

This is War

Christianity 101, Part 5

1 Peter 4:1-3

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

As Christians, sometimes we need to be reminded to always be on our guard. All the days of our life, we are engaged in battle against the devil, his army, this world, and even our own flesh. This battle rages on always, but sometimes we can get complacent and we can be wounded by subtle attacks that we don't even recognize. Peter reminds his audience and us that we need to always have this battlefield perspective. Jesus died and defeated the power of sin, but sometimes we let it hang around us and trip us up. Peter reminds his readers that they must always be conscious about who they are living for moment by moment. He encourages them that they have started to see the fruit of defeating sin in their lives and urges them to not be satisfied. He wants them to be resolved to always fight the fight so as to live for Christ the rest of their time on earth.

Discussion Points:

Peter reminds his readers again that they have identified with Jesus in his death. In doing so, they should have "ceased from sin" but it doesn't always seem that easy. The passions of the flesh still bubble to the surface if they are not kept in check. He reminds them that they are faced with two choices: they can continue to live for human passions or for the will of God.

- Why is it that Christians still have to battle their flesh?
- Why should Christians be intent to make sure they are living for the will of God?
- What did Jesus' death on the cross mean for this battle against sin?
- How did Jesus' death on the cross change a Christian's allegiance in this war?

Peter starts this section of his letter by using warfare language of arming yourself.

- With what does Peter tell his audience to arm themselves?
- How would you describe this mind or purpose of Christ?
- How does arming yourself with the mind of Christ help in this battle?

Discussion Guide cont.

Ceasing from sin can be a difficult thing for us to understand. Peter is not referring here to a state of perfection, because that will not ever become our reality in this life, but instead a state of resolution to stay away from sin.

- In what ways can you be resolved to cease from sin?
- What practical steps can you take to actively battle sin?
- How can you adopt the mind of Christ in your own life to fight against sin?

Peter reminds his audience about what kind of perspective they should have about their time. Sometimes it is easy for us to have the mindset that we have a lot of time to solve our problems. We think that we don't really have a deadline that we are trying to meet, so we lose the sense of urgency that Peter tells us we should have. We need to make good use of all of our time because our entire life has been bought by the blood of Jesus.

- Why does Peter feel the need to remind his listeners to live for God and not the flesh?
- How can you make sure you are conscious about who you are living for in every moment?
- Have you made any specific resolutions about what you will do or not do to fight sin?

Peter says that Christians should “live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”

- Is there any middle ground between these two contrasting extremes?
- Is it possible to be committed to Christ and still try to hold on to your sin?
- This statement by Peter seems pretty obvious. Why do we still have trouble following it?

Gospel Connection:

Sin comes to bring us death. Christ came to give us abundant life. We know this truth, but the problem is that we don't always see things the right way. Sin promises us that it will fulfill us and bring us happiness and satisfaction. It tells us that we know what is best and that we can attain what God cannot or will not give us. It is entirely deceitful and efficient at enticing our appetites, but in the end, it always leads to death. Jesus came to earth and never succumbed to this temptation. He had perfect relationship with God and saw things correctly because he did not have a sinful nature clouding his perspective like we do. When he died on the cross bearing our sins to remove them from us and defeating the power of sin to hold us, we were set free. If we believe in him and follow after his example, the Holy Spirit will help us to discern the deceitfulness of sin and help us fight back against it. We can actually have victory now because God is on our side.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Where in your life are you still following the desires of your flesh? How can you be aware of that sin and be resolved to not be content with it? How can you defeat it?
- Pray:** Thank God for giving you redemption and the power to fight sin and win. Ask him to continue to transform you into the image of His Son and live for His will alone.
- Do:** Be sure to arm yourself with the mind of Christ by reading your Bible and asking God to help you fight against the enemy.

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Christianity 101, Part 5

1 Peter 4:1-3

In recent months we've mentioned the Reformation and reformation leaders like Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. Five hundred years ago, a reformation movement began that altered the course of church history.

Two hundred and fifty years later, there was a time in American church history when the country was deeply impacted by the preaching of men like Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards.

It was called the Great Awakening, and a pastor by the name of Jonathan Edwards was a leader in the movement.

As a young man in his early 20's, Jonathan grew tired of his own mediocre, lackadaisical attitude toward his walk with Christ and he decided to do battle with sin and take his testimony and his Christianity seriously.

Little wonder that God would use him later on to become a key leader in the Great Awakening – a time of great revival in America – during the 1700's.

Beginning in 1723, when he was 20 years of age, Jonathan began composing a list of resolutions – he would write 70 resolutions in all.

Let me read some of them:

- *Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, where I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and where I have denied myself (that is, where I've done the right thing): [and to do so] at the end of every week, [every] month and [every] year.*

Here's another – this was resolution #61:

- *Resolved, that I will not give way to that laziness which relaxes my mind from being fully and fixedly set on*

Christianity, no matter what excuse I may have for it.

In other words, I'm going to examine my life and my commitment and I won't allow myself any excuses for backing down, or slacking up.

One more – Resolution #56:

- *Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.*

Imagine taking that argument away from the enemy; if Satan knows you're not going to slack up in fighting your sinful desires, even when you are unsuccessful, you have dealt him a serious blow and you've given yourself a tremendous vantage point for battling on.

Jonathan Edwards understood this simple truth about Christianity: it is war.

Anybody who believes the Christian life is a road of ease with sunshine and comfort and rose petals along the path, never signed up for the real thing.¹

Christianity is war.

- It's a war against the relentless mindset and the lure of an unbelieving world.
- It's war against the devil and his strategic attacks to defeat and discourage us in our walk and testimony for Christ.
- It's a war against our own sinful corruption which at any moment can entangle us and sweep us back into sin.
- It's a war against cultural Christianity that would gladly settle us into a lackadaisical, undisciplined, unresolved life.

The issue the Apostle Peter is going to provide today in a course we're calling Christianity 101, is the decision – the resolution – to deal with sin and sinful desires in our own lives.

He answers the question, “What kind of resolutions do we need to make in order to advance in our walk with Christ?”

If you'll turn to ***I Peter chapter 4***, you'll find his spiritually inspired counsel that I'm going to fashion into the form of three resolutions.

And the first one is this:

1. I am resolved to suit up and fight back!

Notice *verse 1. Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind or purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*

Peter writes, *therefore* – in other words, in light of what I've already written, let me make some application. In light of the fact that

- Christ resolved to die for your sins –
- That Christ resolved to face the judgment of God the Father for your sins
- That Christ resolved to suffer separation and death because of your sins – the just dying for the unjust
- now then, you, believer, need to be just as resolved when you suffer any kind of difficulty, no matter what it is, to be done with sin.

One author translated “ceased from sin” several hundred years ago to read – he has quit with sin.

You can understand Peter's words *ceased from sin* to mean, not a state of perfection, but a state of resolution.

As a Christian, you are no longer bound by the penalty of sin – you are no longer condemned (***Romans 8:1***); Christ paid for your crimes and you are eternally safe in Him.

But while you are free from the *penalty* of sin, you are not free from the *pull* of sin.

You might be free from the *condemnation* of sin, but you are not free from the *attraction* of sin. So you'd better suit up and fight back against sin!

A Christian who is learning the lessons of Christianity 101 is a Christian who is demonstrating that they are *done with sin*.ⁱⁱ

Peter is essentially referring to a Christian who is no longer on speaking terms with sin.

And the key to this resolution is – notice – ***arming yourself with the same purpose*** – or better rendered – the same mind, as Christ.

The word here for purpose or mind originally referred to the act of thinking – the realization. The word indicates, one Greek scholar writes, a resolve that expresses itself in determined action.ⁱⁱⁱ

Peter is saying, “Look, just as Christ was resolved to pay the penalty for your sin, be just as resolved to fight against the power of sin.”

Arm yourselves with this kind of resolution. By the way, the word for *to arm yourselves* appears in the form of a verb only here in the entire New Testament. It means to equip yourself with the appropriate tool or weapon and it carries the idea of being ready.^{iv}

In the New Testament, the noun form of this verb was used of a heavily armed Roman foot soldier who carried a spear, sword and heavy, long shield.^v

Chuck Swindoll comments on this verse in his commentary on 1 Peter by writing, “Peter's point is clear. Christ has not sent us into the world as vacationers on a self-guided tour of a playground, but as soldiers on a tour of duty in a battlefield. We are not called to kick back, relax, take in the scenery, and wait for God to take us home. Rather, we are engaged in a fierce conflict on foreign soil and we need to arm ourselves with spiritual armor to withstand the temptations of this world.”^{vi}

Well said. It's time to make dress for war mentally; it's time to live with a sense of resolution – and make it daily – to suit up and fight back. We're not on the playground, we're on a battleground.

If you're old enough in the faith and you've read the letters of Paul and Peter and James and others, you often hear the nuances of spiritual warfare.

Paul told the Roman believers to *put away the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12)*.

He tells the Ephesian Christians to *put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil – against the world forces of darkness (Ephesians 6)*.

If you take time to study that paragraph, Paul describes the armor in detail; for instance, he refers to the *soldier's shoes* – which we know from history were leather sandals. The soldiers would embed the soles of their sandals with small stones which then acted like cleats as they ran up hills or gripped the ground in hand to hand combat.

Have you ever thought about the fact that a Roman soldier never needed cleats if he was retreating? He needed them because he was climbing and advancing.

You don't want to slip because slipping and falling might be incredibly dangerous. So you need to wear the right shoes.

Somebody sent me a video clip this past week and it illustrated this perfectly: here's a golfer who's playing somewhere where it's cold. He has hit his ball out onto the icy pond and he decides to walk out on the lake in his tennis shoes and hit the ball off the ice. He's obviously missing the right shoes – he's missing his marbles too.

Some of you are going to go home this afternoon and watch a little football. You'll notice that every player is suited up with every possible helpful thing – from gloves to cleats.

Maybe you've discovered this already, but you don't wear cleats if you're sitting in your living room watching men play football.

I've noticed how fans who attend the games show up in the stadium wearing all kinds of things – helmets, team jerseys, gloves, and hats. You know, I've never seen a fan wearing a pair of cleats in the stands. You don't need to wear

cleats in the stands, but you do need them down there on the playing field.

Paul says to put on the right shoes because he expects you to be in the contest, gaining ground.

Paul also refers to wearing *the helmet of salvation*. In other words, you need to protect your mind – your thoughts – with the truths of the gospel.

He mentions carrying *the sword of the Spirit* which is the word of God.

When Jesus Christ was tempted three times, by the devil, Jesus responded all three times by immediately quoting from Deuteronomy. I often wonder how we'd do against the Devil if all we had was the book of Deuteronomy.

Jesus did battle against temptation by means of the sword of the Spirit.

So you also, as a Christian soldier, have both defensive and offensive weaponry in order to fight the fight and run the race.

I remember many years ago when our twin sons were around five years old and we were at the airport picking up my mother-in-law who was coming to spend the holidays with us. We were standing by the gate when soldiers began getting off that same plane and filing past us. They were dressed in fatigues, boots, and several of them had guns strapped in their holsters. My boys were awestruck as they watched the soldiers walk past them. One of my boys said to me, "Daddy, look at all those army men!" One of the soldiers walking by stopped, looked down at him and said, "Boy, we're not army – we're marines." And I thought, "Anybody know whose child this is?"

A good soldier – including a marine – goes into battle prepared with everything possible in order to win.

So also, the Christian, arms himself; he suits up and fights back in this battle for purity and discernment and integrity and authenticity and impact.

So make your resolution – I am resolved to suit up and fight back.

Secondly;

2. **I am resolved to watch the clock and clean house!**

Notice *verse 2. So as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

I love this seemingly offhanded comment – *so as to live the rest of the time*, It's as if Peter wants us to focus on the fact that we don't know how much time we have left, but to dedicate whatever time we have left to the pleasure of God.

This is Jonathan Edwards' passion in his Resolution #5:

- *Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can;*

And Resolution #7:

- *Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.*

Peter's phraseology here – *the rest of the time* – is meant to inspire the readers in their efforts to redeem the time.

The word for *time* is *chronon*, which gives us our English word chronology. In other words, as the chronology of your life's events play out – over a long period of time or a short period of time – dedicate the chronology of your life to the will of God.^{vii}

It's as if Peter subtly implies, “take note of the time! Keep your eye on the sun dial” – or, in our case, your smart phone or your watch.

There is this sense of expectancy in Peter's call to resolution. Expectancy has a way of shaping the way you live.

I understand from our children's ministry that we have in our congregation nearly 30 women who are expecting.

We even use that word – expecting. What does that mean? We don't have enough time to

answer that! But that means life is about to change.

It means your husband is going to go down aisles in the grocery store he's never been down before. It means you're going to make a line in your budget for really important things like Goldfish and Cheerios. It means you've taken a room somewhere in your house and painted it blue or pink.

And the closer you get to your due date, the more expectant you become, and the more expectant you are – I mean – you can hardly wait for that baby to be born! You just can't wait. Please wait at least 30 more minutes. We do have medical volunteers standing by.

Expectancy produces urgency. There are things you have to get done in light of your due date because of the shortness of time.

Peter effectively says to the believer that we should live with a sense of the shortness of time in life which will produce a spiritual sense of urgency.

There are things you have to get done – and what are they?

Notice – *so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

In other words, there's no time to waste on the lusts of men – you don't have time to fool with any of that.

Peter's expression here for *the lusts of men* relates to every evil human desire – the plural use of the word for *lusts* indicates all the varied cravings of the fallen human nature.

So Peter is referring here to a life controlled by those cravings and sinful desires that characterize fallen human beings.^{viii}

Peter is basically drawing a contrast between the will of man and the will of God.

He has already spelled some of it out in this letter, categorized by his statement in chapter 2 where he writes, *For such is the will of God by doing right.*

Later in *chapter 3* he writes that the will of God might lead to suffering – in *verse 17*.

Now in *chapter 4* he writes that the will of God is doing the opposite of sinful humanity. He's going to describe it for us later.

But living *according to the will of God*, one author put it so well, is when His desire is our command, His Spirit is our guide, His Son is our example and His word is our authority.^{ix}

When that happens, you are spending your time in the will of God. That doesn't refer to whether you're doing dishes or preaching a sermon. When His desires are your command, His Spirit is your guide, His Son your example and His word your authority, you won't be wasting time, no matter what you're doing.

So if you are watching the clock and cleaning house – it means your life is being governed and guided by God's Spirit and God's word.

Which is another way of saying, we need to think biblically – clearly – what is the will of God on this issue at hand? What does the word of God say?

Listen, you'll never know the will of God on a personal subject unless you use the word of God in your personal study.

R. C. Sproul once wrote about one of his students who had substituted feelings for thinking biblically, which requires biblical study. She was struggling with God's will on the subject of marriage and when he asked her how she used the word of God to guide her thinking, she responded that she practiced what she called "lucky dipping."

She was serious, Sproul writes. She explained that she would close her eyes, open her Bible and place her finger on a line of text in the Bible and consider that God's will. Her method required no study, meditation on scripture or prayer – just lucky dipping.

One day, in her passion to find a husband, she applied her method to try to determine whether God was going to provide her with a husband or not, and she pointed to a verse from Zechariah 9 which read, *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion . . . behold your King is coming to you . . . mounted on a donkey*. She took that to mean her husband was just around the corner.

And sure enough, Sproul writes, the guy she met a few days later, she assumed was her Prince Charming and she married him.

Sproul didn't say what happened later on and he didn't tell me how riding on the donkey fit into the will of God; maybe they rode one on their honeymoon or maybe the guy's car was slow and made a lot of noises.

But Sproul did go on to write that we have to search the scriptures if we ever hope to have the mind of Christ. We simply cannot find the mind of Christ in 15 minutes a day.^x

We must be in the word, immersed in the word, thinking the word and weighing everything in light of the word. That's how you watch the clock and clean house.

Thirdly, here's one last resolution:

3. I am resolved to stay the course, having said farewell!

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course.

What Peter does here is refer to their personal testimony. You could paraphrase this to read, "You spent enough time in the past doing what unbelievers desire to do, but you've had enough of running down that kind of path."

In other words, you used to pursue that pagan course of life, but you've stopped that race after sin and now you're *running the race for the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14)*.

You're running after different things now.

Now what's surprising is that Peter pulls off the interstate and reminds these early believers of the kinds of things they used to run after – the courses they once pursued.

As if to remind them – you never want to go back there, so remember how empty it all was.

And what Peter does is describe 6 evils that characterize that old life which needs to stay in your rear-view mirror.

In other words, this is still the potential of every one of us – even after having come to Christ – which is why the letters of the apostles to the church continually urge the believer to *lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light* – remember – *let us behave*, Paul writes, *properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (Romans 13:12-14).*

In other words, keep saying goodbye to that kind of life and don't invite it back!

Every day, whenever the temptation arrives, remind it and yourself that you're not chasing after that any more – you've said farewell and you aren't going to leave a forwarding address.

Peter takes virtually the same list from Paul to the Romans and uses it here in *1 Peter 4* to describe that old lifestyle.

Here are the six evils he chooses to address.

Sensuality – this is a word that refers to someone who lacks any sense of shame. This word refers to, what one Greek scholar described as an outbreak of wickedness which violates a sense of public decency.^{xi}

Peter will use this same word in his second letter to describe the lifestyle of the people of Sodom – and the dominating idea behind the word here is that of shameless conduct.^{xii}

The next evil Peter mentions is translated *lusts*. This denotes a strong desire for anything – not just sexual lust or desire.^{xiii}

It could be anything from a passionate craving for gambling or money or power or food or control or attention or fame.

Where the first word – *sensuality* – refers to the open expression of evil, *lust* has to do with the private cravings of sinful hearts.^{xiv}

The next word is *drunkenness* – a compound word that uses wine and the verb to bubble up or to overflow; it depicts someone who is overflowing with wine, obviously a reference to someone perpetually drunk.^{xv}

The next word in the list is *carousing* – this is a word that referred to sexually loaded revelry – it can be translated orgies.

This is spring break and Mardi Gras all rolled up into one event. This is that trip to Las Vegas where they were promised that whatever they did in Vegas, stayed in Vegas. But it didn't actually stay in Vegas; it was actually recorded by God (*Revelation 20:12*).

Drinking parties is next in the list. You might think Peter was a student at a local college or he must have worked for your company at Christmas time.

This is a phrase that refers to a party where the keg is open and the revelers are getting wasted.

This may also be a subtle reference to the heavy drinking and revelry and partying that characterized pagan religious festivals.^{xvi} It describes how many Americans live on the weekend.

Finally, Peter mentions *abominable, or lawless, idolatries*

Idol worship in Peter's generation involved all the above – drunkenness, orgies, sexual perversion, lust and outbreaks of every imaginable evil.

These are idolatries – that is, these are the gods of the fallen world.

And these gods effectively replace the authority of God's word and the control of the Holy Spirit and the integrity of the gospel and the testimony of a changed life.

The pull never quite goes away, so make sure you don't get swept away.

Peter clearly urges the believer to stay the course and keep saying farewell to this – your old life.

Jonathan Edwards wrote it this way in his resolution #68:

- *Resolved, to confess honestly to myself all that which I find in myself of sin, and to confess the whole case to God, and beg Him for His help.*

Why? Because you belong to Him. You don't want to be entangled in that old life; you

want everything of you to belong to everything of His will.

So make your resolutions afresh today:

- I am resolved to suit up and fight back!

- I am resolved to watch the clock and clean house!
- I am resolved to stay the course, having said farewell to my old life!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/12/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from J. Allen Blair, Living Peacefully (Kregel, 1959), p. 192

ii David R. Helm, 1-2 Peter and Jude (Crossway, 2008), p. 129

iii D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1984), p. 256

iv Ibid, p. 257

v Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter (Zondervan, 2010), p. 212

vi Ibid

vii Adapted from Hiebert, p. 259

viii Ibid

ix Adapted from Hiebert, p. 259

x R. C. Sproul, 1-2 Peter (Crossway, 2011), p. 141

xi Hiebert, p. 261

xii John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 167

xiii Ibid

xiv Adapted from Richard W. DeHaan, Good News for Bad Times: 1 Peter (Victor Books, 1975), p. 113

xv Hiebert, p. 261

xvi Adapted from Phillips, p. 167