

1Peter 4:4-6

Two Paths, Two Destinies

The pagan mindset in New Testament times, and for many people today, was that this short life, spent in this material world, is all there is to look forward to in life.

They had very little concept of life after death—this was all there was to live for.

So, if you died young, or if you died without experiencing many pleasures in life, you were ripped off.

So, they indulged passionately in anything that could provide them even a few fleeting moments of pleasure, and they clung tenaciously to everything in this world that could provide some sense of security, because this was all they had to hope for in life.

This is the same mindset most people in our western culture have today.

Therefore, they found it difficult to understand Christians who were so willing to let go of all the things of this world for the sake of Christ, in their confident hope that the best was yet to come on the other side of the grave.

They couldn't understand why Christians would be willing, even joyful, to suffer persecution and hardship for the sake of the gospel in this short life.

This is why Peter wrote in **1Peter 3:15**, *"...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you..."*

1Peter 4:4, *"In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you."*

Let's break verse four down phrase by phrase:

"In regard to these..."

Referring back to the description in verse 3 of the things the Gentiles pursue, indulge in or believe instead of God.

The things they think will give them purpose and happiness in life; or things they believe will give them safety and security.

The words used in verse three to describe the pursuit of the Gentiles in search of life apart from God, are: **Lewdness**, meaning unrestrained sex or violence;

Lusts, meaning indulging in whatever you have a carnal craving for, thinking that might make you happy and fulfilled. "If it feels good then do it."

Drunkenness, excessive drinking; maybe just one more drink will make me happy.

Revelries, excessive feasting to try to make an occasion meaningful and fulfilling.

Drinking Parties, these are parties fueled by alcohol, so that there is no restraint against the indulgence of all kinds of lustful pursuit. Vainly trying to find satisfying life and purpose without God.

All of these describe excessive indulgence in what God created for His creatures to enjoy, but without God they don't satisfy.

These good things with God missing from our lives is a bit like making a special Christmas dinner, or planning a big birthday party, but nobody shows up, and so you eat by yourself, and try to enjoy the party by yourself—but it is absolutely empty and unfulfilling.

We were meant to experience and enjoy life together with God. But when He is missing it is impossible for us to find true fulfillment and satisfaction without Him. All the food, drinks, music, and games are empty.

And there was one other item listed in verse three; "**Abominable Idolatries**," meaning substituting created things in place of God Himself—looking to other sources for wisdom, direction, protection, provision or security in life rather than trusting in God.

We all know that trusting in money to meet our needs and to give us security instead of trusting God is a big form of idolatry.

And looking to fortune tellers, horoscopes, Ouija boards, psychics, or secular counsellors to get direction for life is abominable idolatry.

Or turning to false religions of good works as a way to make yourself acceptable to God is abominable idolatry.

But there is another form of abominable idolatry that has for many become a major substitute for trusting God.

The whole system of sacrificing our economy and our freedom and naively trusting Covid protocols, because that is what the doctor has told us we must do to be safe, is taking on a very religious and superstitious nature which has, for many people, replaced trust in God, and has pushed the church out of their lives.

For many, following Covid protocols has become abominable idolatry—it is their new religion. The doctor has become their guru, and the protocols their superstitious practice.

Does that sound farfetched? Consider this scenario that has been encountered many times by pioneering missionaries going into pagan lands:

Some of our top medical officials have become like a pagan witch doctor who tells all the people of his village that if they will sacrifice their animals that they depend on for sustenance, and hang a fetish on a string around their necks, this will protect them from evil spirits that are making people sick.

And without checking it out to see if it is true, the people of the village religiously follow what they are told by the witch doctor—even when over time it doesn't seem to be working, they continue to have blind faith in everything the witch doctor tells them to do.

And they willingly give up whatever other religious loyalty they may have had in exchange for believing the new doctrine of the witch doctor, and carefully following everything the doctor tells them to do.

That is a form of “abominable idolatry”—the doctor has taken the place of God, and the authority of the doctor's words have trumped the authority of the Bible, and they have trumped modern medical science.

This is very much of a spiritual issue that we are dealing with.

1Peter 4:4, “In regard to these [excesses and abominable idolatry], they think it strange that you do not run with them...”

The people of this world, those who are not citizens of heaven, like us, they think it strange that we Christians aren't agreeing with their world-view, we aren't just going along with them in the things they are pursuing.

We march to a different drumbeat; we listen to a different voice and follow a different Master.

They can't mentally process or make sense of it. Why don't we see things the way they do?

Their choices seem so right to them. We need to trust in the wisdom and insight of God who says:

Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Many of you got saved later in life when you had established many close non-Christian friendships, or you may have been saved out of a non-Christian family.

When you became a Christian and the Lord began changing your life, and your interests, and your pursuits many of your unbelieving friends and family thought you had lost your mind, and they gave you a hard time about changing paths and no longer running with them in their way of seeking life.

“... they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you [Amplified – they abuse you].”

The flood of dissipation is similar to what Jesus called the broad way that leads to destruction.

Matthew 7:13-14, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Jesus is the narrow gate. He describes Himself as a narrow gate, because He says that He is the only way that you can enter into eternal and abundant life.

When you see the majority of people all travelling down the same path, that is a likely sign that the path they are going down leads to destruction.

Whether that broad way that they are all running down is the pursuit riches and financial security, or blindly trusting the WHO protocols to keep them safe, or looking for life and meaning in drunkenness, drugs, addiction to social media, or uncommitted sex, there is one thing in common, these heavily-travelled paths all lead to destruction.

In contrast, the way of trusting and following Jesus, is narrow, it is difficult because it is opposed by the majority, and therefore the few who walk that way are often persecuted for doing so.

But the Bible says, it leads to life—abundant life.

Here is a word to the wise: If God has put you on a lonely path that few people support you on, but those who do support you are godly followers of Christ, then rejoice, you are probably on the right path.

But if the majority in this kingdom of darkness are travelling right along with you, beware, you are probably on the wrong road and should look for the nearest exit.

Many times we have wondered, why the Lord is waiting so long to come and take us home. It is natural for believers to long to go home where we belong, but we need to remind ourselves that there is a reason why the Lord hasn't taken us home yet.

Remember that we are on a mission and the work isn't done yet.

Look around at all your unsaved friends, neighbors and loved ones. Remember that their only hope of escape is to put their faith in Jesus.

And our mission is to bring Jesus to them, and introduce them to the one who can save them.

What will happen to them when the Lord takes us away? What will happen to them when they die?

1Peter 4:5, answers that question, ***“They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”***

The statement, *“They will give and account to Him...”* means the people of this world, who are not followers of Jesus, will one day have to answer to God their Creator, for the words and actions of their lives on earth.

Matthew 12:36-37, *“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words [i.e., words expressing faith] you will be justified, and by your words [i.e., words betraying unbelief] you will be condemned.”*

Acts 17:31, “[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

You may think that some people are getting away with their wickedness. But God’s word assures us that every sin ever committed, by every person who has ever lived, will be punished. God’s perfect righteous justice demands this.

Either the unbeliever will have to bear the punishment themselves forever, or we can accept Jesus Christ as our substitute, believing that He has already suffered the punishment on behalf of all those who will put their trust in Him and receive Jesus as their Savior.

And the text says that God is **ready to judge**. The time of His judgment could take place at any time—He is ready.

The question is, are you ready to face this judge, because, ready or not, one day you will stand before Him.

And God is **ready to judge the living and the dead**, meaning those who are still alive and those who have already died—every human being who has ever existed, without exception, will be required to give an account of their lives to their Creator.

Hebrews 9:27, “...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”.

The pagans in Peter’s day were deceived into believing that when you died your life was over, so any penalty that you would have to pay for sin would be during your lifetime.

So if you lived a luxurious and comfortable life and died quickly, then you had escaped judgment.

This was much of the reason they would reject Christianity, because the Christians lived simply, they gave away their wealth, and they were willing to suffer hardship for the sake of their gospel.

But the Christians did so knowing that this world is not their home, this life is not their reward, it is our assignment—they lived with the hope that the best things in life would begin when Jesus returned to take them home.

God teaches us that those who have already died have not escaped the judgment. Their bodies will be raised from the dead and will be brought to stand on trial before God their judge.

Revelation 20:11-15, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. [This describes the time, after the Millennial Kingdom of God’s destruction of the first, fallen heaven and earth before creating a new heaven and earth.] **And there was found no place for them.**

¹² **And I saw the dead** [these are all the unbelievers from all of human history who were not earlier raised to live with Christ in the resurrection], **small and great, standing before God** [they are standing because they have now been raised from the dead to face judgment], **and books were opened. And**

another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead [They are still called “dead” because they are totally and permanently disconnected from God] **were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.**

¹³ **The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death** [referring to the graves on land] **and Hades** [referring to hell where the souls of the dead exist in a disembodied state waiting for judgment] **delivered up the dead who were in them. And they** [the dead souls and bodies, resurrected and reunited] **were judged, each one according to his works.**

¹⁴ **Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This** [the lake of fire] **is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

That Book of Life is the register of all believers in Jesus Christ, who by faith have become children of God and citizens of heaven.

Anyone whose name is not written in that Book of Life will be forever separated from God and from all of His goodness, in a place called the lake of fire. To be cast into the lake of fire is called the second death.

These verses rule out any form of universalism, in which all are saved. It gives no opportunity for a second chance after you die.

Just as a second and higher life exists for the believers who are walking on the narrow and difficult way today, a second and deeper separation from God awaits the wicked who are running down the broad way that leads to destruction.

If you are born twice you will only die once then live forever. But if you are only born once, you will die twice and be forever cut off from any of the goodness of God.

Therefore, you must be born again.

1Peter 4:6, “For this reason [because there is a day of judgment coming] **the gospel was preached also to those who are dead** [who are now dead—they were alive when the gospel was preached to them, but now they are dead], **that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”**

Peter is reassuring believers who are looking at the difficult lives of fellow believers who suffered much in this life and now they have died.

The wording of the verse implies that perhaps they were put to death for their faith—they were judged according to men in the flesh.

And yet their persecutors are continuing to enjoy a peaceful and comfortable life.

Was it worth it to believe in the gospel?

Peter says, one of the main reasons we preach the gospel is because the greatest benefit of believing the gospel is experienced after we die.

And the greatest consequence and tragedy of rejecting the gospel is also experienced after we die.

Because they believed the gospel that was preached to them, though the narrow path they followed Jesus on in this life was difficult, they will never face God's judgment but instead, after death they go home to live according to God's promise in the spirit, meaning with God, in the Kingdom of God, where there is fulness of joy forevermore.

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