Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

If you were to paint a picture symbolizing the Christian life, what would it look like? What image would best represent the Christian life? Well, from this passage, as well as the more well-known one in Ephesians 6, which is where believers are commanded to put on the full armour of God, a fitting choice would be that of a soldier, ready for battle.

And it appears to be the case that Christians needed to be reminded of this reality, often. For, as we have seen, this letter was originally written to Christians who faced persecution. And you would think, given the reality of persecution, that Christians would want nothing to do with the pagan and immoral practices of their unbelieving community. But it is clear from Peter’s letter that that was not the case. In 2:11, Peter warned believers to “*abstain [or stay far away] from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul*.” And he returns to this theme again in our passage today. So, it is clear that the Christians Peter originally wrote to were struggling with godly living or holiness. And I am sure we all know why that is the case: After all, the Bible speaks about temptation and “*the pleasures of sin*.” Sin can feel good. And it can also be hard sometimes to know for sure if something is right or wrong. And back in 2:12, we noted that we are not to withdraw from the world into isolated Christian communities but to live in the world. But doing holiness in an affluent and pleasure-loving society is not easy! And then there is also the constant pressure to conform; to be like everyone else, to not be different in what we think or say or do. And these pressures are just as real for us today as they were for the believers in Peter’s day.

And so, in this passage, **Believers are Commanded to Adopt a holiness Battle-stance**. In verse 1, Peter says, “*Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking*.” And the Greek word translated as “*arm yourselves*” literally means to arm yourself with weapons, to put on armour, and to stand in a battle-ready position. So, we must examine ourselves in the light of this passage; Is this how we are living? Are we at war with sin? Is holy living important to us? You see, if we are not living with a holiness battle-stance, then, in line with what we read earlier from Isaiah 1, God will not ‘miss’ our worship at all. But we will also see is that the remedy for failures of this sort is **vertical before it is horizontal** – It is how we view Christ that most influences how we live. So, let’s see all this as we consider the four parts of this passage: First, having a holiness battle-stance means **adopting a Christ-like mentality**, second, **living for the will of God**, third, **leaving sin behind**, and fourth, **having** **an eternal perspective**.

1. So, first of all, having a holiness battle-stance means **adopting a Christ-like mentality**.
   1. Boys and girls, do you remember your parents ever saying something to you like, “Just do it like your older brother/sister does it.” Or, have you adults ever had a boss at work say to you, “Just try and do it like John/Joan does it.” And we say this sort of thing because one way to train people is to point them to the example of someone who does the task, the right way, all the time. Well, we find this method of training used often in the New Testament letters in relation to Christ. One of the most well-known examples is **Philippians 2:5ff**, where Paul says to believers, “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*” And then he describes the humility of Jesus. And we have already seen Peter do the same thing in 2:*21ff*. He said, “*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you might follow in His steps*.” So, we are to follow Jesus’ example; we are to imitate the way that He lived in a hostile and unbelieving world – He didn’t pay back evil for evil; He endured injustice; He trusted in His Father to judge His persecutors. And here in our text, Peter points to Christ again: “*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*.” So, we must have the same way of thinking that Jesus had while on earth.
   2. Now, we will come back to what this looks like in a moment, but the last part of the verse helps us get there. It says, “*For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*.” And as we have seen in the last couple of weeks, suffering in the flesh means persecution and all the suffering that it brings. So, **is Peter saying there that when we are persecuted, we stop sinning?** 
      1. Well, that cannot be the case because the Bible is very clear, in **1 John 1:8**, for example, that “*if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*.” We will not be free of sin until we are with the Lord in heaven.
      2. So, what does Peter mean? Well, the last part of verse 1 points back to the beginning of verse 1 where we read, “*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh*”; same language. And the same language is also used in **3:18**: “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit*.” And I won’t give you the technical details, but it is plain from the grammar of the Greek that what Peter says at the end of verse 1 is *first about Christ and what He did on the cross* before it is about what we believers must do. And what Christ did on the cross is to bring us to God. And we talked about this last week. Because of Christ, we are justified ones. In God’s eyes, it is just-as-if-I never sinned.
         1. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*” So, as a follower of Jesus, you are a new creation. You have the Holy Spirit living within you! You are no longer under the dominion or mastery or tyranny of sin.
         2. And it is only those who are new creations in Christ that will imitate Him and endure the suffering of persecution. A person who does not truly love Jesus will not endure persecution for His sake.
      3. So, that is what is meant here – In Christ, we believers are justified ones; new creations. And that is why we are able to imitate Him and endure persecution.
   3. But this reality of being new creations **also needs to come out in our daily attitude toward sin**. **Hebrews 4:15** says that in every respect Jesus was tempted as we are, but He never gave in to temptation.
2. So, how was He able to do this? What motivated Him to live like this? Well, we see that our second point, which is that adopting a holiness battle-stance also means **living for the will of God**. Verse 2 says, “*So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God*.”
   1. In John 4, we are told about Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman. The disciples had gone away to buy some food. And when they came back, she left, and the disciples were trying to get Jesus to eat some food. And we read, “*But He said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’*” And being the dopey disciples that they were, they wondered among themselves if Jesus had a secret stash of food somewhere? But then He said to them, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me*.”
      1. And I have preached on this passage with you, before. And we saw then that the will of God means the commands of God in Scripture. And there are two ways to live – we either obey God’s commands or we disobey them. This is why David, in **Psalm 51:4**, said, “*Against you [Lord], you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*.” David knew that he had sinned against other people, but he knew that ultimately all sin is disobedience of God’s commands.
      2. So, for Jesus, obeying His Father was as necessary and essential as food. And when I preached on this passage, the question I asked you was, Is obeying God’s commandments like food for you, or is it more like dessert? Is it necessary and essential or is it optional and occasional?
      3. I remember my father-in-law once telling us that during World War II, food was so scarce in the Netherlands that at one time all they had to eat was tulip bulbs. Do you think anyone at the table said, ‘But I don’t like tulip bulbs!’ No, you ate anything to survive!
      4. And this is how it should be with followers of Jesus and obeying His commands – necessary and essential.
3. Well, more ‘flesh is put on the bones’ of what this looks like in daily life as we continue to our third point, which is where we see that adopting a holiness battle-stance also means **leaving sin behind**. Verse 3 says, “*The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry*.” And by “Gentiles” is meant unbelievers.
   1. In the New Testament letters, there are **many lists like this one** of sinful desires and behaviours that characterize life *apart from* Christ, which ought not to be a part of life *with* Christ. And it is a good thing that we have these lists because as the last 20 or so years have made plain, society can change its mind about whether a certain behaviour is right or wrong very quicky.
      1. “Sensuality” means living for and pursuing sensual or sexual pleasure. Many Romans and Greek cities of that time had pagan temples where sexual activity was viewed as part of the religion. So, homosexuality, prostitution, public nakedness, polyamoury, and even paedophilia were practiced and indulged in and on public display.
      2. “Passions” were the lusts that gave rise to these sorts of behaviours.
      3. And “drunkenness” and “orgies” and “drinking parties” and “lawless idolatry” were all aspects of what Peter describes in verse 4 as a “*flood of debauchery*.” You could walk past a pagan temple in the city streets, and you would see all of this going on in broad daylight.
      4. And it is all going on in the world we live in today also. And in recent years much of it has been legalized and normalized and even celebrated. But it is evil in the sight of God, it creates nothing but misery and disease and brokenness, and it has no place among followers of Christ.
   2. So, we must adopt a holiness battle-stance towards these passions and behaviours.
      1. If you have watched war movies, you will know that **land mines** cause terrible damage when they explode. So, soldiers try to avoid areas where they suspect mines have been laid. But if they have to go that route, they will do all they can to avoid stepping on land mines.
      2. Well, the list in verse 3 is a list of ‘landmines.’ Believer, avoid these things if at all possible. Don’t go there.
         1. That party venue where the music throbs and the alcohol flows and bodies are pressed together on the dance floor; don’t go there.
         2. And young people and adults, you have no business playing drinking games or sex-games, ever.
   3. And one of the best ways to avoid sin is to pursue godliness. **Romans 6:11-13** says, Because of your union with Christ, “*count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness*.” And if you really want to arm yourselves with the same way of thinking that Jesus had, as **Philippians 4:8** says, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*.” So, instead of going to the rave or the party where its all about alcohol and drugs and sex, learn to find joy in sacrificial acts of service and attending Bible study and in practicing hospitality and listening to godly podcasts and reading good books.
4. And that brings us, fourthly, to the last part of adopting a holiness battle-stance, which is **Having an eternal perspective**. Verses 4-6 say, “*With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does*.”
   1. And if ever there was an accurate summary of our times, this is it! Right? Our world celebrates homosexuality, casual sex, drunkenness, no fault divorce, and recreational drug taking. And our neighbours are surprised that we have a different view and that we value lifelong marriage and no sex outside marriage and sobriety, and that we believe that homosexuality is unnatural and abhorrent to God. And they malign us, which means they accuse us of being hateful and judgmental. And this puts us in a definite minority; what we believe is very unpopular. And we can write letters to parliament, which is good to do, but it feels like trying to hold the wind back, doesn’t it. It feels pointless and fruitless. And it could lead to despair and to caving in, just so we can be like everyone else. But we can avoid this is if we know and believe what the Bible says about the Day of Judgement and eternal life:
      1. **Verse 5** – Unbelievers “*will give account to [Jesus] who is ready to judge the living and the dead*.” What they indulge in and celebrate today will be a cause of great shame and guilt to them when they are condemned to hell on that Day.
      2. And **verse 6** is talking about martyrs. Some believers had died because of persecution. So, these believers were judged in the flesh the way all people are – a body in a grave. And their persecutors viewed this as the ultimate victory. But we know that the soul of the believer goes immediately to be with Jesus upon death; that they “*live in the spirit the way God does*.” So, the death of these believers was not a victory for their persecutors but a victory for these believers! Their way their way of thinking was: “*To live is Christ, and to die is gain*!”
   2. And it was their way of thinking because it was how the Lord Jesus thought. As the cross loomed large on His horizon, Jesus prayed, “*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him*.” He knew that on the other side of the cross He would be raised and exalted and glorified.
   3. So, can you see how knowing and believing this, having an eternal perspective, will help you adopt a holiness battle-stance? In Luther’s great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God, he wrote:

*Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also;*

*The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still,*

*His Kingdom is forever.*

Because there will be a final Day of Judgment, what the world thinks about Christians and their views *does not matter*. And should it come to persecution, this is the only thing that will enable you to stand firm against the world’s opposition and mockery. But you must arm yourself with this way of thinking now. You must adopt a holiness battle-stance. Fill your mind with Christ and His word. Stay away from the ‘land-mines’ of sinful behaviour. Confess your sins, daily. Pray, at all times. “*Offer the parts of your body to [Christ] as instruments of righteousness*.” And preach to yourself, each day, that “*to live is Christ, and to die is gain*.” Amen.