

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Life of Faith and Hope (Part I: Holiness)

1 Peter 1:13-16 (685)

The first major section of Peter's letter – **1:3 – 2:10** - is about the riches, the beauty, the worthiness of that salvation set before us in the gospel. In the middle of this section Peter begins to explore how we should actually live in light of this grand vision of the grace of God in salvation. The prime indicator of this is his use of the words "behavior" in **1:15** and "conduct yourselves" in **1:17**. This sub-section dealing with Christian conduct, runs from verses 13 through 25.

I Peter 1:13-25, *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. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷ 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; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God,*

who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 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,* ²³ *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.* ²⁴ *For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off,* ²⁵ *But the word of the Lord abides forever."* *And this is the word which was preached to you.*

Not a few New Testament books have clearly defined doctrinal and practical sections. The doctrinal sections are normally characterized by indicative verbs – those that tell us what God has done. The practical sections are characterized by imperative verbs – those that express a command or exhortation applicable to us. The actual break between the two is often marked by the conjunction “therefore.” Such a break occurs in the Book of Romans, for example, at **12:1**, *I urge you **therefore**, brethren, by the mercies of God.* Such a break also occurs in **Ephesians at 4:1**, *I, **therefore**, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.* I Peter has doctrinal and practical sections as well. The familiar “therefore” in verse 13 marks this first practical section.

The imperatives of Christian living always begin with *therefore*. [I want you to see that] Peter does not begin to exhort us until he has celebrated the wonders of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. The indicative of what God had done for us *precedes* the imperative of what we are called to do for him. Without the indicative of what God does, the imperative is addressed to a helpless sinner ... the imperative becomes a commandment that crushes us or that drives us to vain and presumptuous efforts (see Clowney, *I Peter*, p. 61).

And such could easily be the effect of I Peter 1:13-25. You see this is a law passage if there ever was one. What do I mean by that? Perhaps it would be better to ask this question, "Does this passage speak peace to your soul or does it cause you a measure of discomfort?" Now, I suspect that it causes you a measure of discomfort. Why is that? Because you have not *fixed your hope completely on the revelation of Christ* even though commanded to do so (1:13). Because you have not been *holy in all your behavior* even though commanded to do so (1:15). Because you have not *conducted yourself with reverence* all your days even though commanded to do so (1:17). Because you have not always and at every moment *loved one another from the heart* even though commanded to do so (1:22).

Because that is true, this passage is a law passage. It condemns us. It accuses us. Indeed, the passage is about as law-oriented as you can get because it uncovers our own unrighteousness. It drives us to despair of ourselves and causes us to seek comfort and protection in the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ.

There are two words in Scripture – the Law and the Gospel. Now the problem for us is that we think of the law as only being contained in the Ten Commandments or in the ceremonial law. But, of course, that is not right. The law is bigger than the Ten Commandments. The law is contained any place there is a story where sinful behavior is illustrated, any place our consciences are pricked by the Spirit of God as we read the text, any place there is a command or an imperative. Because that is true there is just as much law in the New Testament as there is in the Old. In some places the law is easier to see than it is in others. Nowhere is the law more easily seen than here in I Peter; in this section so loaded with imperatives - *fix your hope, 1:13; be holy, 1:15; conduct*

yourselves, 1:17; love one another, 1:22; long for the word, 2:2; submit yourselves, 2:13; honor all men, 2:17.

When we see the law revealed in such passages as I Peter 1:13-25 we are driven to despair; despair that comes from the realization that we shall *never* be able to satisfy the demands. It is that very despair that causes us to run to Christ. We meditate on *His* righteousness, on *His* obedience. We take our comfort not in the righteousness that comes through the law but in the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. **Philippians 3:9**, *and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.* Now, how is it that we can seek refuge in Him? We are able to seek refuge in Christ because He has obeyed the commands of God and He has done so perfectly. Christ was perfectly holy as His Father is holy (**1:16**). Christ conducted Himself in perfect reverence (**1:17**). Christ has loved His brethren with perfect sincerity and with infinite fervency (**1:22**). So is it as if the imperatives no longer apply to us? Not at all. Because Jesus has met the demands of the law for us we are now free to pursue obedience with a radical passion out of gratitude for what Christ has done for us.

This is what's going on here in verses 13-25? Obviously, there are but twelve verses before you get to verse 13. But these twelve verses are so loaded with gospel truth that Peter is compelled to describe the response of grateful obedience. Having mentioned the three Christian virtues of *faith* (**1:5, 7, 9**), *hope* (**1:3**), and *love* (**1:8**) in 1-12, in 13-25 Peter describes for us what that life of real faith, hope, and love looks like. Having mentioned that we may be *distressed by various trials* (**1:6**) in 1-12, in 13-25 Peter tells us how we are to carry ourselves in times of hardship and difficulty. Having cited several attributes of God in verses

1-12 (*foreknowledge, grace, peace, mercy, power*), in 1:13-25 Peter tells us that our lives are to be a response to the perfections of God. For example, in verse 16, the primary reason we are to pursue a life of holiness is because God is holy. Having supplied an overview of the Christian life in 1-12, in 13-25 Peter describes the life of the one who has been born again (3), whose end is to receive an eternal inheritance (4), and who is kept in faith by the power of God (5). So what is the Holy Spirit teaching us in 13-25? It is simply this: the proper response to the glories of the gospel is a life of holiness (1:13-16), of reverence (1:17-19), and of brotherly love (1:22-25). This morning we focus on the first in verses 13-16.

Verse 13. *Gird your minds for action.* This is a familiar metaphor. “[It] is a picture of a man gathering up his long main garment and tucking it into his belt so as to leave his limbs free for action” (Kelly, *I Peter*, p. 65). This metaphor is probably rooted in **Exodus 12:11**, *Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste – it is the Lord’s Passover.* The Old Testament people of God were to be ready, prepared for that great journey which was the Exodus. Peter’s thoughts may have run back to the words of Jesus Himself. **Luke 12:35** (KJV), [Jesus] “*Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning.*” God calls us to be girded in our minds; mentally ready, prepared. Peter expresses this idea in **4:1**. *Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose.*

Keep sober in spirit. Again, we have a familiar phrase best understood as a further interpretation of *gird your minds for action*. **I Peter 4:7**, *be of sound judgment and sober spirit.* **I Peter 5:8**, *be of sober spirit, be on the alert.* **I Thessalonians 5:6**, *so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.* So the idea here is being mentally sharp and attentive.

Fix your hope completely. Focus your anticipation. Set your expectation. Fasten your understanding. Gather all your intellectual, volitional, and emotional powers and concentrate them *on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* In other words, on the blessings promised in the gospel. Without a doubt we are to be *abounding in the work of the Lord (I Cor. 15:58)*. If you do not have a ministry in this fellowship and are not laboring hard in it you ought to be ashamed. At the same time, it must be said that activity is not to be our primary engagement. Beloved, our most lofty engagement, our most arduous mission is the patient, disciplined, confident waiting for and expectation of the salvation that God will sovereignly bring to us. This is especially important in times of hardship. Verse 13 speaks of a “future grace.” When I put those two words together I immediately thought of John Piper’s book, *Future Grace*. I defer to him to explain what future grace means:

Referring to Romans 8:28-30 Piper says, “The end of the chain is that the justified will be *glorified*. That refers to *the (future) grace ... at the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:13)*, when he comes to give us *the unfading crown of glory (I Peter 5:4)*. We *will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of [our] Father (Matthew 13:43)*, because we will be completely *conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29)*. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there will be no death or crying or pain any more (**Revelation 21:4**). God himself will be with us; *and fullness of joy and pleasures forever more* will be ours at his right hand (**Psalms 16:11**); and we will *enter into the joy of our Master (Matthew 25:21)* ... This is the ultimate fulfillment of Romans 8:28 ... The future grace of glorification is guaranteed by the past grace of justification” (pp. 124-125).

Verse 13 is absolutely crucial for us to understand. Only as we are focused on, consumed with, fascinated by, yearning for the grace of God in the gospel of Christ can we know the power to obey (1:14). Only as we are focused on, consumed with, fascinated by, yearning for the grace of God in the gospel of Christ can we know freedom from the fleeting pleasures of sin, the power to break free from the bonds of a godless culture (1:14). Only then can we know the capacity to sincerely and fervently love the brethren (1:22). Only as we are focused on, consumed with, fascinated by, yearning for the grace of God in the gospel of Christ can we possess the motivation for radical holiness (1:15). Indeed, holiness characterizes the one whose hope is so set on the gospel.

As obedient children. We have been *born again* into a new family (1:3). We live out our faith in a household where there are new values, new principles, new expectations, and new hopes. It is a whole new sphere of existence. In the household of God the characteristic quality associated with the Father is care for His children (Ps. 103:13; Matt. 7:9-11), and the corresponding characteristic of children is obedience to our Father. In I Peter our obedience manifests itself in three ways – self-control (1:3), submission (2:13, 18; 3:1, 5; 5:5), and separation to the will and ways of our Father. This is what we have in 1:14.

Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were your in your ignorance. In this phrase Peter refers to our condition or status before we were saved. Since the Fall ignorance has been the distinguishing mark of unregenerate men and women; those void of the saving knowledge of God in Christ. **Ephesians 4:17-18**, *walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.* **Romans 1:21**, *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they*

became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. As such their behavior is governed, driven by sinful passions and desires. Peter gives a sampling, a “thumbnail sketch” (Kelly, p. 68), of what he has in mind in **4:3** – *sensuality, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.* Lost men and women are absorbed in such things, enslaved by such things. But in regeneration a new principle is implanted in the soul - so powerful and gracious that the former dominion of sin is broken. The believer now has appetites, desires, preferences, affections for Christ that never existed before. Peter’s call is to no longer conform or be pressed into the mold of that life which was ours under the dominion of sin. Don’t do that but do this.

Verses 15-16. *But like the Holy One who called you.* I prefer the translation, *as the one who called you is holy* (see **I Peter 2:9** and **5:10**). So, *as the one who called you is holy, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”* Is it that intrinsic, essential holiness of God Himself that is being demanded of us here? We reach back to the Holiness Code in the Old Testament (Lev. 17-26) to help us understand what’s going on here. **Leviticus 20:26**, *“Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”* Kelly explains, “Basically, holy means separate, marked off, the opposite of what is common or profane.”. “The Old Testament takes it for granted that God imparts holiness to whatever objects or people He appropriates to Himself. So Jerusalem is called *the holy city* (**Is. 48:2**). Zion and the Temple on it are called *holy* (**Is. 56:7; 64:10-11**). Above all Israel is holy because God has chosen it as His people and dwells in its midst (**Num. 15:40; Deut. 7:6, 26:19**) ... So Peter takes over and develops these conceptions. For him the Church is God’s holy people (**I Peter 2:9**) and its members are saints, holy by virtue of being called by God (adapted from Kelly, p. 70). According to

Peter, Christians are separated for a holy purpose – *to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us (2:9)*.

It is such separation that Peter means with the word holy ... Holiness is therefore not something we can achieve by moral effort; rather it is a separation from former culture ... The point is not that we are to make ourselves holy ... Rather, the point is that we must now conform our behavior to our new status (Achte-meier, p. 121).

Holiness, then, is appropriate based upon God's call. Holiness is also appropriate based upon God's character. "In the Old Testament, it is God Himself, in His awful majesty and perfection, who is in the authentic sense the Holy One (Is. 6:3). According to Old Testament thinking, holiness expresses the nature and will of One who reveals Himself as righteous, merciful, and loving ... The point is that "Christians should delight in imitating God, both because he is their Father and because his moral excellence is inherently beautiful and desirable" (Grudem, p. 80). So with the Psalmist we say, *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth (Ps. 73:25)*.