*Holy Living*

1 Peter 1:13-16

11/6/22

This morning we enter a new section of 1 Peter. In vs. 3-12, Peter grounded us in the gospel, describing the salvation God provides and the benefits we receive from it. Now we come to the main body of the letter, stretching from 1:13-5:11. This section focuses on how we live as aliens and sojourners in the world. Every paragraph is based on one or more commands. The focus is on how we live as faithful Christians in the world. This section breaks into two parts. 1:13-2:12 gives general principles for sanctification, calling us to order our lives around the teaching of God’s word. Then, from 2:13-5:11, Peter describes what this looks like in specific relationships and responsibilities.

Our text forms a bridge between the introduction’s gospel focus and the call to holy living that follows. The connection is made clear by the word, *therefore.* That word grabs everything that has been said and connects it to what is about to be said. God’s saving work began in eternity past when He ordained the plan of salvation. Then Jesus accomplished it in history through His death and resurrection. The Spirit applies salvation to those who believe. Along the wa, God has raised up prophets and gospel ministers to announced salvation to us. He did all this to reconcile us to Himself. Therefore, Peter says, let me tell you how you ought to act.

Our text contains five commands, reminding us that, although salvation and sanctification are ultimately and decisively works of God, we are not passive in them. We must respond to and cooperate with His work of grace in us. Like the servants in Jesus’ parable of the talents, we must steward the grace we have received for His glory. These commands help us think about how we do that by providing general principles for spiritual growth. Let us consider each of these commands in turn.

First, we are commanded to prepare our minds for action. The bible teaches that we are to be intentional in the practice of our faith. Faith is more than a recognition that you are a sinner in need of the salvation Jesus provides. It includes turning away from sin to follow God. Bible often uses the word *follow* to explain what it means to believe. This is why Jesus declares in Mt. 16:24: *if anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.* The gospel is a call into relationship with God through faith in Jesus. God’s people are no longer their own. They have been purchased with Jesus’ blood. Therefore, Ro. 6 says that we are to be slaves of righteousness. The gospel calls us out of darkness, into the light of God. We are to walk as children of the light.

None of this happens by chance. Spiritual maturity comes to those who intentionally engage in their faith. Therefore, Peter commands his readers to prepare their minds for action. Notice three things here. First, the command is to prepare. When you prepare for something, you are gathering the resources and knowledge necessary to succeed in an endeavor. Second, notice what we are to prepare: our minds. We have observed before how our culture encourages us to make decisions based upon how we feel. But the Bible teaches us to make decision based upon what we *know.* We prepare our minds by filling them with God’s word. Finally, we are preparing our minds for action. The goal is transformed behavior, so that everything we think, say, and do is done for God’s glory.

The second command is similar in tone: keep sober in spirit. Some of your translations probably say *be sober-minded*, which I think is more helpful*.* Although the word sober in this context does not relate to alcohol, its use in reference to alcohol clarifies what Peter is encouraging us to be. When a person is intoxicated, their thinking is impaired, leading to irrational or foolish behavior. Sobriety keeps your mind functioning properly, increasing the likelihood of proper behavior. So, the command to be sober-minded tells us to not allow circumstances or difficulties to dictate your actions, but rather substance of your faith.

These commands remind us that there is a solemnness to our faith. That does not mean that it is cold or lifeless. The opposite is true. True joy and abiding happiness are only found in a relationship with God; but we are also dealing with things of eternal weight. Being followers of Christ makes us enemies to the world. They will attack and malign us. We are engaged in a spiritual battle. Like good soldiers, we need to be serious about our duty and prepared for the fight. So Peter tells this group of believers who were suffering for their faith to prepare their minds for action and to be sober-minded so that they can honor God in their circumstances.

The third command is to fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. On Monday, I took time to read through 1 Peter again to keep the big picture of the letter in my mind. As I read through it, I realized how important the return of Christ is to this letter. It has already been referenced in vs. 4, 5, & 7. Now it appears in vs. 13. Why is Christ’s future return so important to the message of this letter?

Peter knows that people are prone to seek instant gratification. No one enjoys suffering; there is a reason Joel Olsteen’s book *Your Best Life Now* became a best seller. We want to have our cake and eat it too. We want all the joys and pleasures of earth and all the joys and pleasures of heaven. But last week we saw how suffering precedes glory. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer in order to enter His glory. Peter’s original readers were being tested by the fires of suffering; yet they were told that their suffering would result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. They were willing to suffer short-term loss to gain eternal glory.

This command latches onto that concept. We do not fix our hope on the joys, blessings, or pleasures of this life. It is fine to enjoy them when they come our way, but they must not be where our hope lies or where our worth is found. Instead, we are to fix our hope on the future experience of God’s grace. This confronts us with the already, but not yet realities of our faith. We already are recipients of His grace if we are His children. We are saved from sin, reconciled to God, made heirs of His kingdom, and have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Yet, the full experience of all these things awaits us in the future when our faith becomes sight. Peter is saying, *do not fix you hope on the here and now, but on the future experience of God’s grace that will be brought to you when Jesus comes back to earth.* Fix your hope on that day, and you will be able to stand firm in this day. We may suffer the loss of all things in this life, but we will be more than amply repaid in eternity.

Our final two commands are linked to one another. In vs. 14 we are given a restriction; in vs. 15-16 we are given a prescription. The fourth command is a negative command, telling us what we are not supposed to do. Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance. This means that we are not to be given over to the passions that controlled us before salvation. We used to be slaves of sin, captured by Satan to do his will. Christ sets us free from that slavery. Yet this does not end our struggle with sin. Yes, we are given a new nature that is alive towards God. This changes our affections, desires, and aspirations. Yet our new nature is housed in a body of flesh that is still under the curse of sin and predisposed towards it. That creates the war Paul describes in Romans 7, as we have desires for godliness that we often fail to act on, while the sin we hate seems to always crop up. This is the struggle of the Christian life. We are to put to death the flesh and its evil desires and to walk by the Spirit. Over time, the change should be evident as we grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

There are two things we should note about our former lusts that we are to leave behind. First, we did them in ignorance. Before salvation, there were many things we did that were wrong. But as our knowledge of God and His word begins to grow, we discover the error of our former ways. I think an example of this is the immorality of our culture. Many young people are ignorant that God expects them to remain a virgin until marriage. They are ignorant of God’s standard. This does not make their behavior okay. It remains wrong, and they are rightly condemned by God for it; yet image that such a person comes to faith in Christ. As they begin to grow, they realize that their lifestyle is wrong. Now they are faced with a choice: continue to satisfy the desires of their flesh or deny those desires to obey God.

This leads into the second thing we need to notice about this command. The verse opens with the phrase *as obedient children*. In the same way a child looks to their father for approval and praise for their actions, we, as the adopted children of God, should want to do the things that please Him. The motivation for overcoming sin is not fear of retribution, but desire for approval. Because He has liberated from sin’s slavery, we want to do what pleases Him.

The negative command is followed by a positive one. If vs. 14 is concerned with what we are not supposed to do, then vs. 15 is concerned with what we should do. As we remove the sinful actions and attitudes that flowed from our former lusts, we are to replace them with actions that please God. Hence the command to be holy in all your behavior. The word *but* highlights the contrast between our former way of life and how we now live as God’s people.

The command opens by pointing us to the standard of holiness. *Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves.* What does it mean for God to be holy? Many of us have some general ideas of what holiness is, but it can be a hard concept for some to define. Many view holiness as a synonym for moral purity; and it certainly does include that. But it is more than that. Others point to the idea of consecration or being set apart. This also is an important element of holiness. Yet how do we imitate God’s *set-apartness?* Holiness runs deeper than this.

God’s holiness is different than His other attributes. When we talk about the character of God, we talk about His love, grace, justice, mercy, and so on. Each of these describe an aspect of who He is. Holiness is different because it describes how all His attributes work together to form the perfect being that He is. Holiness is His chief attribute, for it governs the use of all His other attributes. It explains how God can exercise grace, mercy, and love towards condemned sinners without violating His justice, wrath, or vengeance. It explains how His anger can be righteous and how His love never violates His truth. Holiness is the sphere within which everything else functions, making Him the infinitely perfect being that He is. This is why the angels eternally crying *Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty*.

The command is that, in the same way God is holy in all His ways, we are to be holy in all our behavior. Everything about us…every action undertaken, thought entertained, or motivation considered is to reflect the holiness of God. We have already considered back in 1:2 how the Holy Spirit sanctifies us or sets us apart from the world for the purposes of God. We have already thought about how Jesus purified us from sin by sprinkling us clean with His blood. Having been consecrated for God and cleansed from sin, we are to reflect His holiness in all that we do. Our desire is to be holy in all our behavior. In the same way all God’s characteristics and action function within the sphere of His holiness, our character and actions should reflect His holiness in all our behavior. Holiness is to be all-encompassing in our lives.

To re-enforce this command, Peter quotes Scripture. Thia phrase appears at least 3 times in the book of Leviticus. It is the theme of Leviticus. God liberated Israel from Egyptian slavery to be His special people. As such, their lives were to reflect His holiness. How much more shall we, who have been liberated from the slavery of sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ seek to reflect God’s holiness in the world?

The goal is not to be better than average. God does not tell us to make sure we look better than the people we go to church with, or to ensure our church is better than the church down the street. The standard of holiness is God, who is perfect in all that He does. We are to reflect His holiness in all our behavior. That means when people are watching, and when they are not watching; it means our conduct is not different when we are with unsaved co-workers, friends, or family and when we are with God’s people. We never turn our Christianity filter off or reduce our faith to be one facet of our life. It is to be all-encompassing. Our love for God, joy in the salvation He has provided, and freedom we enjoy because of it should produce a growing desire to know and reflect God’s holiness.

Ever other command in this letter…and there are a lot of them…is captured by this command: *like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior.* None of us perfectly meets that standard; yet the righteousness of Christ given to us covers all our deficiencies; and His death on the cross pays their penalty. His grace is greater than all our sin. Therefore, we are free to pursue His holiness for the pure joy of drawing near to God and thrill of being like our Father who is in heaven. Our goal is the let our light shine before men so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

*Father, we pray with David in Ps. 139 that you search us, O God, and know our hearts; try us and know our anxious thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the everlasting way. Do this for Your glory.*

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless and with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*