

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.² As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.³ 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.⁴ They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ 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.⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:1-8)

Arm Yourselves with Christ's Attitude

When I was in college, a friend of mine spent a summer helping a mission congregation out west. The pastor there was having trouble communicating with his members and whenever he encountered an unhappy member, he had fallen into the habit of saying, "Attitude is altitude." My friend felt that this was making his members more unhappy. But of course, there is an element of truth in that little saying, right? If our kids come to school with a bad attitude, chances are, they're going to have a bad day. If you go to work obsessing about everything that frustrates you about your job, you're pre-programming yourself to find some reason to be frustrated before the day is over. If you keep rehearsing your conflicts with your spouse in your own mind, the next time you disagree, you're probably going to have a much bigger argument. On the flip side, if you remind yourself of how blessed you are to have a job or a school or a spouse, if you remember why you took that job or married that man or woman in the first place, if you stop and give thanks to God for the blessings you have even when you're frustrated, you're probably going to be more able to deal with the frustrations and the difficulties that you do face. Attitude does affect our emotional altitude. It affects our willingness to try, our dedication and our effort. This morning, the Apostle Peter invokes our attitude when it comes to our Christian life. Now, he does not indulge in some pop-psychology approach to ministry. Rather, he draws a connection between the attitude of our lives and our commitment to living for Christ. He notes that in a sinful world, it's a battle to live for Christ. We need to be armed and ready. So he tells us today, **arm yourselves with Christ's attitude.**

I.

It's better than this world's attitude. Peter tells us, "**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.**" He tells that we're supposed to arm ourselves with Christ's attitude so that we don't spend what's left of our lives pursuing worldly desires, but rather that we live for God. What is all that about? Jesus was the Son of God who was born into this world, as a real human being, to take our place in life and death. His sufferings here really include all the pain of the cross and even his death there. Once Jesus died and rose, he cannot die again. He is through with death. And Peter is making the connection that he didn't do that for himself. He lived and died and rose for us. The Bible teaches that in the mind of God, when Christ died for us, we died. When Jesus paid for our sins, in God's courtroom, we suffered death and hell, the just punishment for our sin. Once a sin is paid for, it's paid for. So we're done with sin.

So Peter tells us to live like we're done with sin. He tells us to arm ourselves with Christ's attitude so that we don't pursue the sinful desires of life here but rather that we live to do the will of God. What was Christ's attitude? He was willing even to lay down his life for God. God the Father asked him to come here and be our sacrifice and Christ trusted his Father perfectly and honored his will. He came down here to be born in a stable and to live a life of poverty and persecution and to die the most painful death the Romans knew how to dish out. Christ let his Father pour hell itself out on him so that we don't have to suffer hell. He did it because he loved us, to be sure. But he also did it because he loves and trusts his Father. What his Father wills, Christ joyfully does.

That's the attitude God calls us to have. It rejects all the sinful desires of our old man, our sinful nature. That might be the hardest thing about living as a Christian in America today because we live in a society that is

all about gratifying your desires. I don't mean the modern emphasis on instant gratification, like downloading a movie or running through a drive through. Our society embraces sinful desires. Think of the dramatic changes that have happened in the last decade when it comes to homosexuality and drug usage. When I went into the army, if you had experimented with marijuana, it was very difficult to get a security clearance. But the other day, my son was looking at the Army ROTC scholarship website. When the application asked about drug use, it specifically said, "Not counting experimentation with marijuana." Our society has changed on these issues.

That reflects a much deeper change. In the past, much of what our society taught was right and wrong generally followed what the Bible says is right and wrong. Today, our society is all about giving you what you want. Whether or not God says it's sinful just doesn't matter. Some polls indicate that most Americans do not think that their religious views should affect the decisions they make. Sex on TV, living together, sleeping with someone you're not married to, getting drunk on holidays, all these things are perfectly acceptable.

Peter wrestled with the same issues 2000 years ago. He tells us that we've spent enough time doing the things unbelievers choose to do. Now, he was talking to churches where most members were adult converts and before they became believers, they lived like everyone else in their society lived. Our situation is not the same. But I bet he could still make the same comment to us. At the same time, all believers do make changes in their lives. Peter says, "**They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.**" That's the price of discipleship. We get to be the sticks in the mud. We get to be the people who aren't any fun. My wife's boss is a Christian and many of the people in her company travel for work a lot. But they don't enjoy traveling with him because he doesn't go out drinking on those travel nights. Now, the people my wife works with are decent, professional people. But if you live as Christ calls us to, the world around you is going to ridicule you.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can't have fun. But it does mean that our lives are not all about gratifying the desires of our sinful nature. In a society like ours, when the opportunity to indulge virtually every sinful desire you can think of is at your fingertips, God calls us instead to dedicate ourselves to doing his will. Do we do that? It's hard, because we all have a sinful nature. You can't watch TV without running into sinful attitudes. Yet, most of us spend hundreds of dollars every year on cable and internet connections. Do we strive to put away the sinful desires of our own hearts? Do we dedicate ourselves to following God's will in a sinful world? Or do we have to admit that most of the time, our sinful desires are in control? Do we make excuses for them and justify them?

All that is sin. It shows that the natural state of our hearts earns us punishment in hell. But Christ died and he paid even for that sin. Christ lived a life of perfect devotion to God so that we can get the credit. Christ rose to tell us that we are forgiven and loved and that God calls us perfect in his sight. We are done with sin in God's court. Arm yourself with Christ's attitude and strive every day here to be done with sin in your life.

And Peter has a message for all those people who ridicule us because we're sticks in the mud: Judgment Day is coming. We hope all those people hear the gospel and repent and trust in Jesus. But if they don't, they will pay not only for their sinful lives but also for all the mockery they heaped on us. Peter says that we preached the gospel to the Christians who have died because they, too, had to face God's judgment. This world will only condemn their lives of faith. But to God, those lives of faith are precious because they show that their trust in Christ is living. You have the same faith. Have the same attitude that Christ showed. Trust in God and joyfully do his will. That is far superior to the self-serving, self-loving, self-indulging attitude that our society embraces.

II.

That attitude only comes from the gospel. It doesn't always feel like it's there, but if you are a believer, you have a new man in your heart. He does have that attitude even when the sinner inside you wants to indulge every sinful desire and fantasy. **Arm yourself with Christ's attitude. It's the key to Christian life here.**

Peter says, "**The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.**" Does that sound like a threat to you? It really isn't. The end of the world is right around the corner and he calls us to change our attitude, but not so that we avoid being embarrassed on Judgment Day. God is not going to hang all our sins out for everyone to see. And not so that we can get to heaven. Christ died and he rose. We are going to live with him in eternity. What does he say? "**Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.**" You can't pray when you're sinning. You don't even want to pray when

you're thinking about all the sinful lusts of this life. You have to fight against your own sinful flesh so that you can focus your mind and your heart on God.

Why does that matter? Because we do live in a dying world. Every day, we face trials and difficulties. Any one of them could destroy our faith if God didn't stop them. They all have the power to make our life hurt more. Prayer is when we take all that's hard about our own life to God. It's when we take all the things that we worry about for our children and our friends and our parents to God. It's when we put all the difficulties of this life in his hands and walk away trusting his promise to hear and deal with those things. But if you are wrapped up in sin, you're not going to pray. And you're going to cheat yourself of the blessings God wants to give you. So the key to prayer and all that comes with it is to arm our new man with the attitude of Christ, to focus on him so that he can wage war against our sinful desires.

Peter mentions one more area of our lives that needs the attitude of Christ to overcome the sinful attitudes of this world. He says, **“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”** Love constantly works to make life better for the people around me. Love always asks itself what I can do that will benefit the person next to me, no matter what it costs me, no matter if they will even appreciate it. Obviously, that brings huge blessings. But notice the specific blessing Peter mentions: it covers over a multitude of sins. I think it's easy for us to misunderstand that statement. Peter is not saying that if you love other people that will cover your sins. That would be a denial of all that Christ did and all that the Bible says about how our sins are taken away. Real love covers over the multitudes of the sins of the people around me. In other words, it forgives. It buries the hurts that I've suffered at the hand of the people around me so that even my heart doesn't keep going back to them and rehearsing them over and over again. And it also protects the people around me from gossip and slander. I don't need to tell you what I know about other people's sins. You don't need to tell me. Love covers over sins. Does that mean that we just let people sin? No. But even when we call them to repentance, we keep the whole matter as private as possible.

That's a tall order. None of us can live that way alone. We fall short in our love every single day. We need to go to Christ and confess those sins and cling to his forgiveness every day. But then we need to embrace his attitude of love for God and for the people around us. Knowing Christ, trusting his work and word, dedicate yourselves to serving God. That is the Christian life. Trust in Christ is the key to that new life.

Attitude is altitude. Yes, that's a pretty trite saying. But the attitude of Christ, the attitude of trust in the love of God and commitment to his word makes all the difference in the life he calls us to live here. It is the opposite of the self-love that lies at the heart of our society. It is committed to living for Christ, to hearing his forgiveness, to putting his words into practice. We are fighting a war against sin and death and hell. Our weapon is God's work in us – it's the gospel. Arm yourself with the attitude of Christ. Amen.