

# Keys to Living as God's People

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 October 2024

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[ 0 : 0 0 ] is no longer our eternal home is with God as his people. That is who we are. That is our identity. And then we've seen Peter lay down how we're to live that out, the appropriate conduct that goes with that in all sorts of different areas of life. And I hope one of the things that we've kind of picked up and we remember from this letter is that right behavior, right conduct, striving after holiness in how we live is a really important part of the gospel. I think we can sometimes be worried about speaking about that kind of thing because we're worried it sounds a little bit kind of legalistic or there's not much grace involved. But the Bible is really big on how we live as being important. The key is that we get that order in the right place. It's not that we live this way in order that God might love us, in order that God might rescue us. It's we live this way because God first loved us, because God has rescued us in Jesus if our trust is in him. It is royal children who live out royal manners, not royal manners that make royal children. And our verses this morning are going to help us again with this, living out this identity we have in Christ. If you're a Christian, you'll know that is a never-ending challenge, isn't it? Trying to live as God's people, trying to live as the Bible says we should, as we know we should, that is hard. In fact, often the closer we are to

God in our relationship with him, the more and more we recognize our weaknesses and our failures and flaws. And we'll never get to that stage where, you know, we've cracked it and we get everything right.

We'll never reach that here on earth. But we are called to keep striving after it. We are called to live according to that. And so Peter keeps on giving us the encouragement and the tools that we need to live out our identity as God's people, as children of the King, so that the world might see something of God in us, and so that most importantly, God might be glorified in our lives. So three pointers here in these verses in how to live out this incredibly privileged identity that we have been given through Jesus in the gospel. And the first one is this, live out your identity by thinking the way of Christ. Live out your identity by thinking the way of Christ. Verse one, since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, we saw that last week, remember the victorious sufferings of Christ, that Christ suffered the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God, that he was put to death in the flesh. Chapter three, verse 18, that is in his human nature. He was willing even to die in order to carry out God's will. Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, Peter writes. Now, I love that phrase again, arm yourselves. This is deliberate language, isn't it? This is sort of military language. We don't just slide into living as we should.

We read back in chapter two about the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Peter's been really clear that the Christian life is a battle. The Christian life can be hard to do as we should. And yet here he's giving us the equipment for that battle, that we are not defenseless, but we are armed. We arm ourselves by having the same way of thinking as Jesus did in his earthly life, in his human life. And what is that way of thinking? Well, it's that commitment that whatever the cost to turn away from sin, to resist those passions of the flesh, as it says there, and instead to live for the will of God. That is what Jesus did. And he is the only person who ever did that perfectly.

But it was really striking for me this week to think, as we're looking at these verses and kind of reading about them, really striking to think that every moment of every hour, of every day, of every year, of his whole life, that Jesus himself was consciously deciding, was making that decision, was choosing that way of thinking, that he would turn from sin and temptation and do the will of his Father God. Karen Jobes, who I've mentioned before in 1 Peter, writes really well about it, puts it like this. Jesus deliberately had to embrace his calling, even though it meant the suffering of being misunderstood, rejected, and finally tortured to death. His full humanity meant he constantly had to decide to obey God and suffer the consequences. Now that's incredible, isn't it? To consider that constant mental effort of Jesus, as he was fully human, as he walked on our earth and made those decisions moment by moment. I wonder if that's something that we often consider, that way of thinking. And yet Peter says that we need to consider that because we need to imitate that. We need to arm ourselves for this spiritual battle that is the Christian life with the same way of thinking, that way of thinking that says that anything is worth it for the sake of living for the will of God.

[ 5 : 50 ] Perhaps that raises then a question for you, well, why is it worth it? You know, especially if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian or you're not really sure, we're really glad that you're with us this morning, but you might well say, well, why would I want to get involved in this kind of thing if it means going against the flow? And I've just been told it's hard and it's like a battle.

You know, why would I be interested in that? Now really that brings us around to the big picture of this letter of 1 Peter. It's because it's living out this incredibly privileged identity that we have as God's people through Jesus. And it's living in light of our eternal home. It is investing our lives in that perfection that will come, that is to come, and that thing that will last forever, rather than kind of chasing the fleeting joys of a world that will pass, that we're so often tempted toward. That it is absolutely worth it. And again, Jesus is our model here. The book of Hebrews tells us, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. We have the same mindset of Christ because we know that what is to come is where our true home, our ultimate joy, our eternal certain hope lies. And so we live out our identity by thinking the way of Christ. And see that phrase there at the end of verse 1? It says, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

That's a kind of funny little sentence. It's worth unpacking that a little bit. One thing that doesn't mean is that suffering, if we suffer, that makes us perfect people. This is not talking about kind of penance or purgatory or anything along those kind of lines. Really what I think Peter means though is that if we're willing to get some flack, get some stick in life, if we're willing in one way or another to make our lives harder in order to live for God, well that's an encouragement as it's a sign that we're no longer living for sin, no longer living fully according to the way of the world, but instead have made that decisive move to be seeking God's will above all things. It's the evidence that we are putting this mindset into action. And so as we look through these verses, you might be hearing this which says, you know, be like Jesus. Have the same way of thinking as Jesus. And that is absolutely true. And that absolutely is what we should be aiming for, striving after. But that's a high standard, isn't it? This passage is saying don't duck that challenge.

That mindset is key to living out our identity as God's people in the world. But it's also given us this encouragement that says, Peter is saying, and you can already see the seed of that in your lives already. You know, think of the times you have mentioned Jesus or church in conversation when it would have been easier not to. Think of the times you've been willing to live, to act in a way that is distinctive from the world around us. Maybe even think of the fact that you're here this morning rather than somewhere else, rather than in bed. Maybe you've had to kind of drag kids to get here and that's always easier not to than to do that. I think people would say that even these small tastes of suffering are the evidence that you have ceased from sin. Not that you're perfect.

I think we're all aware of that. But that however imperfectly you're looking to strive after God's will over and above the ways of the world and the passions of the flesh.

[ 9 : 40 ] So do be encouraged this morning as we look at these verses. But let's also make sure that we are challenged in these verses. Because each one of us here can grow, can decide, can commit our thinking to be more like that of Jesus. Remembering his deliberate, his determined, his continual conscious commitment to live for the will of God rather than the temptations of the world, rather than the passions of the flesh. And it's because of his perfection in carrying that out that we are saved. And again, that order is important. It's as his rescued people that we then arm ourselves for life with him by thinking the way of Christ, our Saviour. So that's the first point Peter is making there.

And then with that key truth in place, he moves on to speak a bit about the outworking of that. We see secondly, Peter says to God's people, live out your identity despite the pressure it brings.

And again, this is a theme we've come across before in 1 Peter. It's actually a theme that becomes more kind of acute, that the suffering, the opposition becomes more intense as we move toward the end of this book. But Peter says, live out your identity despite the pressure it brings. This is verses 3 and 4. Let me read those. For 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.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you. Peter again emphasizes this, this new identity, this change that has happened.

The time that is past suffices, he says. That stuff is done because you now have a new life to live. You have this new identity through Christ. So leave all that stuff behind. That's what other people want to do.

[ 11 : 50 ] And I do have a look at that list there in verse 3. Living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. It's tempting to read that list and to think, well, that all sounds a little bit extreme, doesn't it? You know, to want to say to Peter, well, that's, you know, maybe that's what was happening there, but that's not what my neighbours really are into. You know, perhaps if we were teaching this at Freshers' Week in the halls of residence, we'd feel these were the kind of warnings that were right on the money. Maybe we think of our neighbours, our friends. We think of Leafy Haddington and East Lothian, and we think, well, maybe this isn't quite right for us. But two things on that. Firstly, I think, is to say that actually, these underlying issues in that list, the kind of underlying causes of sex, of alcohol, of a general lack of self-control, we would be really naive to think that these are not still a huge part of people's lives. That these are not still the animating desires behind people's actions in all sorts of walks of life. Whether they display themselves, you know, in kind of obvious studenty ways, whether they display themselves in kind of anti-social behaviour or overt ways, or whether they display themselves in much more perhaps subtle or respectable kind of middle-class ways.

Now, we would be naive to think that these aren't a reality in every section of the population, and that they aren't a very real temptation for each one of us. So that's the first thing. Let's not be naive about the reality of these attitudes in our culture and in our lives as well. But secondly, and I think this is really helpful to see, that actually that the behaviours listed here were an established part of the kind of cultural and social and even religious life that Peter is writing into. So for an example, the most popular Roman festival was called the Saturnalia. And sensuality, drunkenness, sex, orgies, losing your inhibitions was at the very heart of those festivities.

You know, or another example, if you wanted to worship your family gods in the traditional way that your previous generations, that your parents, your grandparents, your great-grandparents had done, then again, idolatry, sex, drinking would have been included in that process.

And so really, the point here is that these aren't so much things you could simply not join in with. These were things that you would have to actively remove yourself from. And that would be a noticeable thing. That would cause shock. You see that in verse 4, they are surprised when you don't join them.

These are just the things that everyone is doing. This is what it means to be part of the culture. You know, that could cause hurt. Imagine you had to pull out of a family, non-Christian, religious event down at the local shrine. You know, that would cause offence as it refused to affirm the actions of those around them, as it refused to engage with family and people you knew.

[ 15 : 22 ] And the result of that, the end of verse 4, and they malign you. Again, that emphasis in this letter of 1 Peter on what people will say, and actually, you know, the weight, the effect that have on us.

That what people will say when we live distinctively as God's people, but Peter's call to live out your identity despite that, despite the pressures that it brings. I think when we see things through that lens of just actually how much part of the culture these things were, it can help us think about perhaps the kind of behaviours that we are being called today to, you know, turn our backs on and to live distinctively from. The rhythms and the patterns of our culture, which we're considered odd if we step outside of. Maybe it is, you know, a group of friends or colleagues with a regular night out, and, you know, everyone is there, and everyone just has a, you know, a bit too much to drink, you know, but it's all harmless, no harm done. You know, to be the person who says, well, actually, I'm kind of drawing a line in the sand here, I'm not going to be drinking that much from now on.

I'm going to make a really clear limit. You know, does that somehow make you a killjoy? Does that make other people feel uncomfortable? How do people respond to that, especially if it's something we've done regularly up to this point, and that yet has to change? Especially if it's something where we say, you know, the time has now sufficed, as Peter says. But we're called to live out our identity despite the pressures it brings. Maybe it's kind of explicit images shared around at school or at work, or maybe it's kind of casual, physical relationships. You know, that pressure to join in with what everyone else is doing in that way, what our society says is completely normal and is completely approved of.

And to be the person that actually says, actually, I don't want to see that, or actually, I don't want to be involved in that, or I don't think that's a healthy way of approaching relationships. That's hard. Because again, it's not just simply saying, well, that's not something I do. It's inherently saying, I don't think that's how life works best. I don't think that should be done. You know, it's rejecting what is culturally accepted and even culturally promoted. And of course, people can react negatively to that. They can malign you, as Peter says. But again, we're called to live out our identity despite the pressures it brings. And I'm sure you can think of plenty of other situations where that hits home for you. The Christian life is supposed to be slightly surprising to people. That as we live alongside them, they would think, oh, I wouldn't expect you would do that. Or why on earth would you not join in with this? It's not being awkward for the sake of it, but we should expect that we won't fit in with our culture's kind of norms and rituals and normal practices. If we're thinking the way of Christ, as Peter calls us to, then we will be distinctive. That will make people think, or maybe make people ask questions. That might make people feel challenged. There might be hostility off the back of that. There was all of that for Jesus. We shouldn't be surprised if in sharing his mindset, we get the same response.

Now, I do remember, as we saw last week, we do all of this with gentleness and respect. It's important to keep that instruction from Peter in mind. But also important to keep this instruction he gives us that we are called to live out our identity despite the pressures it brings. So that's the second thing.

[ 19 : 06 ] If we want to live out this privileged identity we're given in Christ, live it out. Remember, not earn it. Really important we keep that order correct. We do that. We live that out by thinking the way of Christ, seeking God's will over everything else. We live that out despite the pressures it might bring. We're not surprised when it's not a smooth road. But finally, and another great feature of this letter of 1 Peter is that it keeps us looking forwards with these reminders of what is to come.

And so finally, Peter says, live out your identity by remembering the judgment of God. Verse 5, but they, that's those who malign, who speak against God's people, they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. It's easy to kind of sideline this concept of judgment in the Bible, isn't it? It all perhaps sounds a bit full on. Again, perhaps if you're here and you're not a Christian, this sounds a little bit much. It's a bit over the top.

But it is an unavoidable part of the Christian faith. It's not a kind of a side issue. It's not an accessory. In some ways we might say it's almost a climax of the whole of the Bible.

And that one day we will meet our creator. We will meet the Holy God face to face. And that however important, however self-reliant, however righteous we think that we are, ultimately God will be the judge for everyone.

And Peter reminds us of this here as an encouragement to Christians. Really, he's saying, look, don't worry about what other people might say or think. Remember that one day you will stand face to face with God and it will be his judgment that truly matters. That's what really counts.

[ 21 : 02 ] Now, I used to be an avid reader of a website called Pitchfork Media. It was, I think it still is, a kind of really pretentious music website that would review new albums.

And it was convinced, and I was convinced, it was like the final word on whether something was good or not. And so it didn't matter really to me what other reviews might say.

It certainly didn't matter what friends or, you know, my parents thought. To be honest, it didn't really matter what I thought this music sounded like, if I'm honest. You know, if Pitchfork gave an album 8.6 out of 10, you know, that was good.

And I would get it and I would enjoy it regardless. This was kind of the ultimate authority, I felt, in all things musical. That's a silly example because it was a ridiculous website.

But when it comes to God, really it is his verdict alone that matters. And that will be abundantly clear when we stand before him face to face as we all will.

[ 22 : 02 ] And so it's this encouragement to Christians, don't worry what others think or say, but live for God's verdict and his verdict alone.

And hand in hand then with that encouragement to Christians also comes that warning to those who aren't yet Christians. And we saw this last week as Peter referenced the day of Noah, where everyone was eating and drinking and doing whatever they wanted and thinking that nothing would ever change right up until the day when the flood came.

And it was too late for those who hadn't put their trust in the rescue that God had offered. Now there is nothing more important than being prepared for that day when you come to meet God as the judge.

And that is why we want to tell people, if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, why we want to tell you about Jesus. Why we want to keep on speaking about Jesus. Because as we were saying earlier, God's judgment is not based on some kind of scales.

Have you done more good than bad? How do you compare to other people? It's only based on how we respond to Jesus, the cornerstone. Have we built our lives on him or have we stumbled over him?

[ 23 : 21 ] God's verdict is only based on if we accept Jesus' suffering and sacrifice in our place that we might be forgiven and brought to God. One writer says the whole point of evangelism, the whole point of sharing Jesus is to prepare people for the day they must give an account of themselves to their judge.

And I think that kind of somber way of viewing our evangelism is so important to keep in mind. When we think about bringing people along to a Christmas carol service or a kids' church event, we're not just looking to kind of bolster numbers.

We're looking to care for people's eternal souls. Nothing could be more important. The good news of the gospel is that we can have confidence to stand before God the judge.

Not because of our record, but because of that of Christ. And that is why we live out our identity now, remembering the judgment of God through Jesus, our eternal place with him.

And that is why, that is how this passage finishes with this incredible encouragement in verse 6, where Peter writes, 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.

[ 24 : 43 ] Peter is saying that for believers who have died, the hope of the gospel is not extinguished, but rather has found its fulfillment. That when Christians, in a purely human way of looking at things, end up dead like everyone else, the reality is there is actually all the difference in the world.

There is an eternal difference. Because whatever the human verdict on their life might have been, whatever people might have said about them, however people might have treated them as they walked here on earth, having faced God as judge with Jesus as their savior, they have received his approval and now spend eternity with him.

And this passage finishes with that powerful reminder of an eternal hope, a reminder that living for God is worth everything at whatever the cost, because our heavenly home is what awaits us.

And also for the many of us here who have known and loved those who are no longer with us, but who lived for the will of God, trusting in Jesus, that in the gospel they too are now secure with him.

John Calvin, the great theologian of the 16th century, put it like this, we see that death does not hinder Christ from being always our defender.

[ 26 : 08 ] It is a remarkable consolation to the godly that death itself brings no loss to their salvation. Even if Christ does not appear as deliverer in this life, yet his redemption is not void or without effect, for his power extends even to the dead.

We live out our identity as God's people by thinking the way of Christ. We live out our identity despite the pressures it brings.

We live out our identity remembering the judgment of God, knowing that through Christ all who trust in him, all who live for the will of God will be welcomed into our eternal home, where any previous cost will pale into insignificance, where we will have God's verdict written over us of well done, good and faithful servant.

Again, not because of our efforts, but because of the work of Jesus in our place. And through that we will enjoy God's presence together forever. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the grace that you have shown us in Jesus Christ.

[ 27 : 23 ] We thank you that once we were not a people, but now we are your people. That once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy, through the work of Jesus in our place.

Lord, we pray that as your people, we would be eager to live out that identity that is true of us because of the gospel. That we would be thinking the way of Christ, who is willing to suffer in order to do your will.

That we would turn away from the ways of the world, the passions of the flesh, the temptations of the devil himself. That we would be aware that to live the Christian life is a battle, and it means sticking out.

But that we would commit to doing that whatever the cost. Looking ahead to the perfect future that we have in you. Lord, we thank you for Jesus and his perfect obedience. We pray that we would have that same way of thinking in every decision that we make, in every moment of our lives.

That our guiding force would be to seek to do your will, rather than seek to give in, or to model, or sorry, to copy what those in the world around us do.

[ 28 : 38 ] Lord, we thank you for the hope of the gospel. A hope that even death itself can't overcome. And we pray that you would be helping us to order our lives, our priorities, and our actions here and now, in line with the will of God, and in light of that perfect and eternal future in store for us through Christ.

If our trust is in him, and it's in his name that we pray. Amen.