

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

A peril is the exposure to the risk of being injured, destroyed or lost. Maybe a visual way to demonstrate spiritual peril is to see our Christian lives as though they were a riverboat and our inner self as the captain. We need to know where the rocks and the sandbars are in the river channel to avoid cracking up—perils. Peter puts three of them before us today. We do well to give heed to them that our lives might be spiritually secure as Christians.

#### **I. Avoid the peril of carnality.**

This first peril that Peter addresses is the peril of carnality, 1 Peter 4:1–6: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit” (NIV), The peril of carnality.

“Carnality,” of course, means “the flesh.” In Scripture, “the flesh” is never just “meat.” It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of thinking that is separate and distinct from God’s way. We therefore have a war between the flesh and the spirit. Most of us in this room know what the term “rebound” means. A person bounced in a courtship or marriage has a tendency to rebound into

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

the arms of another. When we are rejected we become especially vulnerable to anyone who shows an interest in us. We would like to escape the deep inward pain we feel and restore our sense of worth. Our sense of esteem. Our sense that we are lovable and a loving person. Peter is aware of the principle of the rebound. That's why he gives the teaching on carnality. He is speaking to Christians who have been hurt. How have they been hurt? They have been hurt by the government because they have been persecuted by it. They have been hurt by non-Christian owners—Christian slaves hurt by non-Christian owners—who have psychologically and physically mistreated them. He is writing to Christians and wives of Christians and husbands of Christians who have been caught in hellish marriages.

Peter knows the human temptation that we may think that we can only take so much in a difficult moment. We become tired of being good and tired of doing the right thing and we say, "I need a fling; I need to drown myself in some sensuality. I need an affair. I need a good drunk. I need an X-rated movie. I need a spending spree. I need to gorge myself senseless with food. I need to do all these things to drown out the hurt I feel within to rebound."

So Peter comes to this word "therefore" in verse 1. "Therefore" is a logical bridge word. Based upon what has been said about the example of Christ and about prevailing over pressure, Peter calls us not to flip out under pressure but, since Christ had the same pressures, we are called upon to take His stance. We do this by arming ourselves with the same attitude as Christ.

The word "to arm" or "to arm oneself" is drawn from the picture of a Greek soldier putting on his armor and taking his weapons. There were two words used for putting on armor. One describes the soldier who puts on lightweight armor. The other describes the soldier who puts on heavyweight armor. The word Peter chooses here is the word that describes putting on heavy

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

armor. Being fully and completely prepared to have the attitude of Christ. He says when you put on Christ's attitude you have done away with sin when you've suffered in the body.

You might say, "I'd sure like to know how to be done with sin." How does one get done with sin by arming themselves with Christ's attitude? We know from the Scripture there are two ways we become done with sin. One way is what theologians would call the positional way. That is, we have a position of standing because of Christ. In Romans 6 Paul teaches us that because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we who believe in Him have been placed into His death. And because we've been placed into His death, sin no longer has jurisdiction over us. We've been delivered from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of our God. God no longer reckons our sins against us. We are, in Christ, positionally done with sin. There is no more charge over us.

Even when we have fallen and failed as believers, Christ has picked us up and in Him we are righteous because we are the righteousness of Christ. So positionally we are done with sin.

There is also another element to being done with sin. That is the practical matter of being done with sin. In experience we also gain victory over sin. When we stand the test, we know that sin cannot touch us anymore.

What does Peter mean by this kind of language? He's saying that when we are serious about our Christian lifestyle and struggle so as not to sin and find ourselves gaining victory over temptation, that particular temptation begins to lose its power over us and we become done with it.

Peter is saying the spiritual life is a lot like that. We struggle and struggle in an area, but as we work by Christ to a position of victory we become done with it. Done with sin. Peter is saying this, in respect to a carnal Christian lifestyle, that we're not called to live after our human desires but we're called rather to live the will of God. To leave off the sensual non-Christian lifestyle of

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

debauchery and lust—and, as you know, in the Scripture where the word lust is used it can refer to sexual lust but it also has reference to things we lust for that have nothing to do with sexuality. Leave off drunkenness and orgies and carousing and detestable idolatries. Peter says when you refuse to join in these kinds of activities, people are going to think it's strange and they will heap abuse on you. They will call you puritan. They will call you self-righteous. They will call you uptight and strung out. But, Peter says, they will have to account to God who judges the living and the dead.

Peter says don't go on the defensive. Don't try to talk them out of it. Don't heap abuse on them. Just simply leave it to the Lord who will judge the righteous and the dead. And he says they will give an account of this to God. Verse 6 is an amplification of this statement "they will give an account" that's found in verse 5. It's a strange statement, verse 6: "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead." What is Peter referring to here? That the gospel is now being preached to people who are dead? Now what he's saying in this passage is there are Christians who believe the gospel and who, while they were alive, were counted as puritans by the world. They knew the judgment of the world. The world did not approve this absence from sensuality. But now those Christians once living are dead. The gospel had been preached to them. They are therefore now over their period of having been judged by men. Instead they are alive in the Spirit.

The principle that he is driving at is that it is better to face the judgment of men than to face the judgment of God. Because the judgment of men lasts only for a time. Then we cease to be under their judgment. We are dead. But the judgment of God lasts forever. Better to live in His presence.

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

Peter is saying there will come a time when God will turn the world right side up. So live right side up now even if everybody else thinks down is up and up is down. The Christian knows that God one day is going to turn the world right side up. Flee from carnality.

#### **II. Avoid the peril of complacency.**

The second peril that Peter tells us about and warns us about is the peril of complacency, verses 7–11: “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (NIV).

In verse 3 of chapter 4 we’ve been told what to leave off. But now we are told what to put on. The Christian life is more than a negative. It’s a positive. It’s like electricity. It takes both the negative and the positive. Peter is telling us in verses 7–11 that we must move away from the passive life of complacency to the active life of prayer and hospitality and love and service. He says, “The end of all things is near.” You look at this and say, “He sure was wrong, wasn’t he?” Two thousand years have come and gone, but the end isn’t yet. But everybody he wrote to thought the end was near.

I think the best way to take a text like that is to take it in the biblical setting that the Bible teaches that the end time for every human being is always in his or her generation. This is the end of time for me. Christ may not come in my generation, but I’m going to go see Him in my generation. So the end of all things is upon me and could happen today. The end of all things is near.

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

How do we live knowing that we live at the end of time? By prophecy books? I wish people would quit buying prophecy books. Starve some of the prophets out of the market. Instead of the real prophets. Real prophets are never interested in speculation. Real prophets are interested in the moral and spiritual implication of the Word of God. I wish Christians would quit reading junk. I wish instead they would concentrate on the scriptural example that Peter says here in his word of how we are to live at the end of time. It's down-to-earth living for a people who are going to be up in the air.

There are four kinds of things he tells us in respect to end-time living.

**A.** The first thing he tells us to do, to engage in, is panic-free praying. "Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (1 Peter 4:7). How is crisis to be met? It's to be met with calmness. The Christian is like the astronaut that gets in the space shuttle, the rocket boosters are there and it's a minute to countdown. It's the big moment and the astronaut is saying, "I'm panicking. Let's pull all the switches!" But he is in control as that countdown approaches. He's got to be in control because he's in a crisis cockpit. So the Scripture calls us, when everything else is falling apart around us in society, that when the end is near for us to be panic free, but to pray with a sober mind and a self-controlled heart.

The word "clear minded" is a word in the Greek which means sane. It's in contrast to insane. As the Gadarene demoniac, he was sitting there clothed and in his right mind. The word "self control" is the word "sober," in contrast with being "drunk." It suggests that the mind is in control rather than the emotions. Panic-free praying.

**B.** Fervent love—another characteristic of end-time believers. Peter says, "Love one another deeply" (verse 8). The word "deeply" is really the word "fervent." In the Greek it's used to describe the muscle of an athlete that's employed in strenuous and sustained effort. He is

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

bending towards some purpose. So the Christian love is to be a love that enjoys sustained effort and activity. And even puts up with failure from others because love covers a multitude of sins.

**C.** Believers are to have uncomplaining hospitality. A third mark of living at the end. In Peter's day hospitality was so critical because there were no Howard Johnsons or Holiday Inns to stay in. Christian homes were necessary. Hospitality is important in our day because, as a Christian, we ought to do more than simply sit together in church services. We need to fellowship together in our homes. Don't wait for the garage to be all clean before you have someone over. Don't wait until the kitchen is perfect. Don't wait until you've got the china set bought. Don't wait until you've moved out of this apartment into a bigger apartment or another house or whatever. Don't wait until you've got a new rug or painted the ceiling or whatever you're going to do. True hospitality is not so much concerned with everything looking nice. It's more concerned with the person being entertained than the appearance of things that are in the house. Uncomplaining hospitality. Do it without grumbling.

**D.** And faithful gift service. If you have a gift, exercise it. Peter takes all of the gifts—the charismatic gifts of 1 Corinthians 12, the motivational gifts of Romans 12, the ministry gifts of Ephesians 4—and says they all fall into two categories. One kind of gifts involves speaking. Those who have the gift of teaching or the gift of prophecy. He says if you're going to be a person who has a speaking gift, then speak as though you were an oracle of God. Don't get up there and simply give what you think. Give what you know is in the heart and the mind of God. I pray that when I preach I'll give you not what George Wood thinks about life, but I'll be able to deliver to you the counsel of God. I can somehow be true enough to the line God draws that I can declare His counsel. Realizing that the words I speak are simply more than my words than I reflect and are the words of God to us.

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

Speak as though you were an oracle of God. And, he says, serve with the strength of God. All kinds of serving gifts abound in the list of Romans 12. But the importance of all service is that it be done in God's strength. Because the characteristic of anyone who serves is they get tired out. And especially when you've gone through a period of time serving people and no one said thanks. Serve with the strength of God.

As believers we continue to exercise our gifts even if we're the world's best because there's always room for improvement. Stay away from complacency, the peril of complacency.

### **III. Avoid the peril of consternation.**

The third peril that Peter addresses is the peril of consternation, 1 Peter 4:12–19: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (NIV).

We'd like to think that out there in the world somewhere there is a Shangri-La. A place of uninterrupted peace and prosperity. What's this then about the fiery trials? That's the literal. These believers Peter is writing to didn't have the experience of having a condo at Tahoe or having a Shangri-La.

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

Peter is saying there is a time of consternation. Why isn't God acting in our defense? Why is He letting us go to martyrdom? Peter had to write and give them some counsel in respect to this.

Before we look at the counsel he gives we might bring this home to our own day to see some areas that we have consternation over.

Somehow the idea has gone abroad, and it needs to be smashed, that if we serve Christ then God by some assured intervention will protect us from adversity, misfortune, persecution, and pain.

When trouble comes to people obsessed with this unbiblical notion they tend to feel that God has let them down, or maybe they've let God down. That somehow God has contracted out of His bargain with them. The peril of consternation.

But Peter tells us that the glory of Christ is yet to be revealed. The word "revealed" is also the word "unveiled." We're to think of an artist or a sculptor at work on a masterpiece. He's alone in his study doing it. Finally it's brought out in the public, but it has a veil over it. There comes an appointed moment when a crowd has been gathered that the veil is pulled and everyone sees the beautiful work of art. Peter takes this as a reference to what the Lord is doing in us now. His glory is not yet revealed. He is at work behind the veil. He is at work, working on us. The time is going to come when He is going to pull the veil and reveal His glory in us to the whole world.

Peter's counsel is to the believers who are in consternation: "This is not yet. But know that He is working on you. If you're going to be suffering, don't suffer because you deserve it as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal." Christians aren't generally murderers, thieves, criminals. But do you know any Christian meddler? Funny that meddler is also with murderer, thief and any other kind of criminal. Doesn't that strike you as odd? Write it down. Home in on that word—meddler. C. S. Lewis has written an epitaph of the meddler. "Dear meddler Christian

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

who died. Erected by her sorrowing brothers in memory of Martha Clay, here lies one who lived for others. Now she has peace and so have they.”

Peter says the sign that Christians are suffering is an indication that the judgment of God has already begun: the strange phrase “It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17). We often take that to mean that God needs to clean out the evil in the Christian house. Then He can go to work cleaning out the evil in the world. That’s certainly a legitimate principle. But that’s not what this particular verse means. This particular verse means that there is going to be visited upon the world a time of judgment and suffering at the hand of God. But right now the hands of evil men have been laid upon the church of Jesus Christ. The fact that they can do that means that behind their hands are the unseen hands of God allowing it. God is, through the judgment of the world, refining the church and purifying the church, and if God’s choicest people are being allowed to be treated in such a manner and they are being saved through such adversity, where in the world will the ungodly and the unrighteous appear when God judges them firsthand and directly. That’s Peter’s thought. That’s the word of counsel to those who are under judgment—that we are not, in the final analysis, answerable to the judgment of people, or other human beings. In the final analysis, we’re answerable only to God. If we spurn God’s grace and His pardon, we enter into His judgment.

God has offered a pardon to the whole world. But a pardon, unless it is accepted, is only a paper. It must be received in order for it to be effective. If it is refused, it is no pardon. That’s what Peter is saying in verses 17 and 18. To refuse God’s pardon is to stand under His judgment. To those in consternation Peter is simply saying, “Wait, God has not written the final chapter yet.” So he closes that chapter with these words: “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator” (verse 19). The word “commit” is a word

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

that literally means deposit. Or entrust. It is a term drawn from banking language in the first-century world when you made a deposit with the banker. A trust was a very serious thing. What Peter is saying here is that you as a Christian have deposited your life to Jesus Christ. When you're in the middle of trouble and adversity and consternation, He hasn't defaulted on that deposit. He hasn't forgotten where the deposit is. But you are Christ's. In the midst of your consternation reckon that God has laid you up as a deposit guaranteed for the day of His visitation.

In our consternation we are to trust our faithful Creator.

Three perils to the Christian life—carnality, complacency, consternation. We take the Word of God on these matters that we might avoid the shipwrecks of life.

### **Closing Prayer**

You alone, our Lord, read the human heart. I cannot possibly know who might be here today who is in a rebound situation in pain and feels like just going out and drowning themselves in a sea of sensuality. Maybe they already have, and they wonder if there's any forgiveness. Lord, at Your right hand there is grace and mercy to be found in time of trouble. There also, Lord, is Your teaching that we do not cope with adversity by fleeing from it by indulging in sensuality or self-pity, recrimination or bitterness. But that we come free from it as we walk in Your steps and follow Your example of prayer and love and hospitality and service and gifts. Lord, we ask a special strength and Your grace in this matter. Stir us up, Lord. If there is complacency in our life today toward You, toward Your cause and Your work, revive us again to remember our first love and to repeat our first deeds of love. For those here, Lord, who are suffering enormous matters of chaos in their own life and they wonder where Your hand is in the events that happened recently in their lives: Where were You when the financial reverse occurred? Where

## **THREE PERILS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **1 Peter 4**

were You when the illness happened? Where were You when the job was lost? Where were You when the dream was dashed? Lord, cause us to come to You today as the strong Refuge, as One in whom we can put our trust, who keeps us often in suspense in the journey of life because You're working out some purpose that we can't see. It's underneath the covering of the veil that You're not ready yet to reveal the glory that You're perfecting. So, Lord, while we wait, cause us to wait with patience and to recognize that our life has been placed as a deposit with You. And You will guard it and keep it until that day. Bring us continually into a position of growing in You, learning from You and of not letting perils get in our way to divert us from serving You. But let us take these perils as a challenge to grow up in You, to mature and to be complete, lacking no good thing. We ask this, Lord Jesus, in Your name. Amen.