

"...above all things"

-Part 1-

1 Peter 3:18 – 4:11

Pastor Tim Dodson

at Jesus Fellowship of Believers

Menomonie, WI October 26,

2025



1 Peter 3:18 - 4:11 ¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to

death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. ²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

³ For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. ⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. ⁷ But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. ⁸ And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

“And above all things have fervent love for one another...”

Fervent love. It means to love without ceasing. It means love that is stretched out and earnest. This is a love that is exercised not just on a peaceful sunny day, but in battle. In times of trial and testing. Peter here lays some preliminary ground before he gets to that directive. Precursor parameters for exercising that kind of love.

As we begin this section of 1 Peter, we are given a very important idea from the use of a very little word: **also**. We spoke previously concerning the believers to whom Peter wrote...as well as even the believers today, concerning the persecution and testing's a faithful individual was going to have to tolerate in order walk with Christ. Peter was reminding us that whatever we endure because we are people of faith...however we might be dis'ed because we are children of the light, Jesus endured it first. If they attempted to smear the reputation of the perfect Son of God....to the point of murder, and He still loved them enough to die for them, we can...*filled with the very same Spirit of God*, give love in return to whatever they say or do to us. We are to love...*fervent love*, like He loves...because Jesus loves mankind.

“We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man, or sink the man, in the plan or organization. God’s plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God’s method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”
(E.M. Bounds)

In this letter, Pastor Peter was doing what few ministers and few churches are willing to do today. He was delivering a difficult and “less-than-rosy” message to living breathing human beings...to believers and seekers alike. And we all know that such recipients do not like that kind of news and in fact go way out of their way to avoid it. We even go find another church to avoid it!

True believers today are indeed legitimately under pressure. Any cultural and societal advantages that used to come from involving ourselves in faith and church are long since gone. It used to be that at least you garnered some street cred and respect for being a "church going man!" But that’s gone now too. No one cares, and often it’s worse than that, because now they may just go out of their way to come out for you for *being* a believer!

So the game is on. Or at least it is if you are fully in! But few, if any of us, have ever yet “resisted unto blood.” (Heb 12:4) However, these believers there in Asia were not quite so lucky, because many of them had lost everything in this pursuit of God and kingdom, some of them even their very lives! Peter could have soft-peddled it. He could have taken the broad and easy road that is so popular today and gave them a big spiritual hug, patted them on the head, and told them that every thing would be OK. But things *wouldn’t* necessarily be OK, and in fact they probably *wouldn’t*, and history tells us factually that it wasn’t for a long period of time.

Yet despite the stark reality of the truly difficult situation, Peter still called upon them to stand strong. Furthermore, he was gutsy enough to go so far as to even call them to an even ***closer*** and ***more committed and disciplined*** walk with Christ even while under fire! He encouraged them to close the ranks, hold each other up...protect one another, and serve God and Kingdom to an even greater degree. He called upon them to love. You see, the last thing Satan expects when the going gets tough for us, is for us to up our game! He doesn’t expect us to give more, serve more, love more, communicate more, pray more, etc when we are under fire!

Peter *did* however encourage them! He reminded them that God was indeed with them. He had not *abandoned* them. And He reminded them that this world was merely a brief stop on a sojourner’s life. The real one was yet coming...just as it is for us today. But Peter also *did* not and *would* not flinch from the message he had been given to deliver. That is the mark of a true man of God! He was not a man pleaser nor was he a wimp. He played his hand, and he did so with boldness, because God was and is on the throne and he knew it and that was all that mattered.

Now it was their turn in all of this. Which way would they go? Would they fold, or push on?

Peter lays it all on the line now. He reminds them here of the suffering that Christ endured on their behalf. He reminds them that whatever they are going through, Jesus went there first, and endured far worse than they. All of this was, no doubt, a hard message to deliver, and an even harder message to receive! It was not one for the weak or immature. It was the call to the sold-out “all-in” committed disciple. It was only for the truly faithful. And for sure it was the litmus test for those who *believed* themselves to be so!

Peter calls these suffering saints in chapter 4, verse 1, to “arm up.” Not with the weapons of this world, (we would like that!) but rather the weapon of Christ Himself, as well as that other-centered, sacrificial, agape love

that road with him everywhere he went! For all us, such a day as this **will** come! Each of us will most assuredly and individually be called...*in the midst of some of our worst personal storms*...to take that next step of a faithful disciple. Many will bow out here...and we know many who have. But some will lean in and continue in their calling.

And by doing so, we will surely have to take on some level of discomfort, self-sacrifice, and even pain...*all for the furthering of the kingdom of God*. It will be a memorable 'cross-road' in your life! For it will be at that moment that you will declare to yourself... as well as all of the world... just how much you love Jesus. Whether you are truly "in" or not. Because anyone can sail when the sky is clear, when the water is calm and the wind is at our backs. But *can* we...*will* we, do so in the midst of the storm...when all hell is breaking loose?

Peter does not use the Greek word for light armor here but the word for heavy armor. We need all of the protection we can get to prepare ourselves for the battles ahead. God does not promise to carry us to the skies on flowery beds of ease. God does not hand out colorful brochures offering good health, prosperity, wide popularity, and a long life to those who accept Christ. Those who array themselves in such flimsy robes are in for a shock.

Peter had long since learned to arm himself for battle. When he had been arrested years before in Jerusalem and sentenced to death, he simply went to sleep in his prison! He was not only a conqueror but also "more than conqueror," as Paul would have put it (Ro 8:37). He had learned how to arm his mind. ([Phillips, John: Exploring Ephesians: An Expository Commentary](#))

And know this also: until a believer makes that firm commitment to live a life of holiness and sanctification, he or she will forever remain susceptible to the strong pull of sin. Until such a radical devotion is given, we are effectively choosing to live lives in the chaos between two worlds where falling spiritually is not only still a very real possibility, but in fact a sure **instability**.

So therein lies our choice. To whom and to what shall we be bound? Because there is no man or woman that is "free" in the worldly sense! We have a generation that believes that they are, but they are blind to the addictions they live under. They are subject to the dictates of culture and society. The ever-changing moralities, fluid word meanings, and the desires of the flesh.

The word "lusts" here is plural, for the things which the world lays before us are many and forever changing. Capricious fads, cultural addendums, and the perceived mandatory luxuries tend to push us into daze of confusion and overwhelmed with insecurities. The fact is, we can only choose either a life of bondage to the "lusts of men" or one of "bond-servant" to the will of God. This is the whole of man's free-will, as well as the confines of such. It is not exhaustive and limitless, but it **is** crucial to our eternity.

Now we who are reborn look back at our lives prior to Christ. How we tried to fill the vast chasm of emptiness we felt with as much as the world had to offer...with as much as we could lay our hands upon. And yet every day we woke up, still empty, and still searching. Sadly, for every suicide or overdose of the rich and famous today, there are thousands waiting in line to take their place, believing they can make a successful go at it.

Recent statistics released say that for every homicide in Minnesota, there are roughly 6 suicides. In Wisconsin, it is 1 to 3 suicides. This rate was slightly higher than the national average in recent years and has increased by nearly 40% since 2000. The official 'powers-that-be' over there were quoted at one point as saying "...and the troubling thing is that we just don't know **why**." Well, I will tell you why: *because they are sad and empty and*

without real purpose in living. Jesus has already offered the only solution there can ever be for the human condition. But “free gift” and repentance just don’t compute on our end. We have to choose. Everyone of us. Only then can actually approach the true and living God.

To quote John Phillips again: *we might have gotten away with things when we were pagans, but that will not do for the new life we have in Christ. Peter reminds us that the past is the past. It is over and done with. There must be no going back to it. There must be a break with all that now. As Paul puts it, "our old man [the man of old, the man I used to be] is crucified with [Christ]" (Ro 6:6).* ([Phillips, John: Exploring 1Peter: An Expository Commentary](#))

(Guzik comments that...) *Sadly, many Christians (in their heart of hearts) think that they have not spent enough time doing the will of the ungodly. They want to experience more of the world before they make a full commitment to godliness. This is a tragic mistake. Because so very many never make it through and will be ironically lost for eternity even with a full knowledge of Christ's salvation and the path out.*

And now as a child of God, those we used to run with think we are crazy. Despite the factual failure to find real joy and purpose and wholeness in such worldly activities, they still think you are nuts to get into this Jesus thing! All the toys are broken but they won't set them down and they wonder why you have moved on. They don't understand your new life and decisions and have resorted to talking smack about you behind your back. And now they have social media to bring on the pressure. But having had the lights turned on for the first time in our lives, it's unthinkable to many of us to go back into the darkness again!

Isaiah 44:14 clarifies much of this for us, saying "*They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.*" (NIV) The New Living renders that passage as "*Such stupidity and ignorance! Their eyes are closed, and they cannot see. Their minds are shut, and they cannot think.*"

Yet despite this truth, some "taste" the things of God and *still* return to the darkness! Hebrews 6:4-6 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

This occurs not because they don't 'get it.' Those that return to the darkness do so not because they *don't* see or because they *can't* see, but so *you* can't see *them*! That's the handy thing about darkness! I may not be able to see where I am going, but you can't see me going there either! [John 3:19-21](#) ESV says "*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*"

One of the stark and truthfully somewhat disturbing aspects of being a pastor and preacher...and doing what we do here in church each week, is the realization that the dispensing of the gospel is as much to establish *guilt* as redemptive innocence! For some, what has been heard here in this church will echo through history as their personal saving grace, and for others, those same words will be their condemnation because they were not truly received. They were *heard* but never *accepted*. 2Timothy 3:7 " *...always learning and never able to come to the*

knowledge of the truth." And many will return again to the darkness because they loved the darkness and did not love Christ. Or never loved Him *enough*....

A lot of people get angry at the idea of judgment and hell, because they want to hold to a false premise that if God was really a loving Creator, He would never condemn lives to such an eternal punishment. But that is a misunderstanding of what is occurring herein! God doesn't condemn anyone to hell...He merely confirms your choice of seating! When we choose to live this life in the dark, then He will validate that choice and let you live in darkness for eternity. Jude 1:13 tells us that hell is a place of eternal darkness. But Jesus is light, and if we do not want the light, we receive darkness instead!

Thus we here in this fellowship continue to share the gospel at every opportunity. To vindicate... or to condemn, either way, it is the work of God. In [John 8:12](#) Jesus says "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" Jesus has gone to incredible lengths to shine that light on you and me. The question is, do you truly **want** to live in that light? In the light where you can see the road up ahead and the road behind you so clearly? In the light where everyone else can see you also? The choice is yours. It is the greatest decision you and I will ever make on this earth...