

## Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE  
EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### Doing What Is Right

#### *The Theme of Holiness in I Peter*

As one reads and re-reads I Peter, three themes, like the form of a sculpture emerges as the marble around it is gradually chipped away, three themes stand out. These three themes are hardship, hope, and holiness. To help orient you to I Peter my early sermons in this series are concerned with these themes.

Last Sunday, February 8, I spoke to the theme of hardship. I quoted these words from John Piper. Notice his use of the phrase “in the path of obedience.” “The suffering that comes [to believers] is part of the price of living where you are in obedience to the call of God. In choosing to follow Christ in the way he directs, we choose all that this path includes under his sovereign providence. Thus all suffering that comes in the path of obedience is suffering with Christ and for Christ – whether it is cancer or conflict. And it is chosen – that is, we willingly take the path of obedience where the suffering befalls us, and we do not murmur against God. We may pray – as Paul did – that the suffering be removed (**2 Cor. 12:8**); but if God wills, we embrace it in the end, as part of the cost of discipleship in the path of obedience on the way to heaven” (*Desiring God*, pp. 215-216). We may say that our hardship and suffering approximates that suffering with and for Christ envisioned in I Peter as we more and more **(1)** freely choose the path of

obedience, (2) as we search out and earnestly pursue God's call upon our lives, and (3) as we expend our lives for the salvation of others.

Now, even in this country and in these days the path of obedience can be a hard and grievous one. Sometimes life can feel like a trip around a Monopoly board. But instead of Baltic, St. Charles, Atlantic, Pennsylvania, and Boardwalk we land on Illness, Disappointment, Loss, Death, and Struggle. It is safe to say that the way of obedience had certainly turned out to be hard and grievous for those in Asia Minor who were the original recipients of Peter's letter.

And the point of this letter is to encourage them in the path of obedience. Turn to **I Peter 5:12**. Here is the purpose of this letter in the words of Peter himself, *through Silvanus, our faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!* Fred Craddock says, "Clearly I Peter was written to *encourage* the Christians of Asia Minor, to call them to confidence in the power of God, to renew hope, to help them find meaning in their sufferings, and to urge them to stay together in mutual support" (*First and Second Peter and Jude*, p. 14-15). John N. D. Kelly says, "This letter ... presents itself as a message of *encouragement* from the Apostle Peter to Christian communities in Asia Minor which are bewildered by the cruel treatment and persecution to which they are being subjected" (*The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, p. 1). "The suffering that comes [to believers] is part of the price of living where you are in obedience to the call of God" (Piper). Are you with me?

On February 1 I spoke to the theme of hope. In our difficulties the real aim of Satan is not the dissolution of our bodies but the destruction of our faith. Faith is

a hearty reliance upon the promises of God in Christ. Peter describes the life of faith, not in terms of ease, but in terms of sober-minded self-discipline. **I Peter 1:13**, *Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* But Satan would tempt you to totally abandon the good fight of faith (see Pink, *The Problem of a Suffering Christian*). He would lure you out of the path of obedience into the weeds of doubt and unbelief. I can hear him now. “You can no longer bear the burden.” “God is unfair.” “Here is the way of relief.” “Here is the way of ease.” Satan would dislodge that hope which is *the anchor of your soul* (**Heb. 6:19**). He would extinguish the flame of hope.

But Peter engenders hope through setting before his readers the glory of the precious and magnificent gospel promises that are ours. Biblical hope is always the expectation, the happy anticipation of God’s grace. It is “a patient, disciplined, confident waiting for and expectation of” the blessings promised in the gospel. According to Peter, ours is a *living hope* (**1:3**) because it is in; it is tied to the One who ever lives. As our Representative, the fortunes of Christ are our fortunes. The gospel promises of God, you see, are Yes in Jesus Christ (**II Cor. 1:20**). So as those chosen of the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sanctified by the Spirit we rejoice in the hope of the resurrection of the dead (**Acts 23:6**), the hope of the glory of God (**Rom. 5:1-2**), the hope of righteousness (**Gal. 5:5**), the hope of His calling (**Eph. 1:18-19**), the hope laid up for us in heaven (**Col. 1:5**), the hope of the gospel (**Col. 1:23**), the hope of salvation (**I Thess. 5:8**), and the hope of eternal life (**Titus 1:1-2**).

Today, I want to speak to the theme of holiness. This *living hope* reveals itself in a certain manner of life. Indeed, hope simply cannot be divorced from behavior.

The hope of the gospel animates the believer. The hope of the gospel motivates the believer. Since hope gladly anticipates the gospel blessings that will be experienced at the revelation of Christ, it enables us to live now in accordance with eternal values rather than in accordance with the values of the culture around us. Hope, then, is critical to living properly (see Davids, p. 19). The degree to which you pursue and maintain a holy life is directly related to the vitality of your hope in the promises of God in the gospel.

This brings us to the theme and overall big idea of the book. I believe the overall theme of I Peter is clearly hope. And so I've titled this entire series *Hope When Life is Hard*. And here is my big idea for the entire letter. Notice how this big idea connects with the three themes I have preached on. *The lively hope (confident expectation) of salvation (gospel promises) sustains the believer (in both faith and practical holiness) in times of suffering (trial, hardship, difficulties met with in the path of obedience)*. The lively hope of salvation sustains the believer in times of suffering. We will spend the next nine months working this idea.

We continue now with this theme of holiness. I think it is fair to say that Peter is preoccupied with practical Christianity. Beloved, Peter has neither the time nor the inclination to mess around. This guy has no interest in pie-in-the-sky faith or some kind of romanticized Christianity. The people who will hear this letter are grinding out their faith in the trenches. They are living every day in jeopardy. Christianity to them and to him is a blood and guts affair. This is all that I want you to see today. Peter is preoccupied with practical Christianity.

This preoccupation is obvious by his constant references to *behavior* (**1:15, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16**). The Greek word *anastrophe* refers to one's manner of life and

character. **I Peter 1:15-16**, *but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your **behavior**; <sup>16</sup>because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* **I Peter 1:18**, *knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile **way of life** inherited from your forefathers.* **I Peter 2:12**, *Keep your **behavior** excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.* **I Peter 3:1-2**, *In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the **behavior** of their wives, <sup>2</sup> as they observe your chaste and respectful **behavior**.* **I Peter 3:16**, *and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good **behavior** in Christ may be put to shame.*

Peter's preoccupation with practical Christianity is also obvious by his constant references to *doing what is right* (*agathopoiein*, etc.: **2:14, 15, 20; 3:6, 17; 4:19** cf. also **3:13**). **I Peter 2:14**, *or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of **those who do right**.* **I Peter 2:15**, *For such is the will of God that by **doing right** you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.* **I Peter 2:20**, *For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you **do what is right** and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.* **I Peter 3:6**, *Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you **do what is right** without being frightened by any fear.* **I Peter 3:17**, *For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for **doing what is right** rather than for doing what is wrong.* **I Peter 4:19**, *Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in **doing what is right**.*

Now Peter uses other terms as well. In **I Peter 1:17** he says, *and if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, **conduct***

*yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.* In **I Peter 2:24** he says, *and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and **live to righteousness**.* He calls it simply *doing good*. **I Peter 3:11**, *"And let him turn away from evil and **do good**; Let him seek peace and pursue it.* **I Peter 3:13**, *and who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for **what is good**?* All of these terms mean essentially the same thing. Peter is preoccupied with practical Christianity. The desire of his heart is that these folks possess a vibrant faith that is lived out day-by-day in the trenches of life.

How are we to understand what *doing right* means? For Peter, Christians are to be marked by behavior that is *according to the will of God* (2:15; 3:17; **4:2**, 6, 19; **5:2**). Christians are to be marked by behavior that is according to the *example* of Christ. **I Peter 2:21**, *for you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an **example** for you to follow in His steps.* "Christians act as they do because they model their behavior on that of Christ" (Davids, p.18). Christians are to be marked by behavior that is according to the character of God. **I Peter 1:14-16**, *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but **like the Holy One who called you**, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; <sup>16</sup> because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* Christians are to live *in obedience to the truth*. **I Peter 1:22**, *Since you have **in obedience to the truth** purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.* The truth in I Peter is the word of God. Our catechism asks, What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man (SC Q.3). Peter takes a comprehensive view of holiness; of doing what is right. In I Peter doing what is right should characterize the believer in every sphere of his life –

personally, in the society in which we live, in our homes, and within the community of faith.

Peter explains that God calls us to the pursuit of holiness in our personal lives. We are to conduct ourselves as individuals who have been given new life by the Spirit of God (1:3, 23). Peter characterizes this life as one of self-control and abstention from the unrestrained sinful desires of human nature. In 2:1 he names *malice, deceit, insincerity, envy, and slander* as some specific sins with which he is concerned.

Peter explains that God calls us to the pursuit of holiness in our relationship to non-Christians and to the larger society in which we live out our faith. **I Peter 2:12**, *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.* Peter has in mind such things as obeying the law of the land (2:13-14), submitting to masters (2:18a), and being in subjection to husbands (3:1). When Christians relate to those outside the faith, Peter's main concern is that we not give offense.

Peter explains that God calls us to the pursuit of holiness within the community of faith, the church. He will mention love, hospitality, service according to gifts, servant leadership, and humility. The reason for the stress on these virtues is obvious. They are all community-preserving virtues. This form of holiness will maintain communal solidarity. And in the face of persecution such solidarity is needed more than ever. Peter is concerned that we live godly lives in every place, with every person, and in every circumstance. Indeed, this letter is preoccupied with practical Christianity.

According to Peter what is the demeanor that accompanies such conduct? It is obvious that in Peter's mind true godliness, true holiness, true righteous behavior is characterized by a general spirit or attitude of humble submission. To him the temper or disposition of mind; the prevailing tendency of the heart of one who has been born again is one of yieldedness and deference. **I Peter 2:13**, *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority.* **I Peter 2:18**, *Servants, be **submissive** to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.* **1 Peter 3:1**, *In the same way, you wives, be **submissive** to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.* **I Peter 3:4-5**, *but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a **gentle and quiet spirit**, which is precious in the sight of God.* <sup>5</sup> *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, **being submissive** to their own husbands.* **I Peter 5:5-6**, *You younger men, likewise, be **subject** to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the **humble**.* <sup>6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.*

The genuineness of humble submission is validated in one's glad and willing obedience. **I Peter 1:2**, *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may **obey** Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.* **I Peter 1:14-15**, *as **obedient children**, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,<sup>15</sup> but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.* **I Peter 1:22**, *since you have **in obedience to the truth** purified your souls for a sincere*

*love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart. I Peter 3:6, thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear (see references to disobedience in 2:8; 3:1, 20; 4:17).*

To what end do we heed Peter's exhortation to do what is right when life is hard and we are sorely tempted to abandon the path of obedience? Righteous conduct in the face of hardship first of all glorifies God (2:12; 4:11, 16). Second, righteous conduct pleases God (2:20; 3:4, 12). Third, godly behavior commends the gospel to unbelievers (3:1, 15). Fourth, such conduct promotes a clear conscience (2:19; 3:16). Fifth, *doing what is right* reflects the beauty of the God whose children we are (1:15, 17). Sixth, such conduct reflects one's abiding astonishment at the cost of redemption (1:18). Seventh, godly conduct adorns the church (4:8-11). Eighth, such conduct marks one's growth in grace (2:2). Ninth, such conduct proves as groundless the censure of an unbelieving world (2:12; 3:16). Tenth, such conduct confirms us in our calling as Christians (1:15; 3:9). Eleventh, such conduct whets our appetite for heaven (5:10). Twelfth, such conduct strengthens the bond of fellowship with all who have ever, do now, and will suffer in the path of obedience (5:9).

I close with this gospel reminder. Why should we apply ourselves with every ounce of energy to *doing what is right*? Is it to earn heaven or to justify ourselves? Not at all. We do what Peter exhorts us to do out of gratitude for what our Savior has already done for us. All to which Peter exhorts us was perfectly manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We live as free men in thankfulness for boundless tender mercies in Christ.