

It is a widely known fact that a chicken with a severed head can still run, but a can the severed head of a rattlesnake still bite?

Jeremy Sutcliffe, a 40-year-old Texas native, found out the hard way. He and his wife, Jennifer, were outside doing yard work on the morning of May 27, 2018, when his wife discovered a four-foot-long, dirt-colored rattlesnake in their garden. She screamed, and her husband left his lawn mower and ran to her, grabbing a shovel and lopping off the rattlesnake's head with a single swing.

After about 10 minutes, her husband tried to dispose of the snake's severed head, Ms. Sutcliffe, said in an interview. When he reached down, the snake — a Western diamondback — sank its fangs into his hand and held on for about 30 seconds.

"Finally, he got the snake head pulled off," said Ms. Sutcliffe, who is a nurse. "I called 9-1-1 and just started driving because I didn't know where to go exactly, what hospital carries anti-venom."

As she drove, her husband started having seizures and fading in and out of consciousness, she said. After transferring him to an ambulance, the authorities called a helicopter to take him to a hospital in Corpus Christi, Tex., about 40 miles away that carried anti-venom.

By the time Jeremy Sutcliffe reached the hospital, his right hand — its middle and ring fingers punctured by the snake's venomous fangs — had swelled and was covered in dark blisters. The doctors told Ms. Sutcliffe that her husband was in septic shock and suffering from internal bleeding and low blood pressure.

Eventually, even with 26 doses of anti-venom in his body (the average treatment is between two and four), the doctors had to put him in a medically induced coma.

Four days later, on May 31, Jeremy Sutcliffe woke up, clueless about how he had wound up in a hospital bed. Later in the week, when his memory of the attack returned, he said he wished he could go back in time and do things differently.

The Bible tells us, that as believers, we have been crucified with Christ and sin is no longer our master. We are no longer under the power of sin – the control of sin, we are no longer dominated by it – we are told that sin is dead to us; however, just like the severed head of a rattlesnake, sin can still strike and harm us if we don't take it seriously.

We have made it to **1 Peter Chapter 4**, where Peter continues with the theme of suffering – the same theme he started with in his letter to the churches in Asia Minor and the same theme he will finish with. If you remember, Peter is writing to believers who are suffering from severe persecution – it’s as real as it gets, and they are trying to live holy lives and godly lives in the midst of a fallen and sinful and broken and hostile world. Suffering is the theme in this letter because that is their reality. They are suffering.

Now, last week we considered the suffering that Christ endured on our behalf – the suffering that ultimately led to His death on the cross, and it prompts a question that drives my message for this morning. If we know that Jesus suffered and went to the cross because of sin – and I’m talking about your sin and my sin just to make it a little more personal – **if we know Jesus went to the cross because of our sin, how then can we in good conscience continue to live in it. How can we continue to walk in sin – how can we continue in a lifestyle of sin knowing that Jesus had to suffer and die because of it? How can you and I live in sin if we know our sin killed Jesus?**

That’s the question, and if my question seems harsh, I’m sorry, but it’s the truth and it’s something to think about and it should have an impact in how seriously we see our sin and also how we are to deal with it. That’s what we are going to talk about this morning. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 Peter Chapter 4**, and we will begin with **verse 1**.

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

Let’s stop there. This passage begins with the word “**therefore**” which we know from past messages is a word that serves as a connection to the previous passages – and in this case the previous discussion was about the suffering and death of Christ. If you recall from last week, in summary, Peter told us in **Chapter 3:18**,

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.

That is the gospel in a nutshell – Christ suffered and died for us – the just for the unjust, the righteous for the unrighteous, the holy for the unholy, to bring us into a right standing, a right relationship with God, and in light of this simple gospel truth, in light of everything Peter said about Christ, in light of our relationship with the Lord, Peter tells us to arm ourselves like soldiers with the same attitude and the

same way of thinking that Jesus had about sin so that we might experience victory over it like Him. Now, that might be confusing because Jesus never sinned, and that's true, but as the writer of Hebrews has told us, Jesus was in all points tempted with sin just like each of us – He just never gave in to it.

As believers, our life is in Christ, we are a new creation in Him, but Peter recognized that we are in an everyday battle with our old sinful nature – an old sinful nature that is dead, but just like that rattlesnake head, even though it is severed, it can still give a painful and devastating strike, so like a soldier, we need to arm ourselves with the right attitude and take this battle against sin seriously. We can't play around with it.

I believe it was Ravi Zaccharias who once said, *“If you tolerate sin in your life, that sin will not only take you farther than you wanted to go, it will keep you longer than you wanted to stay and it will cost you more than you thought you'd pay.”*

Boy how true that is! When it comes to sin, don't be surprised if you reap much, much more than you sow, and it will negatively impact virtually every aspect of your life. Walking in sin will damage your *family*, it will damage your *faith*, and it will damage your *future*. This is not a game, we are in a battle against sin, and as believers, we need to bury sin like a severed rattlesnake head – we need to get serious about sin, call it out for what it truly is, cease from it, and strive to do the complete opposite by doing what is right and good. That's what Peter is telling us, but he's got more to say about it. Let's look at **verses 2-3**,

²so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

Peter is quite blunt in this passage as he gives us an example, a description of the old way of life, a lifestyle of sin – involving unrestrained sex and sensuality, drugs and booze, wild parties, and even idolatry. I guess when it comes to sin, the times have changed, but the craziness still remains the same, and Peter tells these believers, *“You used to do that, that used to be you as an unbeliever, but that lifestyle of sin should be out of our system.”* It's in the past, so leave it there. They had spent enough time living like the world – now they must get serious about their Christian walk and their attitude toward sin.

Warren Wiersbe said that he and a friend met at a restaurant to have lunch. It was one of those places where the lights are low, and you need a miner's helmet to find your table. He said, "We had been seated several minutes before we started looking at the menu, and I remarked that I was amazed how easily I could read it. 'Yes,' said my friend, 'it doesn't take us long to get accustomed to the darkness.'"

It is so true. If we are not careful, it is easy for Christians to get accustomed to sin, maybe even calling it something else to justify the behavior, and instead of having an attitude that hates and opposes sin as Jesus did, we gradually become used to it, we make excuses for it, and it becomes a way of life.

Now just a word of caution before we move on. You may look at that list and say to yourself – *"Well, I don't do any of that. I'm not a party animal like those other people."* I'm glad you don't do that, but be careful. Don't become self-righteous and think for a second that sin won't strike you if you are not careful. Self-righteousness is blinding and it will cause you to be so preoccupied with the sin of others that you overlook or even justify the sin that is in your own life. This was the glaring error with the religious leaders in Jesus day – they were self-righteousness, thinking they were right with God, when Jesus called them wicked, and filthy, and described them as snakes.

When considering these first three verses, Peter's point is really clear. The Christian life is not a cake walk, and it's not for the faint of heart. It's serious business, so serious that Jesus suffered and died because of it. We are Christian soldiers in a foreign land – remember this is not our home, and we find ourselves in a fierce battle. It's a battle against sin. It's a battle against our old sinful nature and our old way of life. It's a battle against the temptations of this world, that will strike out against us if we don't get serious about it.

A certain man wanted to sell his house in Haiti for \$2,000. Another man wanted to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the front door.

After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So, the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the single nail he still owned. Soon the smell become intolerable and house became unlivable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail.

Sin is like that single nail. *“It’s just an itty-bitty nail, it’s only a little sin – I mean, what harm can it really do?”* But before we know it, something rotten is in our lives. If we allow sin to linger, if we allow it to fester in our lives, it becomes a foothold for the enemy and it will damage your *family*, it will damage your *faith*, and it will damage your *future*. We need to be serious about our Christian walk and our attitude toward about sin, but Peter says it won’t be easy, and he explains why in **verse 4**.

In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you;

We know the readers of this letter were suffering, namely from the persecution by the Roman Empire, but some were also being ridiculed by their former friends. These believers identified with Christ, they rejected their former way of life, and now they have to endure more suffering for going against the flow.

I think we can relate to this to some degree. Our old running buddies cannot understand why we no longer do what they do. They don’t understand the change in our lives, and they want us to return to the reckless and wild lifestyle that we used to live. They think what we believe is foolishness, they think how we live our lives is strange.

“What do you mean, you don’t do that anymore?”

“So, you think you’re better than we are?”

“What’s wrong with you, have you lost your mind?”

It’s ironic that a lost person can wreck their bodies, consume all kinds of mind-altering substances and drink booze like a fish, destroy their homes, damage their relationships, and ruin their lives by running from one sin to another, but let that person give their life to Christ and people will think they have gone crazy. Now that’s really strange.

This week I read a quote from a person I have not heard about in years – Vincent Damon Furnier, otherwise known as Alice Cooper. Yes, that Alice Cooper, the godfather of shock rock music. He is described as the artist who first introduced horror imagery to rock and roll music.

Anyway, I did not know this, but apparently, Alice Cooper became a Christian some years ago, and here’s something he said:

“Drinking beer is easy. Trashing your hotel room is easy. But being a Christian, that’s a tough call. That’s real rebellion.”

I like that and he is right – living the Christian life is hard, and it’s a lot easier to get drunk and fool around than it is to go against the flow by following Christ.

When we get serious about following Christ and cease our old sinful way of life, we will find ourselves going against the flow, and our old running buddies may be surprised, they may be shocked, and Peter tells us they may even **malign** us. The Greek word for **malign** is *blasphemeō*, from which we get our word “blasphemy.” It refers to a harsh, slanderous outburst against sacred things, and that makes sense because as a believer in Christ – you are sacred, set apart, holy.

In this world, in the here and now, the unsaved may judge us, but one day, we are told that God will judge them. Look at what Peter says in **verse 5**.

but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Those who live ungodly lives will have to give an account someday. No one will escape the final judgment of God, and those who have rejected Christ – rejected His forgiveness, rejected His mercy and rejected His grace will have to give an account for every thought, every word, and every action they have ever committed. And those people who abuse believers for following Christ and rejecting their old way of life, may for a time seem to have the upper hand, but the last word will belong to God.

Now you might say, “*Well pastor, I prayed to receive Jesus as my Savior long ago – so, I’ve got fire insurance. God’s grace covers my sin, I’m forgiven, so I can live like the devil in this world because I’m going to heaven when I die.*” Well, Jesus has a word for you as well. In **Matthew 7**, beginning with **verse 21**, Jesus said,

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

You might come to church, you might have prayed your “magic prayer”, you might profess to be a Christian, you might have a bumper sticker on your car, you might wear a cross around your neck, but if you live a lifestyle of sin, if you walk in sin, if living in sin is your normal way of life and it doesn’t even phase you, then

you got some soul-searching to do. Instead of hearing Jesus say, “*Well done My good and faithful servant*” I fear you may hear “*Depart from Me I never knew you.*”

And here’s the thing – Jesus doesn’t want to say those terrible hopeless words to anyone. He does not want to tell someone “*Depart from Me I never knew you*” and for that reason, the gospel was given. Peter tells us in **verse 6**.

For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

Now, let me tell you, this is one of those verses that is open to a lot of debate and numerous interpretations – I hear as many as 20 interpretations, and like last week – I have no intention of torturing you more than my normal torture of you.

In this verse, Peter was reminding his readers of the Christians who had suffered for their faith and have *now* died, and although they had been ridiculed and persecuted by men, even harassed by old friends for being different – for going against the flow, now they are in the presence of God, and they truly live. They heard the gospel when it was preached to them, they believed it and they lived it, and now they hear the words from Jesus, “*Well done My good and faithful servant.*”

Brownlow North was great British evangelist sometime in the late 1700 to early 1800s, and he had lived a wicked life before he was saved. One evening as he entered a church where he was to preach, a stranger walked up to him in a hurried manner, and said, “Here is a letter for you of great importance, and you are requested to read before you preach tonight.”

Thinking that it might be a request for prayer, he immediately opened it, and found that it contained a detail of some of the things he had done in the past. The letter concluded with the words, “How dare you, being conscious of the truth of all above, pray and speak to the people this evening, when you are such a vile sinner.”

Brownlow North put the letter in his pocket and when it came time for him to preach; he pulled out the letter and told the people what the letter said. He then stated to the crowded congregation, “What is said in this letter is true, and it is a correct picture of the degraded sinner that I once was; and oh, how wonderful

must the grace be that could quicken and raise me up from such trespasses and sins, and make me what I appear before you tonight, a vessel of mercy, one who knows that all his past sins have been cleansed away through the atoning of the Lamb of God.”

Everything I have covered this morning assumes that there something about you that identifies you as a follower of Jesus. It assumes there is something about you makes you stand out in the crowd because you go against the flow, you are not the person you used to be, you are different, you follow Christ, and you take sin seriously – or at least you should.

Remember, your sin killed Jesus, and if you are not taking sin seriously, if your life is no different now than before you knew Christ, if you are still living in a lifestyle of sin, you are playing with a rattlesnake head, and you will get bit.

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude – Max Anders, David Walls
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible – David Brown, A.R. Fausset, Bobby Jamieson
James, 1, 2 Peter & Jude, The Randall House Bible Commentary – Robert E. Picirilli & Paul V. Harrison
Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter – R. E. Picirilli
Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter – Charles R. Swindoll
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe
Faithlife Study Bible - Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Bomar, D.
Notes on the New Testament: James to Jude – Albert Barnes
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck
Enduring Word – David Guzik