

BY HIS WOUNDS YOU HAVE BEEN HEALED

1 Peter 2:11-25

Key Verse: 2:24

“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.”

In the last passage we learned about our identity in God through his words, **“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession....”** God has given us this wonderful identity purely by his grace and out of his love for us. God wants us to have this clear identity while we live in this world. When we have this identity we can have a sense of dignity as God’s children. However, this does not make our practical lives easy. Having an identity is one thing, and living as God’s chosen people in daily life is another matter. The world we live in is full of injustice, violence and immorality. When we live godly lives, naturally we become the targets of accusation and insult, and will be persecuted in both word and deed. What is worse, we have our own sinful desires that tempt us to live like people in the world. Nevertheless, Peter urges us to live good lives, to submit to authority, to show proper respect, to love the family of believers, and even to submit to harsh masters. How can we do these things? Though we want to, we have no strength. We know that we should love others, but we naturally criticize and blame them instead. We know that we should be thankful, but naturally we complain. We know we should be submissive and respectful, but naturally we become rebellious. It is because our souls are wounded in many ways. Everyone has wounds that foster resentment, bitterness or a spirit of vengeance. These wounds torment our souls and infect what we say and do. They not only destroy our own character, but also harm others whom we associate with. When wounded people live together, they easily wound each other and become worse. In order to live good lives, we need to be healed. Let’s come to Jesus who understands and heals us.

In verses 11-12, Peter gives general directives about how to live good lives in regards to inner struggles and outward manifestation. Verses 13-17 contain specific instructions to all believers. Verses 18-25 are given to slaves, but can be applied to all believers. Especially in verses 21-25 we find the source of strength and motivation which enables us to live good lives.

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First, how to live good lives (11-12). In verse 11, Peter called the believers, “**dear friends.**” Even though he was a great apostle, he called them his friends. He learned from Jesus who called him, “friend” (Jn 15:15). Friendship should characterize the Christian fellowship. He also called them “**foreigners and exiles,**” which would better be translated “**strangers and pilgrims**” (KJV). Though we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession, we live in this world as strangers and pilgrims. We are strangers to the people in this world because our language and lifestyle is different. Especially our hope and desires are different (4:4). We are pilgrims because we don’t think of this world as our permanent home; we are on the way to the kingdom of God. Traveling through this world is like crossing a bridge; no one tries to build a permanent house on a bridge—only a fool would do such a thing. As strangers and pilgrims, how should we live? Peter says in verse 11: “**abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.**” Why did he mention this first? It is because sinful desires have power to draw us into the world and entangle us. Here, “**sinful desires**” refer to more than sexual immorality and debauchery. They also include self-seeking, selfish ambition, self-glorification, and all manner of ego indulgence. These sinful desires wage war against our soul, weaken our spirituality, and hinder our pilgrimage to the kingdom of God. Sinful desires do offer a kind of fleeting pleasure (Heb 11:25); so it may be painful to abstain from them. But this is an absolutely necessary step to living a good life.

In verse 12 Peter exhorts us to live good lives among the pagans. Jesus said, “**Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven**” (Mt 5:16). When the light of God shines through us, it exposes the darkness in unbelievers, and provokes their reaction. So they accuse us of doing wrong and then try to dig out some basis for their accusations by finding a little selfish behavior or some bit of unkindness in us. When we hear their accusations, it is easy to be upset and defensive and begin fighting with them. If we fight with them, we give them even more reasons to accuse us. Instead of doing this, we should focus on living a good life with a genuine motive of love, serving them sacrificially. Then, when they see our good deeds, they realize that their accusations are groundless and God is the source of our goodness. This may influence them to believe in God. Then they glorify God, not grudgingly, but willingly as recipients of his grace who can also live a good life. In this respect, we Christians are ambassadors of Christ. That is why we live a good life; it is part of our Christian witness.

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Second, live as God's servants (13-20). In these verses Peter gives practical instructions about how we should live, and explains why they are important. Verses 13-15 urge submission to human authorities, especially the emperor and governors. Peter upholds the legitimacy of these authorities to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right (14; Ro 13:1-3). In Peter's time, people misunderstood Christians as a subversive element whose goal was to overturn the Roman Empire, for they worshiped only King Jesus, refusing to recognize Caesar as divine. Some immature believers, in showing a resistant and belligerent attitude toward authority, might have escalated conflict. Peter reminds them that it was God's will to do good. Here **“doing good”** is expressed by submission to authority. This would silence those who were making foolish accusations against them (15). Verses 16-17 are about how to use freedom as God's servants. The version of the Bible called The Message says, **“Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules.”** We should show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, and honor leaders.

In verses 18-20 Peter gives instructions to slaves. When we hear the word “slave,” we naturally think on the basis of our own historical context. However, slavery in the Greco-Roman world was different. Some slaves lived miserably, especially those who served in mines. Yet other slaves served as doctors, teachers, managers, musicians, and artisans, and could even own slaves themselves. It would not be unusual for a slave to be better educated than the master. But still, they were under the control of their masters. They had no legal rights. Their masters could beat them, brand them, and abuse them in many ways. It was not easy to submit to one's master, especially to those who were harsh. In America today, from a legal standpoint, there are no slaves. However, there are many people whose practical situation is comparable, such as illegal immigrants, or the socially and economically underprivileged. Sometimes we feel like slaves, such as mothers who are bound to care for their children, or employees who must work overtime and on holidays without any vacation. When we feel constricted like a slave, we naturally feel rebellious and resentful and can fall into self-pity and play the victim. This mentality fosters laziness and dishonesty when the employer or master is not watching. Peter exhorted them, **“Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh”** (18). He also said, **“For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God”** (19). When they recognized God, who was there, and was watching over them, taking care of them, they were able to endure. So Peter

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encouraged them to suffer for doing good instead of suffering for doing wrong. This is commendable before God (20).

As we hear the words, “**submit...respect...fear...honor,**” a rebellious spirit may arise within us. It is because spiritually speaking, we sinners are descendants of Cain who rebelled against God, became a restless wanderer, and went to live in his own way. We naturally tend toward rebellion rather than obedience. In our nation, particularly, rebellion is often justified in the guise of human freedom. Recently, the results of international tests of high school students were announced. America, even though we spend more money, have great technology, and students who work very hard, could do no better than 21st place in the major categories, while many Asian nations were at the top. There may be many reasons, but failure to respect teachers may be the most significant. This reflects not only on students, but on their parents as well as our society. We need to learn submission to the authorities, respect for everyone, and fear of God, and to honor our leaders.

How can we do that? In verses 13-20 Peter used the words, “**...for the Lord’s sake...it is God’s will...live as God’s servants (slaves)...in reverent fear of God...conscious of God...this is commendable before God.**” These words teach us that God is present wherever we are, whatever our situation is. Sometimes, when we are in a hostile environment, we ask ourselves, “Where is God? Is God among us or not?” Then we doubt God’s love and power and fall into fatalism and confusion. But when we are aware that God is with us we can overcome all kinds of hardships. God is watching over us. Psalm 121:7-8 say, “**The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.**” God cares for those who seek him and rewards them. God also punishes those who do evil. When we are aware of God, we can endure suffering, even unjust suffering. We can be good stewards and even become shepherds for our employers, like Old Testament Joseph and Daniel. We can be a good influence, and glorify God, regardless of our situation.

Third, follow in Jesus’ steps (21-25). Though we know how to live a good life and are aware of God, still, it is not easy to do. We need practical guidance and inner strength. Peter points us to Jesus who is our example and source of strength. In verses 21-23 we find Jesus’ example. In verses 24-25 we see what Jesus has done for us to become our source of life and strength.

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First of all, Jesus is our good example. Verse 21 says, **“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”** In saying, **“To this you were called,”** Peter affirms **that suffering for doing good is part of Christian life.** Philippians 1:29 says, **“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.”** **Jesus set a good example in suffering for doing good when he suffered for us. So when we suffer for doing good we are following in Jesus’ footsteps. It is the way to really learn of Jesus.** That is why Paul said, **“I want to know Christ...participation in his sufferings”** (Php 3:10). Let’s think about Jesus’ example. Peter quoted Isaiah 53:9 to emphasize that Jesus was sinless: **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”** Suffering began at the fall of man and is a result of the sin and brokenness of the world. So, all human beings suffer because of sin. Jesus had no reason to suffer, because he is the only person to live a perfect life without sin. Nevertheless, he suffered for us. When Jesus served his messianic ministry, he was often misunderstood, insulted and rejected. He could have responded with his power, which calmed storms and drove out demons. But he never used his power in retaliation for the wrongs that were done to him. When he was falsely accused, arrested and tried, he could have called on twelve legions of angels to crush his opponents in an instant (Mt 26:53). But he did not. Verse 23 says, **“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”** It is very natural to retaliate against wrongdoing. But Jesus never retaliated; he made no threat, not even a gesture. It was because he fully entrusted himself to God who judges justly. In this way he broke the vicious cycle of retaliation and made peace. To follow Jesus’ example, we must learn to trust God to deal with injustice. Romans 12:19 says, **“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”** In South Sudan, there has been a month of severe fighting between government forces and rebels and many people were killed. Fortunately, all of our brothers and sisters in UBF were unharmed, and a cease-fire was declared last week. But due to tribal loyalty and a retaliation mentality, the region remains unstable. Missionary Andrew Kim said, “Only God can help us! Please pray continually for South Sudan and Africa.” The vicious cycle of retaliation can be broken only by Jesus and those who follow his example.

Jesus is more than just our good example. The suffering of Christ was unique in that it was the substitutionary sacrifice for all people. Let’s read verse 24: **“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.”** When

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Jesus suffered, he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross. He paid the full penalty that our sins deserve to offer forgiveness to us freely. The words, “...so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness,” have deep meaning. The chains of sin are very strong. So no one can break them by their own effort. But when we accept Jesus’ death, we die to sin. The power of sin is broken. We are set free to live for righteousness. Still, however, wounds may remain deep inside of us. These wounds may be from long ago, through a bad experience in childhood. Some were neglected, abused or abandoned by their parents. Some were bullied by their classmates. Some experienced failure or had their dreams broken. Some were subjected to racial discrimination. Some were harmed during war. Some suffered from extreme poverty. A wounded person may be unaware of their own condition. But it is expressed inevitably in what they do and say, and by their responses to certain things. At the root of someone’s cynicism, sorrow, fatalism, or despair, there may be a wound. This causes some people to talk excessively without listening to others at all. Others respond by not saying anything. To try to escape the pain of their wounds, people eat too much, self-medicate, play virtual games, watch television and movies endlessly, indulge in shopping, and so on. These are just symptoms, like the tip of an iceberg; deep inside the person has wounds caused by sin. In order to live a good life as a healthy person emotionally and spiritually, these wounds must be healed. Many think that only a professional counselor can heal them. Such people may be helpful, but they cannot really heal the wounds caused by sin. They have their own wounds that need healing. Only Jesus can heal these wounds. Peter quoted Isaiah 53:5 and said, “...by his wounds you have been healed.” Peter shared this because he himself had been healed by Jesus. He loved Jesus and followed Jesus loyally. He once insisted to Jesus emphatically, “**Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you**” (Mk 14:31). But he disowned Jesus three times the very night Jesus was arrested. Later Peter repented, and his sins were forgiven. But his wounds remained. He could not become a shepherd until his wounds were healed. The Risen Jesus visited him and healed his wounds. Then he became a shepherd like Jesus for the early Christians.

Corrie Ten Boom was deeply wounded by the abuse of Nazi soldiers while in a POW camp during WWII. As a Christian, she tried hard to practice and teach the forgiving love of Jesus. One day, about 8 years after the war ended, while delivering a message on forgiveness, she met a prison guard who had abused her personally. He thanked her for her message and shared how wonderful it is to be forgiven by Jesus. Suddenly she felt she was in prison all over again and the horrors of imprisonment filled her mind. When he extended his hand to shake, hatred filled heart. She could not lift her hand. She was still wounded in her soul.

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She prayed silently, “Oh God, help me to live my message.” Suddenly she felt power surge through her body and she shook his hand warmly. She felt all the hatred melt away, and she knew she had forgiven him. Her wounds were healed by Jesus.¹ Those who are healed by Jesus can live a good life and be a blessing to others. We were like sheep going astray, but now we have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (25). As we follow Jesus, he watches over us and cares for us. Let’s come to Jesus for healing so that we may live a good life.

¹ Bengé, Janet & Geoff, 1999. “Corrie Ten Boom: Keeper of the Angels’ Den,” Seattle, Washington: YWAM, pp. 191-92.