

After Conversion, Our Lives are to be Different

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June 6, 1954

Reading the first five verses of Peter, fourth chapter, first epistle. For as much then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. For he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of man, but to the will of God.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excessive wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excessive riot, speaking evil of you, who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

Now this of course is addressed to a Christian, and I might for the sake of refreshing our knowledge, define again a Christian as one who has fled for refuge to Christ, who has identified himself with Christ, and has received life from Christ. Now that's stating in other language what is meant by believing on Christ.

There are three prepositions: to Christ, with Christ, from Christ. If you'll remember these, that a Christian is one who has fled for refuge to Christ. It is not cowardice that makes us flee for refuge when we are in grave peril. It would be moral recklessness amounting to insanity, or a man were in fifty degrees below zero weather, and he knew a few feet away, half a mile away, there might be a shelter, who would boldly stand still and freeze to death rather than seek refuge in the shelter.

So, a moral being in a moral universe who knows that his sins have imperiled him forever and learns that there is in the Rock of Ages, a refuge for sinners. He is not a brave man who refuses that refuge, he is a moral fool.

So, I do not hesitate to say that a Christian is one who has fled for refuge to Jesus Christ, and having fled to Christ, he has identified himself with Christ completely. His identification has become such that wherever Christ is, he wants to be. Whatever Christ stands for, he wants to stand for.

Whatever Christ is against, he wants to be against. Christ's friends, he wants to be his friends. Christ's enemies, he is willing should be his enemies. The work Christ is interested in, he wants to do. What Christ is not interested in, he takes very lightly and gives little attention to. He has identified himself with Christ,

And Christ has given him life. For this is not mental, it's spiritual. Christ has given life to this man, and I will give him eternal life. And no man is able to pluck him out of my hand, and thus he has life. He has received life from Christ. He has identified himself with Christ, and he has fled for refuge to Christ.

Now there are two phrases here, both have the word “time” in it. The time past, he said, and then the rest of his time. The time past and the rest of his time.

Now the time past, he said, of our life may suffice us. I think there is a bit of irony here. Haven't you had enough, he says. The time past of our life may suffice us to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, drinking, revelings, banqueting, and idolatry. That is, he is not giving us a rundown on all that we did. He is simply giving us some samples of the way we lived, and the way the people of the world live now. All the people of the world, for all have sinned.

These are not taken by any means to include everything a sinner does, or a Christian used to do, but he simply gives a sample, lasciviousness, and drinkings, and revelings, and banquetings, and idolatries, touching all phases of our social and religious lives.

Now he said, in time past you lived like that, but it can end now, because God maketh all things new. Let us repent of our sins, and let us be very sorry for them, but let us not be discouraged by them.

Let us not in any wise permit them to discourage us from believing, for God is the one who maketh all things new. And this, in grace, is the land of beginning again. You had a bad beginning and you went on in a bad way, but at any time you choose, you may begin another kind of life, and call that life that is past, the time past.

Now, second, the rest of his time. The time past of our lives we all know. Everybody knows how old he is after they get to be quite small, or quite large, they know how old they are, and sometimes they count them on their fingers.

I asked a chubby little girl one time how old she was. She held up four fingers and said three. She had been saying three, and holding up three, and they told her, now, it was four, so she held up four and said three.

So even the little ones know how old they are, and we all know that. Your time past, what has it been? Your time past may have been ten years, 15, 17, 21, 27, 34, 43, 54, 70, whatever it is, you know your time past. But I want to ask how many of you could tell me what the rest of his time will be.

You know what the time past has been. What is the time yet before you? I wonder if you know. Could you guarantee one year? Could you promise me that you would still be here two years from now? Could any of you now stand, raise your hand, and say, pardon me, I will be here 12 months from now. What is the rest of your time? Your time past you know. You celebrate its passing. People bring you things.

We men get ties, reminding us that we've had another birthday. That's the time past. But what is the rest of our time? Will you tell me, has anybody given you any present celebrating the rest of your time? What a foolish thing to do.

Nobody knows whether he will have another birthday. Is there one here who would stand and say, I'll bet on the next three months? I'm sure of the next two months. Is there anyone here that can say, I'm sure of the next month? Nobody knows.

My friend, Mr. Collett of Beulah Beach, Ohio, whom I have known for the last 25 years, but indigestion, he thought, and the doctor said, take it easy. Well, he said, all right, so he painted his house. And he went to bed that night, got up the next morning, and I think before he could get dressed, tumbled over on the floor and was dead. He didn't expect that, didn't expect that at all. He fully believed that he had a long time, the rest of his time.

If anyone had said to him the night before, Brother Collett, what's the rest of your time? Well, he'd have said, I want to finish painting my house, and then I've got a meeting I want to hold in this and thus town, and then I want to take in this convention and be a Bible teacher there. But he didn't have much rest of his time. What's the rest of your time?

Now the Bible says that the rest of his time, the time past, he lived a certain way, but for the rest of his time, he lives to the will of God.

Old Thomas à Kempis says, oh, how wise and happy is he that now laboreth to be such an one in his life, as he will desire to be found at the hour of his death.

Now it says here that for the rest of your time, you're not going to live the way you did for the time past. And so they think it's strange, they, that vague pronoun without any antecedent. They think it's strange. Who are they?

Well, it is a technical term meaning a worldly people who are not renewed, who have not fled for refuge to Christ, who have not identified themselves with Christ, and who have not received life from Christ. They, whoever they may be, rich or poor, old or young, far or near, they, think it's strange that you run not with them as you used to do.

Now that's another characteristic, a lesser characteristic, but it's a truly one characteristic of a Christian. He is one who no longer runs with them. Doing this has ruined many a beginner.

I've said it here, I repeat it, that there have been those who have gone into the altar room and have on their knees tearfully told God they were tired of the past and they wanted to be a Christian. Then they have got up and gone out to run with the people they used to run with. The result has been tragedy and failure in that Christian life.

Tragedy and failure in the Christian life because we have run with those that we should not have run with. That ye run not with them, they think it very strange. Our worldly friends know only one life, only one, that is the life they now live. They know only one life and they feel that to leave that life would be to die.

But a Christian has found another life more real, more exciting, more satisfying than the life he had before, and he's living that life to the will of God. But the sinner, doesn't know this. He only thinks there is or thinks there is only one kind of life and only one life.

And it's not uncommon for a young person who is trying to follow the Lord to hear this said about him. Well, what does he do? What kind of life does he live? Oh, how dead that

is. How meaningless that is. No fun in that. That's the common approach to the Christian by the world. They think it's strange because they're not informed that you have another life.

It's like this. The disciples, in their imperfection, came to our Lord Jesus and they said, Master, we have brought you meat and bread. He was sitting on the well's edge in Samaria. The woman at the well had been talking with him, he with her, and they said, How do you have anything to eat, nobody having brought you anything? And he said, I have meat to eat that you know not of. They thought he hadn't eaten because he hadn't eaten the food they were used to.

But He said, I recognize another kind of food and another kind of life. And I have been living and eating my Father's food and giving help to the needy, and that is life to me.

So, the Christian, constantly coming against people that do not understand him, they mark him off as being dead because he no longer lives the kind of life he used to live, nor run with them to the same excess of living or dying. So, the Christian is considered strange.

Now let's just toss that around a little bit, that word, strange. Do you know what strange means. It's from the same word as we get our word stranger. A stranger is someone that's not integrated in the landscape, that isn't socially a part of the group, a newcomer. Stranger, they used to greet each other out in our West; a man would appear, and it was not an opprobrious term. It was simply a term meaning we don't know who you are, good morning stranger.

Well, a stranger was someone that was strange, his garb was strange, his face was strange, maybe even his language was strange. And if you get different enough from people, you get queer to a point of laughter.

Dr. Max I. Reich, that great Jewish saint, wore a little beard, and he told me that, rather ruefully, that he used to have to take a good deal of abuse from boys and girls on the street, who would look at his beard and then look at each other, and then smile. He was strange because he had a beard.

If we were as natural as we ought to be, we'd be strange without a beard, because nature put a beard on in the front of the average man's face, and we cut it off, and if anybody leaves it on, we say he's strange.

Now isn't that strange? That we mutilate nature and say that's natural, and then if nature just has its way, we say that's strange. And when the boy in the Navy or somewhere in the service, just for the fun of it, sends home a picture of himself with a two weeks beard, everybody roars with good-natured laughter. It doesn't look like the boy that went into the service so well-groomed and carefully looked after. He's been out on a trip, and so he let his beard grow.

I've seen pictures like that, and they don't even look like themselves. They look strange when actually they only look natural. They look strange after they get through cutting

off their beard. But the point is that anything is strange when it's not like the rest of the things around about it.

Toss a German down in the midst of English-speaking people, and his accent immediately marks him. He's strange because his tongue is a little thicker and his voice a little further down than the American.

Take a Frenchman, his voice is in his nose, and he's different because he talks up in his nose. You have to have adenoids to speak French. And he's strange because he's strange, no, only because he sounds a little different from what we're used to. So a Christian is considered strange.

Brethren, I want to repeat what I said here some weeks ago. I am not going to waste any tears on anybody who comes whimpering to me for sympathy because people think he's strange from following Christ. We're hearing it in the newspapers these days.

A little school reads the Bible, a teacher reads a few verses, and maybe they say the Lord's Prayer together. Some little fella sits there whose parents are atheists, and he thinks he is, poor little misguided innocent chap.

And the parents memorialize the school board, and they say, we want to enter an official protest. It embarrasses our little boy when they read Scripture. He's taught at home the Scripture is not true, and he is embarrassed when they all bow their heads and say the Lord's Prayer, and he doesn't believe in the Lord's Prayer. They think he's strange. We want to offer a protest.

What kind of cowards are they anyhow? You Christian parents know that your children went through grade school and then through high school marked as being queer, and you made no protests. Christians know there's no use to make a protest. Of course, they think we're queer, but queer means different that's all, and of course we're different, and woe be to the Christian that isn't.

And the moment that it can't be said of a Christian, he's different, he has disgraced his testimony and sold out his faith, for it is the mark of a church that they are people who are different. They think it's strange that you're different, but says Peter, don't put in a protest, don't hire a lawyer, don't memorialize anybody, don't approach the school board.

They who shall give account to God. There's his answer. Those who think we're strange and insist upon saying so with much laughter, they shall give an account to God and not to the Christian. God never made me a judge over anybody, and he never made you a judge. He made us witnesses, but not judges.

So never call your critics to account. Explain to them if you can, but if they will not accept the explanation, then fall silent. Silence is the most eloquent answer to some critics, and we have the example of our Savior for that. When they were questioning Him and abusing Him, He was silent.

And he said, why don't you speak to me? Don't you know that I have the power to release you or the power to crucify you? Then He spoke and said, you don't have any power at all except God gives it to you. It's in my Father's hands, and then fell silent.

And the silence of the Lamb has been one of the wonders of the centuries, that the Lamb was silent. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb He was without speech. Never try to call your critics to account. Silence is always and often the best. And he says in the first verse that this example we take from Christ. For as much as Christ has suffered, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

So we have Jesus as our example. Sure, we're different. If we aren't different, woe be to us in the day of Christ. Of course we're strange. And being strange, they will think us strange. But being strange only because you're morally cleaner than somebody else isn't anything to disgrace you.

Some of you men work. My good friend sitting back there told me some years ago about having to go to banquets with his business, and he drank water or grape juice, and they drank liquor. Was he strange? Sure, he was strange. But if one of them gets in trouble, who will they come to for prayer? To the strange fellow who wouldn't drink liquor.

Some of you work in offices where yours is the only clean mouth in the office. The rest of them are borderline dirty or dirty outright. And you've got the only clean mouth. And they ride you by telling off-color jokes, trying to stir you. And you don't laugh, and you don't go along with it. You're strange. Sure, you're strange.

A clean thing is always strange when cast down in the middle of dirty things. A clean mouth is always a strange mouth when surrounded by unclean mouths. A pure heart is strange when surrounded by impure hearts. An honest man is strange when in the midst of dishonest men. But it's a good kind of strangeness.

And the Church of Jesus Christ should be strange, queer, different, because she is clean-mouthed, she is honest, and she is pure-minded. But they think it's strange that you'll run not with them, but don't you try to ride them for it now, because they're going to give account to God who's able to judge the quick and the dead, and not to you. You're a witness but not a judge.

And Christ is your example. He suffered and kept still. You and I can afford to do it.

And really, I don't think it's too serious, myself. I don't think it's too serious. I've been thought strange, but you let a sinner go long enough and far enough and he'll become strange the other way.

When a man becomes a raper or a murderer or a bank robber, he's strange too. And the world puts him in jail as being queer and different and strange and dangerous. But he's different over on the other side.

The Christian is different on the righteous side.

Hello, stranger. God bless you.

And the stranger you are, the better you will be. We Christians who have fled for refuge to Jesus, have identified ourselves with Jesus, and have received life from Jesus, today we celebrate in the Lord's Supper.