

A HOLY PEOPLE

1 Peter 1:13-16

October 12, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

“No one is perfect.” That is what I often hear in the form of an excuse from some who profess Christ and fail to understand the magnitude of our text this morning. Often, they look at this wondrous statement, **“You shall be holy, for I am holy,”** and interpret it in a fashion that distorts its true meaning. This is an effort either to somehow get God off the hook for their imperfect lives, for their unholiness, or to simply continue to live their lives as they want because, after all, this is an impossible command to keep, and God would not command that which is not possible for one to obey. What kind of God would that be?

The reasoning goes like this: “God could not be talking about moral purity or even ethical living in this call to holiness because it is impossible for us to attain a holiness that is like His. Therefore, He must be speaking to our holy standing with Him as it relates to our justification. That makes sense – we can be holy in that way because He is holy in His judgments of us in Christ. So this is really just a call to live lives that are set apart. That is the aspect of holiness this refers to.” Thus, there is an emphasis on one’s justification and holy standing at the expense of an ethical, sanctifying holiness.

However, this sort of thinking has within itself the seed of its own destruction for it contains the truth that the believer is to live a life that is set apart from the world without going one step further and defining what that set apart life looks like. What is different about it that sets it apart? *That is* moral and ethical and cannot be separated from the standing one has in Christ Jesus. Peter certainly understood that. What Peter commands in this text is that *the child of God act like the child of God!* It really is that simple, and any other interpretation only distorts his message and makes it more difficult than it really is. This is a call to personal holiness, a call to live a life without sin and reflect the holiness and glory and majesty of Christ on this earth.

It has been said that whenever we see the word **“therefore”** in Scripture we need to ask what it is there for. In the opening verses (1:1-12) Peter has reminded these scattered exiles of their salvation by God in Christ and the inheritance that was already theirs. This was the foundation for their joy and their hope. Because God had birthed them again to a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead and given them an incorruptible inheritance, a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, a salvation that stirred the hearts and minds of prophets and angels, **“therefore.”** **“Therefore”** serves as a transition from the doctrinal to the ethical, from the doctrine of salvation to the practice of salvation. In light of their salvation in Christ, they are to do the following things contained in the rest of the letter, things that will prove their faith is real in the midst of persecution and suffering. In this text, there are five marks that Peter gives in this passage that characterize one who is seeking to live a holy life. As we strive to maintain each of these in our life, we will grow and mature in holiness.

1. Eternal awareness (v. 13)

“Therefore, prepare 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.” While it appears that there are three commands in this verse, there is only one verb in the imperative mood. **“Prepare your minds”** and **“keep sober”** carry the force of commands and serve as participles subordinate to **“fix your hope.”** This Greek construct is important to recognize

because Peter's stress then is on this primary imperative to **"fix your hope completely."** The ESV translation captures this, "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Here we see "preparing" and "being" serves "set" or "fix."

Now that we have the Greek lesson out of the way, what is Peter's main thought in v. 13? It is that these scattered believers would have an eternal awareness about them. **"Fix your hope"** suggests that they should center their hope, fix their expectations and confidence on that which was promised to them. They were to do so **"completely,"** "unreservedly," or, as the KJV has it, "to the end." In other words, Peter is encouraging these believers to live constantly in the hope of the promises of God regardless of their circumstances on this earth. They were to live in light of eternity. This hope, this eternal awareness, is an impetus to holy living.

Specifically, their **"hope"** was to be concentrated **"on the grace to be brought to you."** Again we see the future implications suggested, though the phrase is in the present. Peter then could mean that this **"grace"** that was presently being brought to them had fuller future implications. There was an even greater store of undeserved blessings that awaited them **"at the revelation of Jesus Christ."** This is the same phrase that Peter used in v. 7 concerning the Christ's return when all of the future implications of this **"grace"** which was already present in them would be complete. That is what it is to have an eternal awareness.

Paul certainly understood what Peter suggests in these verses. As a matter of fact, Peter seems to echo Paul's thoughts as found in Romans 12:1-2. Paul spent the first eleven chapters of Romans to lay the doctrinal foundation. Chapters 12-16 provide the imperatives, the "therefore" of living the Christian life.

Romans 12:1-2 – ¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, *by the mercies of God*, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here we see Paul's command for holy living like Peter's is to be rooted in this **"grace"** with an eye on eternity. Paul urges the Roman believers to live a holy life "by the mercies of God." While there is greater **"grace"** that awaits at the Lord's return, the believer is encouraged to live their life now in light of His return, and that by His grace and mercy.

The reason many fail to be holy is that they have forgotten what is already theirs in Christ Jesus. Their focus is on the now, be it positive or negative. If all is going well, then one tends to forget God and dependence on Him. This breeds self-confidence and pride and neglects to recognize God's grace and mercy. The opposite danger is to focus on negative circumstances which can lead to spiritual depression and despair. One leads a person to *neglect* their hope; the other leads one to *forget* their hope. However, Peter establishes the truth that hope and holiness go together. A hopeless person cannot live a holy life.

That is why we stress that Paul put on forgetting past circumstances, whether favorable or unfavorable, and pressing on towards the future when all will be accomplished in Christ:

Philippians 3:13-16 – ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a

different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

That is living with an eternal awareness.

2. Intellectual activity (v. 13)

“Prepare your minds for action.” Serving this eternal awareness is how we live in the present, beginning with engaging our minds in holy thought. This phrase, literally “gird up the loins of your mind,” speaks of the custom of the time. Men and women alike wore long robes or skirts that restricted or hindered their movement. The picture is of one tying up their robe with a belt to provide ease and freedom to move about and work. A modern equivalent is taking off one’s coat and rolling up the shirt sleeves.

Peter then used this picture of clothing to illustrate the thought life. If one is going to live a holy life then they must “gird up” or **“prepare”** their minds by removing any hindrance to holy thinking. Richard Belcher comments on this picture, “A paraphrase for our understanding might be, ‘Don’t let your mind hang loose if you expect to serve the Lord.’ An ungirded mind centers on the circumstances of the day rather than the glories of Christ. A girded mind centers on the glorious Savior and salvation, not on the cost and difficulties faced as we serve Him.”¹

So how do we **“prepare our minds?”** How do we go about keeping our minds from “hanging loose?” This requires discipline. Holiness will not become a reality without disciplined thinking. As Tom Schreiner suggests, “Thinking in a new way does not happen automatically; it requires effort, concentration, and intentionality.”² This comes positively only as we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, as we saturate our minds with Scripture. To live a holy life requires that we read God’s Word, study God’s Word, listen to God’s Word preached, memorize God’s Word, meditate on God’s Word, pray God’s Word, and apply God’s Word. We must have the mind of the psalmist, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11). This is what is required in preparing the mind.

Peter further suggests that this preparation is **“for action.”** One writer provides this vivid picture, “The Church of Jesus Christ is not a dormitory for sleeping saints but rather a barrack bulging with spiritual soldiers ready to enter the battle.”³ The believer immersed in God’s Word is prepared for action, wielding “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). They are ready to do battle in this holy war because they trust that “the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” Heb. 4:12).

It is only as one fills their mind with the Word of God that the hindrances of the world are removed. Paul wrote in Colossians 3:2, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Here Paul provides the negative side of preparing the mind, “not on the things of this earth.” I learned a little phrase early on in my computer programming education, “Garbage in, garbage out.” A computer will do exactly what is fed into it. The program is the mind of the computer, the control center. Just as a computer functions according to its mind, so to do we. Garbage in, garbage out. We must constantly guard our hearts and minds against the

¹ Richard P. Belcher, *Ministry Helps in First Peter*, 22-23.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *NAC: 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 78.

³ Wayne Detzler, *Living Words in 1 Peter*, 23; quoted by Michael Bentley, *Living for Christ in a Pagan World*, 44.

garbage of the world. This is accomplished only as we saturate ourselves in the Scriptures. It requires discipline. It is hard work. But it is a work that will pay off in the end.

3. Spiritual alertness (v. 13)

“Keep sober *in spirit*.” The general idea echoes Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” When one is intoxicated, their senses are dulled. They are unable to cogently process what is happening around them. Their reality is distorted and consequently they act rather foolish. Others can see that there is something not quite right with them.

That is why Peter commands that the believer **“keep sober.”** It is easy to become dull to the reality of God by the things of this world. The world with all of its trappings seeks to lure us into its “Vanity Fair.” When people are lulled into such drowsiness, they lose sight of Christ and their salvation and their call to holiness. Therefore, they are to **“keep sober.”** The meaning here is to be serious, to be careful, to be vigilant in living the Christian life, to possess self-control, to keep a clear head. When one is **“sober”** they are able to rightly discern the way of holiness, to recognize moral departure from the faith, to accurately assess false prophets and teaching. The **“sober”** sees clearly the seriousness of the Christian life, of walking by faith and imitating God. They are able to hear, understand, and obey God’s Word. They have the ability to focus on Christ and not on the world.⁴

So how does one **“keep sober?”** Paul says that we should not be drunk with wine, “but be filled with the Spirit.” That is spiritual sobriety. Just as the drunkard loses all sense of his surroundings, so to does the one who is filled with the Spirit. They are dulled to the things of the world and have minds that are set on things above. They are able to focus on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things” (Phil. 4:8). Just like the drunkard, others will notice that there is something different about the believer.

So Peter’s command in v. 13 is that we live in light of our eternal hope in Christ, and we do that as we fill our minds with the Word and our spirit with the Spirit of God. Word and Spirit work together! Jesus told the woman at the well, “Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24). Paul told the Romans, “Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship (Rom. 12:1).

Let go, let God not biblical Christianity. Let God be God – yes.

4. Filial obedience (vv. 14-16)

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”* As was the case in the preceding verse, there is a single, primary imperative given in these verses, **“be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.”** This command to be holy in our living is tied directly to our nature, our nature as the children of God and in our calling as His children.

John 1:11-13 – ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those

⁴ Belcher, 23.

who believe in His name,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, *but of God*.

Ephesians 1:3-6 – ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,⁴ just as He *chose us* in Him before the foundation of the world, that *we would be holy and blameless before Him*. In love⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In his excellent book, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, David Wells asks the following questions about the Christian life:

Why do some in the church wander from the core doctrines of the Bible and have to be rebuked? Why do some carry on sexual affairs as if this were a purely private matter and irrelevant to their Christian lives? Why is it that some pastors yearn for preeminence, demand attention, are authoritarians, build careers and empires, or are moneygrubbing? Why are some church members so disagreeable that they are a source of constant grief and divisions?

Here is how Wells answers these questions:

The simple answer to all these questions is that *the holiness of God is not a pressing concern*. It does not have power to wrench around the disposition of people. It is not a present reality. At most it is a doctrinal point to be agreed to, but it is not a searing reality that enters our hearts like a sword. That is why we have no compunction about engaging in sexual immorality, self-serving and obnoxious behavior, or embracing beliefs that are unorthodox, biblically speaking. It is as if, in our minds, God is off in a distant realm, utterly pure though he might be, and we are in our own realm, living our lives as we want, giving expression to some of our dark impulses whenever the urge creeps up on us. And why not? God is there and we are here... This inevitably changes the way we think about God. The God of the outside, who stands over against us in his holiness, loses his point in our lives. We find ourselves yearning for comfort, therapeutic comfort, and at the same time the self-discipline and sacrifice of a faith grounded in God's holiness have become distasteful to us. As this God, the God of the Bible, becomes remote to us, worship begins to lose its awe, his Word loses its power to compel us, obedience loses its attraction, and the church loses its moral authority. That is our situation today.⁵

5. Intentional separation (v. 14)

“Do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours in your ignorance*.”

Ephesians 4:20-24 – ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way,²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

⁵ David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*, 238-240 (italics mine).

Colossians 3:5-10 – ⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.

1 John 2:15-17 – ¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

And what does Peter say concerning these lusts? **“Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.”**

1 Peter 4:3-4 – ³ For 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. ⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*.

Worldliness is the enemy of holiness. C. J. Mahaney defines *worldliness* as “a love for this fallen world... More specifically, it is *to gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God*... It exalts our opinions above God’s truth. It elevates our desires for the things of this fallen world above God’s commands and promises.”⁶ Do you see how worldliness, as defined by Mahaney, is an enemy to the holy living Peter describes, a holiness whose very root is in the commands and promises of God. Joel Beeke wrote,

The goal of earthly worldly people is to move forward rather than upward, to live horizontally rather than vertically. They seek outward prosperity rather than holiness. They burst with selfish desires rather than heartfelt supplications. If they do not deny God, they ignore and forget Him, or else they use Him only to their selfish ends. *Worldliness... is human nature without God.*⁷

Conclusion

Follow the track of your *time, money, and affections*, and there you will find your throne.

1. How are you spending your time?
2. Where are you spending your money?
3. Who or what stokes your affection the most?

God said, **“YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”**

⁶ C. J. Mahaney, *Worldliness*, 27.

⁷ Joel Beeke, *Overcoming the World: Grace to Win the Daily Battle*, 16; quoted by Mahaney, 27.