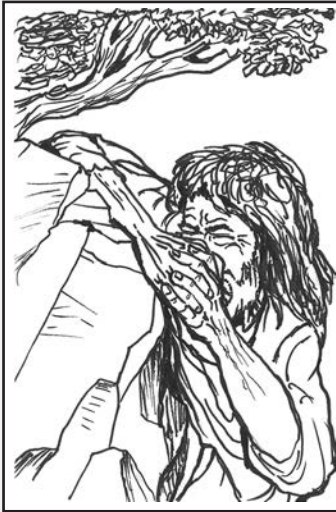


The body is made up of parts. There are hands and eyes. Together, each part makes up the body. In the same way, the church is made up of individual believers with different spiritual gifts.

DEFINITIONS

1. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

TO SUFFER IN THE FLESH (1 Peter 3:18, 21)



Christ suffered for our sins in order to bring us to God.

Jesus died for our sins. And our hope of salvation is found only in Him. It is found in His holy life. His holy life covers us. It causes us to be made holy in the eyes of God. Because of Jesus, you are “accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 62.

But God’s grace² does not end when God declares that our sins are forgiven. God also gives us the power to overcome our sins, as well.

Read 1 Peter 3:18, 21; 1 Peter 4:1, 2; and Romans 6:1–11. What link is there in these verses between suffering and victory over sin?

There is a small Greek word used in 1 Peter 3:18. It shows just how big and far-reaching Jesus’ sacrifice for us really is. It is the Greek word *hapax*. This word means “once for all.” Peter uses *hapax* to declare the great power of Jesus’ death for us.

The word “so” appears in 1 Peter 4:1 (NIRV). This word links 1 Peter 4:1, 2 with what Peter has just said in 1 Peter 3:18–22. In these earlier verses, Peter points out that Christ suffered for our sins. He suffered so that He could bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). As a result, we can take part in “the baptism that now saves [us] too” (1 Peter 3:21, NIRV).

So baptism is perhaps the best way to help us to understand Peter’s words, “whoever suffers in [his or her] body is finished with sin” (1 Peter 4:1, NIRV). By baptism, the Christian takes part in the suffering, death, and return to life of Jesus. And the Christian has made a choice to no longer “live the rest of [his or her] earthly life for evil human desires. Instead, [he or she] live[s] to do what God wants” (1 Peter 4:2, NIRV). This choice can happen only by surrender of self to the Lord every day. And every day that kind of surrender involves a Christian “nailing [his or her] sinful desires to [the] cross” (Galatians 5:24, NIRV).

DEFINITIONS

2. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

When was the last time you found yourself “suffering in . . . the body” in order to fight against sin? What does your answer say to you about your Christian life?

BORN AGAIN (1 Peter 4:3–6)

In Jesus Christ, we have new life. He gives us a new beginning. We are born again. New life in Christ means we will live differently than we did before. Who has not heard amazing stories of those who were once unbelievers? But then they experienced a powerful and complete change in their lives. Why? Jesus and His saving grace changed them.

So Peter talks about the death to self and the new life we have in Jesus. He talks about being baptized into Christ's death and His return to life. Then Peter talks about the kind of changes a new believer will experience.

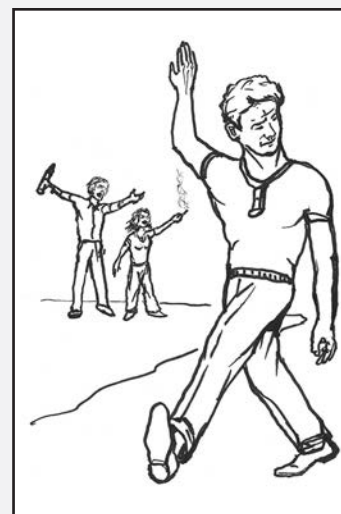
Read 1 Peter 4:3–6. What changes will happen in a new believer's life? And how do others act when they see those changes?

Peter uses different terms to speak about alcohol abuse. He says, "You got drunk. You went to wild parties" (NIRV). In modern words, we would say, "Your partying days are over." According to Peter, the change that a Christian experiences should be very great. In fact, those who knew the Christian in the past will be "surprised that [he or she] no longer join[s] them in what they do" (1 Peter 4:4, NIRV). So we can see here a chance to witness to others without even having to preach. A godly Christian life can be more of a witness than all the sermons in the world can be.

What does Peter say in 1 Peter 4:3–6 about judgment?

Here, as elsewhere in the Bible (John 5:29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27), Peter makes it clear that one day there will be a judgment for what we have done "in the flesh" (1 Peter 4:2, NKJV). Peter talks about the gospel being "preached even to people who are now dead" (1 Peter 4:6, NIRV). He means that even the dead had a chance to know the saving grace of God when they were once alive. So God can be just and fair when He judges them, as well.

You are now a believer in Jesus. How is the way you live now so different from the time when you did not believe in Him? What difference has Jesus made in your life?



By no longer doing the sinful things we once did, we can witness to others without even having to preach.

SINS OF THE FLESH (1 Peter 4:3)

Peter writes a list of sins that his readers did in the past. But they stopped doing those things after they became believers in Jesus. Then Peter also writes a list of what could be called “sexual sins,” or sins having to do with sex.

Read 1 Peter 4:3 again. What else does Peter list there?

Two groups of words in this verse have a clear sexual meaning: “You lived a wild life. You longed for evil things” (NIV). “Wild life” comes from the Greek word *aselgia*. It means “sexual pleasure.” “Evil things” comes from the Greek word *epithumia*. It means “strong desire.”

But it is all too easy for Christians to have the wrong idea about sex and desire. The Bible is not against sex. After all, God created sex. And He gave sexual desire to humans as a great blessing. After all, desire for sex was there in Eden, at the beginning (Genesis 2:24, 25). Sex was to be one of the main things that would unite a husband and wife in a lifelong marriage. Marriage is the best arrangement for raising children. And the closeness and love between husband and wife is meant to show the kind of relationship God wants to have with His people also. (For example, read Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; and Hosea 1–3.)

Sex is a deep blessing when it is enjoyed in agreement with God’s plan in marriage. But sex outside of marriage is one of the greatest destructive forces in the world. The terrible results of sexual sins are beyond anything we can imagine. Who among us does not know about lives that have been ruined through the abuse of this wonderful gift?



The closeness and love between husband and wife is meant to show the kind of relationship God wants to have with His people.

What same thing do all the following verses teach us? Read 2 Samuel 11:4; 1 Corinthians 5:1; Genesis 19:5; 1 Corinthians 10:8.

Of course, one does not need the Bible to know stories of the pain and suffering that these sins have caused.

But we must be careful too. It is true that sexual sins can have powerfully negative effects on people. Society tends to frown upon these sins and those who do them. But sin is sin. And Christ’s death covers sexual sins, as well. As Christians, we should be careful not to judge others who have fallen into sexual sin (read Luke 6:42).

LOVE COVERS ALL (1 Peter 4:7–11)

Even when Peter was alive, Christians believed Jesus would return soon. And then the world would end. First Peter 4:7 declares this belief. Peter writes: “The end of all things is near. So be watchful and control yourselves. Then you may pray” (NirV). In other words, be ready for the end. In one very real way, too, the “end” is never more than a moment after we die. We close our eyes in death. Then thousands of years may pass, or just a few days. But the next thing we will know is the second coming of Jesus and the end of this world.

According to Peter, the “end of all things” is near. So how should Christians live? Read 1 Peter 4:7–11.

Christians need to be serious and watchful in prayer. They also are to “love one another deeply. Love erases many sins by forgiving them” (1 Peter 4:8, NirV).

What does that verse mean? How does love erase or cover sin? Peter quotes from Proverbs 10:12. And there is a hint in this verse. It reads: “Hate stirs up fights. But love erases all sins by forgiving them” (NirV). In other words, love makes it easy to forgive those who hurt us. So Christ’s love leads Him to forgive us. And our love should lead us to forgive others. After all, suppose love rules in the heart. Then small insults, and even some large ones, are easier to overlook and forget.

Peter expresses the same idea as Jesus and Paul. Both Jesus and Paul say that the whole law is summed up in our duty to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:34–39; Romans 13:8–10).

Peter also urges Christians to be hospitable. The Second Coming may be near. But Christians should not withdraw from social relationships because of it. Finally, Christians should speak as those who are speaking the words of God. In other words, the seriousness of the times demands for serious communication about spiritual truths.

“Love erases many sins by forgiving them” (1 Peter 4:8, NirV). Who has sinned against you? How can you show the love needed in order to “erase” that sin? Why does it help you to show this love?



Love erases sins by forgiving them.



Why did Jesus write down the “guilty secrets of [the leaders’] own lives” in the dirt where they could be swept away?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Love is patient and kind. It will not make a small mistake look larger than it is or too big to be forgiven. Love will not gossip about the failings of others. The Bible plainly teaches that the sinful are to be treated with patient kindness and thoughtfulness. The right way must be followed with those who have fallen into sin. Then the heart that appears stubborn may be won to Christ. The love of Jesus erases many sins by forgiving them. His mercy and forgiveness never lead to uncovering another’s wrongs unless it is necessary.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Counsels [Advice] to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, page 267.

How does Jesus deal with sinners? Think of Jesus and the story of the woman in John 8:1–11. She is caught in adultery. Adultery is the sin of having sex outside of marriage. The religious leaders bring the woman to Jesus. Jesus writes down in the dirt the “guilty secrets of [the leaders’] own lives” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 461). Why does Jesus write their sins in the dirt? Because the words He writes in the dirt could be swept away in a moment. Jesus shows the religious leaders that He knows they are two-faced and evil. But even though He does, He is not going to expose or uncover their sins to others. Perhaps this kindness is Jesus’ own way of reaching out to these men. What a powerful lesson for us when we need to face boldly those who have sinned.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Are there some things that all believers need to think the same way about in order to work together as a church? If what are these issues (problems)? And how can we come together as one in our thinking on these issues?
- ② What has been your own experience with the idea of the need to “suffer in the flesh” in order to stop sinning? What does that idea mean?
- ③ Look around at the terrible results of alcohol in so many lives. What can we do as a church to help others see the danger of this drug? What can we do to keep our young people aware of what a mistake it would be even to experiment with something that can do them such terrible harm?