

“Sick Sheep and Healed Lives”

1 Peter 2:21-25

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I’ve been a Christian for at least 45 years.

For all of those years, with varying degrees of doubt and assurance, I have known that I belong to God by his grace, not by my merit.

But for all of those years, with varying degrees of victory or defeat, there has also been an on-going battle with sin.

I have been in the battle long enough to realize that living as a Christian is not simply a matter of **deciding** and **trying** harder to obey God.

Yes, I must decide; my determination to follow Jesus matters.

Yes, I must try: my engagement in the battle matters.

But when I read God’s instructions about holy living, I realize that **will** and **effort** alone will not bring the increasing victory over sin in my life that I desire.

I’m realistic enough to not expect **perfection** from myself, but I love God enough to want to exhibit a **growing** Christ likeness.

And so I come to the Scriptures that we are currently studying from 1 Peter and I ask, “**Can** I do what God asks?”

In the texts we have studied the past couple of weeks and will look at again this week and two more weeks, we find the following high standard to which God calls his followers:

1 Peter 2:11- 3:8 “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Then Peter declares the necessary attitude for such godly living; submissiveness. Submissive:

toward governing authorities, v13ff

toward masters/bosses and v18ff

toward one’s spouse.3:1ff

toward everyone 3:8ff

It seems to me the whole section then is summarized with these words from verse 12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, **though they accuse you of doing wrong**, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

The **way** that is done, God says, is by having and living a submissive, non-retaliatory lifestyle as stated in verses 13 and following: “**Submit** yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men...”

I understand **what** it is I’m supposed to do and even the **attitude** with which I’m to do it **BUT can I actually do it**; for that matter can that become the way I naturally act and react?

Let me give you another embarrassing, “how-not-to” illustration:

Last Wednesday I was driving in the third of three cars following a school bus about 7 a.m. right here by the church.

The bus pulled over to the curb and stopped.

All three of us following, slowed to a stop but the bus didn’t turn on its lights.

So we all three cautiously pulled alongside the bus to pass.

The two cars ahead of me were past but as I pulled alongside, the yellow lights went on and the stop sign swung out from the side of the bus.

I immediately stopped, right alongside the bus, knowing I shouldn’t go past the front of the bus nor back up.

One of the drivers jumped out of the bus, ran to my car and yelled at me about not heeding the warning lights and threatening me with a \$75 ticket for not stopping.

“Though they accuse you of doing wrong...”

I rolled my window down and over the noise of the bus; I yelled back about how they lured me into the situation and that in fact I had obviously stopped because I was talking to him.

He got back on the bus, the lights were turned off and I drove away.

I was immediately struck with what I had just done; thinking, “Where did that reaction come from?”

I prayed, “Lord Jesus, forgive me.”

I know I should have caught up to the bus and apologized to the drivers as well; but I honestly didn’t think of that until later.

But I continued to ponder the situation and my reaction.

How can I get to the place in life where my natural reactions and actions are what God is describing here in 1 Peter?

As I said already, though deciding and trying are important they don’t seem to be enough.

I sometimes feel very much like the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:21-24

“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Right in the middle of our 1 Peter text, the Apostle answers this question.

Remember, Peter is giving instruction about submissive living in all situations of life.

As we saw last week, when Peter describes a submissive attitude toward masters he uses Jesus as the ultimate illustration of patient, non-retaliation even when abused.

1 Peter 2:21-23 “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 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.”

To be sure, Jesus is the supreme example of how we ought to behave toward others, even those who mistreat us.

And as Christ-followers we want to emulate him.  
 But that only compounds my problem.  
 I know what Jesus wants me to do.  
 And then seeing how he acted, I feel even  
 worse that I can't seem to act that way.

But Peter doesn't end with calling Jesus an example that we must pattern our lives after.

In verses 24-25 **Peter spells out the foundation and power for such Christ-like living.**

1 Peter 2:24-25 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.<sup>25</sup> For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

How is it possible for us to pattern our lives after Jesus?

Peter says it is possible because of what Jesus did in his death and resurrection.

Yes, Jesus was the greatest example ever of patient suffering and the most dramatic demonstration ever of his love, but his death was not only an example and a demonstration.

Most fundamentally Jesus' death was a sacrifice of his life for our lives.

Peter introduces this idea back in verse 21 "To this you were called, because Christ suffered **for you**, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

Christ didn't just suffer; he suffered "**for you,**" **for us!**

So now in verses 24-25 he moves beyond the idea of Jesus as an example.

Now he adds that when Jesus died, he bore **our sins**.

He develops this more fundamental idea of sacrifice; a sacrifice made necessary because of our sinfulness and sin.

Now this may begin to sound like common ground to many of you who know that Jesus died for our sins.

But I am convinced that most of us don't go far enough in our understanding and application of this idea.

We think of Jesus' death in terms of only half of its results:

- We rightly say that Jesus died paying the **penalty** of death that was due to us for our sin. 1 John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins..."
- We also rightly say that Jesus died removing the **guilt** of our sin so that we can have a right relationship with God. Romans 5:10 "We were reconciled to him (the Father) through the death of his Son."

I want you to see that while all that is certainly implied in what Peter writes, those ideas are not the focus of his thoughts.

Remember he's writing about us **living** like Jesus.

So he remind us that Jesus died for us:

- **So "that"** we might die to sins and live for righteousness
- **So that** "you have been healed.
- **So that** even though "you were like sheep going astray, you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

What are these other results of Christ's death?

They are righteousness, healing, and returning.

Again I emphasize these ideas are not only about being saved and certain of going to heaven when we die; these are about how we live and act now as a Christ-follower.

Peter anchors, not just our conversion but our daily Christ-like living in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Again, repetitiously I add, too many who call themselves Christians think that Christianity is about having their guilt and penalty removed and waiting for heaven.

That's why there are literally millions of Americans who call themselves "born again," "saved," or "Christian" who have no thought of actually following Jesus in this life.

How many call themselves Christians thinking, because they prayed a prayer or went forward in some evangelistic meeting or because they mentally agree that God exists and that Jesus was a real person who died and rose again, that they are now Christians.

Because some don't believe in God, we think we, who do believe in God, are fundamentally different from those who don't and that we are acceptable to God because we do believe in him.

But Peter, along with every other New Testament writer, forcefully reminds us that true Christianity is not only about the past forgiveness and a future heaven but also about the present.

Hebrews 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

"Let us remember," Alexander McLaren wrote, "that our religion is meant to work, that we have nothing in our creed that should not be in our character, that all our credenda (doctrines) are to be our agenda; everything believed is to be something done; and that if we content ourselves with the simple acceptance of the teaching, and make no effort to translate that teaching into life, we are hypocrites or self-deceivers." (Alexander MacLaren in Barnhouse, *Romans*, 166)

So again, notice how pointedly Peter says it, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, **so that we might ...**"

live righteously;

live as spiritually healthy people,

live as people who have returned to **follow** the Shepherd of our lives.

What happened on the cross? What happened that empowers us to be able to live, as Christ wants us to live?

Peter writes, "by his wounds you have been healed."

Both verses 24 and 25 are anchored in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:5-6 "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

ISA 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
 each of us has turned to his own way;  
 and the LORD has laid on him  
 the iniquity of us all.

Again, how does Jesus' death heal us, enabling us to live differently?

The Apostle Paul speaks more extensively to the same issue: Romans 6:3-14 "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him." In the same way, 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...for sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

When we trusted in Jesus as saving Lord, we were by, God's doing, placed into Christ so that what was true of him became true of us.

John Stott wrote, "A Christian is not merely a justified believer. He is someone who has entered into a vital personal union with Jesus Christ." (Stott in Men Made New p34)

When we were placed into Jesus (as evidenced by our water baptism) we were also placed or baptized into his actions.

- What he had done, we had done.
- What happened to him, happened to us

And so Paul says there are two things that are true of us who are Christians.

Please notice he does not say these things OUGHT to be true but that they ARE true of us.

In Christ Jesus we died to sin and  
in Christ Jesus we rose to a new life.

The logic of the passage goes like this:

CHRIST died to sin.

WE died in Christ because WE are in him.

Therefore WE died to sin. (Moo, *Romans*, p354)

So to understand in what way we have “died to sin” we must understand in what way Christ died to sin.

Verse 9 explains it: “death no longer has mastery over him.”

Death once had authority over Christ because he took our sin on himself. Sin leads unalterably to death.

But once Christ died (and rose again) he broke that linkage between sin and death.

Christ broke the rule of sin that was operating in him (because of our sin) and he was freed from its control that led to death.

He broke the power of sin to control and kill.

Sin is not just something we do that is wrong, sin becomes a master - it rules us. (Cf Romans 6:15ff)

Christ took our very real sin on himself and it ruled him

(now I understand that Jesus put himself in that position willingly but having done so - having taken our sin on himself - it took him to death).

But when Jesus rose from the grave, he broke sin’s power.

Jesus was no longer controlled by sin.

Again, what is Paul’s point?

When we trust in Jesus Christ as Saving-Lord we are placed “in Christ”, we are connected to him in a way that what has happened to him has happened to us.

Look at V6 “For we know that our old self, our old way of life, was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin, (**our old sin-prone way of thinking and acting**) would be done away with - no longer able to control us. - “That we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

Before you became a Christian, while it was possible for you to do certain things that we would call “good” -

it was impossible for you to anything that God would call “good” or “righteous” or deserving of God’s favor.

God said it this way “Even our so-called righteousnesses are as filthy rags”.

We were controlled by sin and **unable** not to sin.

We could do nothing right by God’s standards because every action was corrupted in some way either by our actions themselves or by our motives.

It was impossible for us **NOT** to sin by God’s definition of sin.

But here is what happened - when we died “in Christ” that power of sin to control us was broken.

Christ broke it and WE are “in Christ”.

It is now possible for us **NOT** to sin.

It is now possible for us to do real “good” by God’s definition.

It doesn’t mean it’s **im**possible for us to sin but that it is now possible for us **NOT** to sin - sin’s power to control has been broken.

So when Paul says we have died to sin,

It is not that I CANNOT sin but that I can now NOT sin.

By God’s grace and his Spirit within us it is now possible for us, for the first time, to actually live in a righteous way - to please our God.

Peter uses the OT words, “by his wounds we are healed.”

By his death we are made healthy; we are now capable, by his grace, to say “no” to sin and “yes” to following Jesus’ example.

It is not just that I must work up the will and energy to be better, I have been healed; by God’s grace I have the ability to do it right.

Yes, it will be a struggle; the old sinful habits die hard.

But as we reject the old ways and trust Jesus, stepping out to do what is right, God's Spirit enables us.

Yes, sin sometimes even sneaks up on us and plays on our old attitudes and ways so quickly that we sometimes sin but "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Then again, with the knowledge of my **new freedom from the controlling power of sin** I desire and act as God instructs in

Romans 6:12-14 "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. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

I want to give you another picture of what happened at the cross that now empowers us to obey Jesus.

I want to read to you Walter Wangerin's poignant poem, "The Ragman."

As I said, **Peter** uses Isaiah's language to describe our spiritual condition, "by Jesus wounds, we are healed."

Think of our sins as diseases or as debilitating injuries – which is what Isaiah does.

Our sinfulness and sins have left us fatally ill and incapable of following Christ.

Now listen to what Jesus does for us as he comes, dies and rises again.

### The Ragman

I saw a strange sight.

I stumbled upon a story most strange like nothing my life,  
my street sense, my sly tongue had even prepared me for.

Even before the dawn one **Friday** morning I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking the alleys of our city. He was pulling an **old** cart filled with clothes both **bright** and **new**, and he was calling in a clear, tenor voice: "Rags!"

Ah, the air was foul and the first light gray, to be crossed by such sweet music.

"Rags! **New** rags for old! **I** take your **tired** rags! Rags!"

"Now, this **is** a wonder," I thought to myself, for the man stood six- feet-four, and his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular, and his eyes flashed intelligence.

Could he find no better job than this, to be a ragman in the inner city? So I followed him. My curiosity drove me. And I wasn't disappointed.

Soon the Ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch. She was sobbing into a handkerchief, sighing, and shedding a thousand tears. Her knees and elbows made a sad X. Her shoulders shook. Her heart was breaking.

The Ragman stopped his cart.

Quietly, he walked to the woman, stepping round tin cans, dead toys and Pampers.

"Give **me** your rag," he said so gently,

"and **I'll** give you **another**."

He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes.

She looked up and **he** laid across **her** palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shined.

She blinked from the **gift** to the **giver**.

Then, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing: he put **her** stained handkerchief to his **own** face; and then **he** began to weep, to sob as grievously as she had done, his shoulders shaking. Yet **she** was left without a tear.

"This is a wonder," I breathed to myself,  
and I followed the sobbing Ragman  
like a child who cannot turn away a mystery.

"Rags! Rags! New rags for old!"

In a little while,  
when the sky showed grey behind the rooftops  
and I could see the shredded curtains hanging out black windows,  
the Ragman came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a  
bandage, eyes were empty.  
Blood soaked her bandage.  
A single line of blood ran down her cheek.

Now the tall Ragman looked upon this child with pity,  
and he drew a lovely yellow bonnet from his cart.

"Give me **your** rag," he said,  
tracing his own line on her cheek,  
"and I'll give **you mine.**"

The child could only gaze at him while he loosened the  
bandage, removed it, and tied it to **his own head.**

The bonnet he set on hers.

And I gasped at what I saw:  
for **with bandage went the wound!**  
Against **his** brow it ran a darker,  
more substantial blood-his own!

"Rag! Rags! I take old rags!" cried the sobbing,  
bleeding, strong, intelligent Ragman.

The sun hurt both the sky now, and my eyes;  
the Ragman seemed more and more to hurry.

"Are you going to work?" he asked a man leaned against a telephone  
pole.

The man shook his head.

The Ragman pressed him: "Do you have a job?"

"Are you crazy?" sneered the other.

He pulled away from the pole, revealing the right sleeve of his jacket  
- flat, the cuff stuffed into the pocket.

He had no arm.

"So," said the Ragman. "Give me your jacket,  
and I'll give you mine."

Such quiet authority in his voice!

The one-armed man took off his jacket.  
So did the Ragman -  
and I trembled at what I saw:  
for **the Ragman's arm stayed in its sleeve**,  
and when the other put it on he had **two** good arms,  
thick as tree limbs: but **the Ragman had only one**.  
"Go to work," he said.

After that he found a drunk,  
lying unconscious beneath an army blanket,  
an old man hunched, wizened, and sick.

He took the man's blanket and wrapped it round himself,  
but for the drunk he left new clothes.

And now I had to run to keep up with the Ragman.  
Though he was weeping uncontrollably,  
and bleeding freely at the forehead,  
pulling his cart with one arm,  
stumbling for drunkenness, falling again and again,  
exhausted, old, old, and sick,  
yet he went with terrible speed.

On spider's legs he skittered through the alleys of the City,  
this mile and the next, until he came to its limits,  
and then he rushed beyond.

I wept to see the changes in this man.

I hurt to see his sorrow.

And yet I needed to see where he was going in such haste,  
perhaps to know what drove him so.

The little old Ragman - he came to a landfill.  
 He came to the garbage pits.  
 And then I wanted to help him in what he did,  
 but I hung back, hiding.

He climbed a hill.  
 With tormented labor he cleared a little space on that hill.  
 Then he sighed.  
 He lay down.  
 He pillowed his head on a handkerchief and a jacket.  
 He covered his bones with an army blanket. And he died.

Oh, how I cried to witness that death!  
 I slumped in a junked car and wailed and mourned as one who has  
 no hope -  
 because I had come to love the Ragman.

Every other face had faded in the wonder of this man,  
 and I cherished him;  
 but he died.

I sobbed myself to sleep.  
 I did not know - how could I know? --  
 that I slept through Friday night and Saturday and its night, too.

But then, on Sunday morning,  
 I was awakened by a violence.  
 Light - pure, hard, demanding light -  
 slammed against my sour face,  
 and I blinked, and I looked,  
 and I saw the last and the first wonder of all.

**There was the Ragman,**  
 folding the blanket most carefully,  
 a scar on his forehead,  
**but alive!**  
 And, beside that, **healthy!**  
 There was no sign of sorrow nor of age,  
 and all the rags that he had gathered shined for cleanliness.

Well, then I lowered my head and,  
 trembling for all that I had seen,

I myself walked up to the Ragman.  
I told him my name with shame,  
for I was a sorry figure next to him.  
Then I took off all my clothes in that place,  
and I said to him with dear yearning in my voice:  
"Dress me."

He dressed me. My Lord,  
he put new rags on me, and I am a wonder with him.

The Ragman, the Ragman, the Christ!"

When he died for me, yes he took my guilt, and yes, he bore the penalty but it is equally true he also broke the POWER of all that sin which diseased and enslaved me – by his grace I have been healed and freed; by His grace, I can follow him as Shepherd and Overseer of my soul.

1 Peter 2:24-25 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.