

1 Peter 4:1-11 ~ Living for God

1. In your opinion, what best distinguishes Christians from non-Christians?
2. Imagine that the world is going to end in 24 hours and you have been granted one wish for anything you want. What would you wish for? Why?

Quick summary: Peter urges his readers to behave in a way that will preserve their distinctiveness as Christians by refraining from pagan excesses (vv. 1-6) and by acting to promote Christian values of love, service, and praise of God (vv. 7-11)

3. In 4:1, what did Peter tell his readers (and us!) they should be prepared to do?
4. What does it mean to be done with sin? (4:1, Galatians 2:20)
5. What did Peter's readers (and us!) do in the past? What does "in the past" mean? Who were the pagans then? Who are they today? (4:3, Ephesians 2:1-3)
6. What did the pagans think was strange? (4:4, 2 Timothy 3:12)
7. To whom did Peter say the pagans or godless people will have to give account? Will Christians be judged also? Who is the judge? What will be judged? (4:5, John 5:27, John 3:16-18, Jeremiah 21:14, 23:2, Psalm 62:12, Obadiah 1:15, Matthew 12:36, Romans 2:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 4:13, Revelation 22:12)
8. For what reason was the gospel preached? (4:6) What happens to people who have not heard the gospel or anything about Jesus? (Romans 2:14-16, 4:15, 5:13)
9. In Verse 4:7, can "the end...is near" have both a positive and negative meaning?
10. What did Peter encourage his readers to do above all? What was one way of doing this? (4:8-9, James 5:20, 1 Corinthians 13:5, Titus 1:8, Hebrews 13:2) To whom do you find it difficult to offer hospitality? Why? How can you offer hospitality if you don't have a home, car, or money?
11. How were believers to speak and serve? What goal did Peter want his readers to reach with all they did? (4:11, Romans 1:16, Jude 1:24-25)

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3. In 4:1, what did Peter tell his readers (and us!) they should be prepared to do?

The word “therefore” at the start of this section refers it back to the previous chapter, specifically verse 3:18 in which Christ suffered unjustly for doing good, as might happen to us also. Furthermore, he is speaking of physical suffering (“in his body”).

What he is instructing his readers to do is to be prepared also to suffer unjustly, and to face such abuse with Christ’s attitude, i.e., a willingness to suffer for doing good.

4. What does it mean to be done with sin? (4:1, Galatians 2:20)

Peter adds that he who has suffered is done with sin, meaning that such suffering enables believers to straighten out their priorities. Sinful desires that once seemed important now seem insignificant when one’s life is in jeopardy. Serious suffering for Christ advances the progress of sanctification (being made holy and free from sin). [from the NIV Study Bible.]

The expression here has a proverbial aspect, and Peter seems to have meant something like this: “when a man is dead, he will sin no more;” referring, of course, to the present life. So if a Christian becomes dead in a moral sense—dead to this world, dead by being crucified with Christ—he may be expected to cease from sin. The reasoning is based on the idea that there is such a union between Christ and the believer that his death on the cross secured the death of the believer to the world and worldly values.

Galatians 2:20 – My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [NLT]

5. What did Peter’s readers (and us!) do in the past? What does “in the past” mean? Who were the pagans then? Who are they today?(4:3, Ephesians 2:1-3)

Peter said they lived in debauchery (excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures),

lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing (enjoy oneself with others in a noisy, disruptive way), and detestable idolatry (worshiping other than the true God, not just carved statues, but idols such as money, appearance, movie stars, and position). Do we do this today? Of course.

“In the past” means the time before your conversion to Christianity.

Ephesians 2:1-3 – Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. [NLT]

Pagans literally meant the Gentiles, although it could also mean non-believers in any established religion (called “godless people” in the NLT) or more narrowly, non-Christian believers. Paganism today, or Neopaganism covers a wide range of belief systems which have emerged in the past 100 years such as Druidry, Witchcraft, Heathenism, Shamanism, Goddess Worship, and various forms of magical practice. However, the book, *Pagan Christianity* posits that much of what is practiced in churches today originated out of Greco-Roman customs and traditions (paganism, not Judaism), and/or human-made inventions, and not out of the New Testament.

Peter’s use of the term suggests that some of his readers might be Gentiles who had been converted from a pagan lifestyle.

6. What did the pagans think was strange? (4:4, 2 Timothy 3:12)

Godly living can bring persecution from your pagan peers. This type of living will surprise and alienate your former companions but this is the price that must be paid for standing firm in the redeemed community of God’s people.

2 Timothy 3:12-13 – ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

7. To whom did Peter say the pagans will have to give account? Will Christians be judged also? Who is the judge? What will be judged? (4:5, John 5:27, John 3:16-18, Jeremiah 21:14, 23:2, Psalm 62:12, Obadiah 1:15, Matthew 12:36, Romans 2:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 4:13, Revelation 22:12)

Peter said the pagans (or godless people) must give account to “him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” In the New Testament, both the Father and the Son are said to be judge on the great final judgement day. The Father is the ultimate source of judgement, but he will delegate judgement to the Son.

John 5:27 – And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

We must then ask: what will be judged? Two things: faith and deeds. About the judgement of faith, John has this to say:

John 3:16-18 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

The verse above and others indicate that those who believe in Christ will enter heaven and have eternal life with God. There will be no “first judgement” for them; their names are already written in the Book of Life. But there is a second judgement of works or deeds. About these two judgements, Paul makes it clear in Romans that (1) good works do not contribute at all to one's salvation; (2) the reward for good works can only come to those who are already justified in Christ. (There is a 12-page discussion of this at www.graceonlinelibrary.org)

About judgement of your deeds, the Bible has this to say:

Jeremiah 21:14 – I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the Lord. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.”

Jeremiah 23:2 – Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord.

Psalms 62:12 – and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

Obadiah 1:15 – “The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

Matthew 12:36 – But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Romans 2:5 – But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed

2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Hebrews 4:13 – Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Revelation 22:12 – “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

The reference to “living and dead” in 4:5 refers to those alive and dead when final judgement day dawns.

8. For what reason was the gospel preached? (4:6) What ultimately happens to people who have not heard the gospel or anything about Jesus?

The NIV study Bible, Oxford Bible Commentary, and others have long discussions of this single verse with several different meanings. To me, what it seems to boil down to is a reassurance to Peter's readers that those who have heard the gospel message but have died will be judged (and saved) along with those still living.

But the issue always arises of what happens to people who have not heard of Jesus or babies that die very young or in childbirth. (There is an excellent discussion of these issues at www.godandscience.org/apologetics/neverheard.htm) There are three key verses by Paul that help us understand these issues:

Romans 4:15 – for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

Romans 5:13 –for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Romans 2:14-16 – For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Rich Deem on the web page above concludes, I think scripture suggests that we are judged on the basis of what we know and how we act upon it. This is not any sort of ecumenical theology or “all ways lead to God.” Those who have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and have refused to believe have rejected Him, and, as such, will fall under the condemnation of God, because they have rejected His provision for our disobedience. Therefore, atheists are still without excuse in rejecting God. Those who perpetrate evil, even without the knowledge of the gospel, will likewise be condemned, since they have violated their God-given conscience. In the same way, those who play the “religion game” of going to church on Sunday, but living apart from a relationship with God, will be condemned.

Deem also says, babies and young children who die go the heaven through the grace and righteous judgment of God. The Bible is clear that those who are not fully capable of making moral choices are declared to be innocent, and, therefore, worthy of heaven.

Deuteronomy 1:39 – Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it.

9. In Verse 4:7, can “the end...is near” have both a positive and negative meaning?

Yes. This background of urgency *reassures* readers that they do not have long to wait for relief and vindication. On the other hand it *warns* them that they will not have much time left if they fall away now.

The New Testament insistence on imminence (Romans 13:13, Hebrews 10:25, Revelation 22:20) arises from the teaching that the “last days” began with the incarnation (the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ). We have been living in the “last days” ever since. The next great event in redemptive history is Christ’s second coming and judgement. The Bible does not say when it will take place, but its certainty is never questioned and believers are consistently admonished to watch for it (e.g., James 5:9).

Peter also urges his readers to be clear minded (serious) and self-controlled (sober), in contrast to the drunken debauchery of their pagan peers. Why? So they can pray. The NLT says, “be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.” In other words Christians are to be 1) characterized by reason, 2) are to make wise, mature decisions, 3) are to have a clearly-defined, decisive purpose in life, and 4) pray.

10. What did Peter encourage his readers to do above all? What was one way of doing this? (4:8-9, James 5:20, 1 Corinthians 13:5, Titus 1:8, Hebrews 13:2) To whom do you find it difficult to offer hospitality? Why? How can you offer hospitality if you don’t have a home, car, or money?

Peter encouraged his readers to love one another. There are literally hundreds of passages on love in the Bible. Two samples:

James 5:20 – remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

1 Corinthians 13:5 – It [love] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Peter suggested that one way of showing love was to offer hospitality without grumbling.

Titus 1:8 – Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

Hebrews 13:2 – Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

To whom is it difficult to offer hospitality? Why? In my case, my own daughter is what my wife calls “a high overhead” person. I have to meet her at the train station; she has weird eating preferences; she doesn’t know when to leave, etc. Showing Christian love to her is not easy. Other people are difficult for other reasons.

How can you offer hospitality if you don’t have a home, car, or money? Sure, you can help someone by carrying packages, raking a lawn, or using your gifts as Peter suggests in 4:10, but what about hospitality? Think about it.

11. How were believers to speak and serve? What goal did Peter want his readers to reach with all they did? (4:11, Romans 1:16, Jude 1:24-25)

First, Peter says when you speak you should speak the “very words” of God [NIV] or “speak as though God himself were speaking through you” [NLT]. The Greek for the phrase “very words” is used to refer to the Scriptures or to words God has spoken. In Romans 3:2, Paul notes, “First of all, they (the Jews) have been entrusted with the very words of God.” When Peter wrote this, the NT did not yet exist, so he was speaking of the OT. Today the “very words” would refer to the entire Bible.

A quote, sometimes incorrectly attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is, “Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” Like some other quotes (“Don’t get mad, get even” or “No good deed goes unpunished”), this is just plain wrong, and suggests it is more virtuous to proclaim the Gospel by example than by voice. But it is simply impossible to preach the gospel without words. The gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching the gospel is inherently verbal behavior. As Paul wrote,

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

So let us say it again: The belief that we can “preach the gospel” with our actions alone represents muddled thinking. However important our actions may be (and they are very important indeed), and whatever else they may be doing (they serve a range of crucial functions), they are not “preaching the gospel.” The gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching it is inherently verbal behavior. If the gospel is to be communicated at all, it must be put into words. This quote is by Duane Litfin from his excellent article, “Works and Words: Why You Can’t Preach the Gospel with Deeds” in *Christianity Today*, May 2012; also on line at: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/may/litfin-gospel-deeds.html

The goal that Peter set forth for all his readers was that they would speak the words of God and serve others with the strength of God so that in all things God would be praised and glorified through Jesus Christ. The end of Verse 11 is often called a doxology or prayer of praise. Here’s another one:

Jude 1:24-25 – Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. ²⁵ All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.