

FIRST PETER

Lesson 6

The Holy Life

1 Peter 1:13-16

When it is said that Christians should live holy lives, what does this bring to our minds? Perhaps we think of someone like John the Baptist who had long, uncut hair, wore a garment of camel's hair, a wide leather belt around the waist, and who ate locust and honey. In our society, this type of person would be an eccentric. Perhaps we think of a man sitting on a flagpole singing hymns, isolating himself from society. Perhaps we think of some hermit running around quoting Bible verses to cactus.

The idea of holiness might cause us to think of nuns or priests who wear clerical garb and live in monasteries or abbeys aloof from the real world. Still others of us might think of people living in communes, wearing gray clothes, using only hooks and eyes instead of buttons and driving around with horses and buggies. Usually our concept of holiness is perverted because of the extremes people who call themselves Christians have gone to prove that they are separated from the sinful world.

Often when the word "holy" is used people think of someone who has been "stewed in vinegar"—who is sour and so pious that he is always mouthing pious sayings and talking about religious things. These things are certainly misconceptions of what it really means to live holy lives as Christians. In this message, we hope to clear up misconceptions and state distinctly and clearly what it means for a Christian to live a holy life.

It should be pointed out that 1 Peter 1:13-16 is only a part of a unit that goes through verse 25. You will observe that 1 Peter 1:13 begins with the word "therefore" and that the first verse of the second chapter also begins with "therefore." Whenever that word appears we should ask ourselves the question, "What is it there for?"

In this section, Peter is dealing with the products of salvation—our attitudes of life, which are the result of true salvation. He gives four commands which are not so obvious in the English translations because the translators tried to make the language flow smoothly and have put in more commands than are really in the Greek text. The four are: "*fix your hope*" (1:13), "*be holy*" (1:15), "*conduct yourselves in fear*" (1:17), and "*love one another*" (1:22). True Christians, as products of the new birth, are to obey these four commands. In this lesson we will deal with only the first two commands.

HOPING FOR FUTURE GRACE MOTIVATES FOR HOLY LIVING (1:13)

"Therefore"

This word looks back to what was said in 1:1-12 where Peter said that God has chosen the Christian to salvation, set him apart to believe in Christ and sprinkled the believing sinner with Christ's blood so as to forgive him all his sins (1:1-2). Then he speaks about the Christian's spiritual birth, which brought him into an eternal inheritance which is reserved for him.

The Christian is protected by God on this earth so as to arrive at his heavenly inheritance. This inheritance is summed up in the word “salvation” which the Christian will have completely and totally at the Second Advent of Christ. It is so valuable that the Old Testament prophets prophesied of it and the angels desire to learn about it by observing Christians. The prophets had a positive attitude about a salvation which did not concern them, and the angels seek to know about this salvation which does not concern them. How much more should we Christians be interested in this salvation which does directly concern us who are living in the dispensation of grace, the gospel age!

First Peter 1:1-12 is a doctrinal section, and 1 Peter 1:13-25 is a practical section. Exhortation to holy living is based upon the theology of salvation. If we are going to have right living, then we must have right doctrine.

“gird your minds for action”

The word “gird” is not a command but a participle, indicating a fact or an event in the past, and it modifies the main verb “fix your hope.” This could be translated “having girded your minds for action” or “when you have girded your minds for action.” The thought of “girding the mind” would have great meaning to Peter’s readers. This was an oriental expression relating to how people dressed in the first century. They wore loose, long, flowing robes (togas) and when they wanted to run or fight or apply themselves in manual labor, they would pull up these robes and tuck them into their belts (girds) around their waist. They did this so they would be ready for action. Perhaps our contemporary sayings would be, “Cinch up your belts,” “Hitch up your trousers,” “Roll up your sleeves,” or “Take off your coat.”

The act of girding the mind would be very familiar to the Jewish Christians for they would relate it to the Passover in the Old Testament. As the Israelites were getting ready to leave Egypt, they were to have their loins girded, sandals on their feet and staff in hand (Ex. 12:11). They were to act quickly and decisively when it was time for them to make their exodus from Egypt. They were to be in a state of preparation for they were aliens in Egypt and were on a pilgrimage to Canaan, the Promised Land.

Now this verse relates the “girding” to the mind. It is an aorist participle in the middle voice in the Greek, and could be translated, “having gird up for ourselves once and for all our minds for action.” How does this apply? These Asian Christians, to whom Peter was writing, were aliens in this world and were on a pilgrimage through life to their heavenly Canaan, the New Jerusalem, the eternal city. As Christians they needed to prepare their minds for action in this earthly pilgrimage. They had to make a definite, once-for-all decision about the fact that they were aliens and strangers to this sinful world and were moving on to a heavenly inheritance, a spiritual country. They were to make up their minds decisively and be convinced that there was no turning back.

Christians, before we can have a fixed hope on our future salvation, we must prepare our minds. Instead of letting thoughts, purposes and decisions hang loose in this battle of life, we are to gird up our minds as energetic people set on going somewhere. Have we made up our minds that we are committed to Christ at any and every cost? Do we mean business about Christian living, or are we idle and drifting? Until we take action and make a definite decision to follow Christ, we will never fix our hope on our future salvation. We must commit to being spiritual aliens, strangers and pilgrims. We must

make mental preparation and sweep all things out of our minds that will become hindrances to us in our earthly pilgrimage to heaven.

“Keep sober in spirit”

Again, this is not a command in the Greek but a present participle, modifying the verb “fix your hope.” It could be translated “being constantly sober in spirit.” A prepared mind for Christ, a mind ready for action to please Christ, is a sober mind. The word “sober” means exactly what our English word means, “not drunk.” We are to have clear minds with all our wits about us. We are to see things as they really are, not as a drunk person who has everything distorted, everything blown out of perspective. “Being sober” is a calm and steady way of thinking which weighs and estimates things aright.

Once we have made up our minds that we are truly aliens, pilgrims and strangers to this world as Christians, then all of our lives are going to be regulated by that fact, resulting in our seeing clearly and moving calmly forward to our heavenly inheritance.

“fix your hope completely”

Now these Christians are commanded to fix their hope “completely” or “perfectly” or “without reserve” or “with no strings attached.” The literal translation of the Greek is “fix your hope to the end.” Christians are to hope in perseverance perfectly and completely right to the end, fixing their spiritual eyes on the final goal which is heaven, the spiritual inheritance and the final salvation of the soul and body (Phil. 1:6).

This is not a contingent hope, so that the Christian might say, “I will persevere and perhaps I will get to heaven; I hope I will; maybe I will!” No, this is a hope of confident assurance, and the Christian can say, “I will persevere because I have a confident assurance that I will make it to my eternal destiny in glory.” This is a fixed hope, for we have our spiritual eyes staring constantly at the goal of eternal salvation. All of our life is now to be lived in light of this future hope; this is the compass setting for our lives. We are to live our lives in relation to this future salvation which most certainly will be ours.

“on the grace to be brought to you”

The “grace” here is an obvious reference to the Christian’s final salvation when he will receive his complete and total salvation in eternity. At that time he will be free from the presence of sin forever. The words “to be brought” is a present participle in the Greek and should be translated “which is being brought to you.”

Peter says that this final grace, this total salvation, is on the way. God is in the process right now of bringing it to us. It is on the way and we shall surely receive it. God is not passive but is actively bringing our salvation to pass.

Looking at our salvation is like looking at a dinner menu. It includes justification as the entree and sanctification as the main course and glorification as the dessert. We are enjoying the first two courses, justification and sanctification, now. Glorification, the last item on the menu, will come afterwards. While we are enjoying this delicious meal, we are not worrying whether there will be dessert, even though this is the best and most

exciting part of the meal. We know that dessert is on the menu and will be brought to us as soon as we are ready for it. We do not worry because we know that our final salvation is on the way. It is the best and most exciting aspect of our salvation.

“at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The final receiving of our completed salvation will be at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ when He will judge the wicked and reward the saints. All of life is to be lived with a realization that Christ is coming back to this earth, at which time we Christians shall have our salvation, totally, completely and finally. Everything we do as Christians is to be regulated by this principle.

Since we are pilgrims and strangers we are not to get too settled down in the materialistic comforts of this world. If we live in light of Christ's return, materialism will fall by the wayside because we will have our priorities straight. If we really believe that our final salvation is near because the Second Coming is near, this ought to affect how we live, for we know it is only a matter of time before we see Christ.

HINDRANCES TO HOLY LIVING (1:14)

“As obedient children”

Literally this should be translated, “Inasmuch as you are children of obedience.” Christians are “children of obedience,” not just obedient children. They are Christians who are characterized by obedience. Every Christian is a child of obedience. Peter is speaking categorically; therefore, this is the character, nature or constitution of every true Christian. This kind of character comes through the new birth which brings us into the family of God (Eph. 5:8).

Christians are characterized by obedience because they partake of the divine nature. They obey God's commands, submit to His will, and by faith live for God. In contrast, the unsaved man is a child of wrath (Eph. 2:2-3).

As children inherit the nature of their physical parents, so a child of God is made a partaker of the divine nature which impels and motivates him to obedience (2 Pet. 1:4).

“do not be conformed to the former lusts”

Here Peter gives the negative aspect of being a child of obedience. This again is not a command but a present participle in the middle voice and should be translated “not continually and habitually conforming yourself to the former lusts.” The word “conformed” means “assuming an outward appearance patterned after some certain thing.” It is the thought of being squeezed into a mold. It refers, therefore, to accepting the patterns of the world. The “former lusts” could be translated “former passions or ambitions.” Our English word “lust” has only a sexual connotation, but the Greek term refers to drives, ambitions, passions and lusts.

Before these Asian Christians were saved, they molded themselves like plastic to the world. Whatever the world was seeking, they sought. Whatever the world was doing, they did. In their unsaved states, they were characterized as children of the world.

Now that we Christians are saved, we do not let the old world system become our pattern. At conversion, we made a break from the world. We made a commitment not to assume the habits, mannerisms, extremes of dress, speech and expressions of the world. Of course, there are superficial conformities in matters such as dress, customs and other externals not contrary to Scripture. However, this verse is talking about the deep-seated attitudes and ideas of the world. It is these we must reject. We must refuse to let the world squeeze us into its mold because we belong to God.

“I urge you therefore, 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. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:1-2).

All worldliness of Christians first takes place in the mind. We are to have transformed minds. The reason Peter says “not conforming to former lusts” is because we Christians are so prone to do this. Conformity to the world and its thinking is probably the greatest hindrance to holy living.

“which were yours in your ignorance”

Peter was writing to both Jews and Gentiles who were converted to Christ. Before conversion, they had no real concept of the true God and His laws (Acts 17:30; Eph. 5:18). They were ignorant of the gospel because they were dupes of the world system. Much of the sin committed by them was due to their ignorance of God, but they were still responsible before Him because sin condemns men whether done willfully or in ignorance.

HOLINESS OF LIFE (1 :15)

“but”

Now Peter changes to the positive side of responsibility for the child of obedience. Here is a strong contrast with the lusts, passions and ambition of their former manner of life.

“like the Holy One who called you”

Peter makes an appeal for these Asian Christians to live holy lives because God, the Holy One, called them to salvation. Peter appeals to them as members of God’s family by a divine calling to live holy lives.

Every Christian has been begotten by God and is a member of the Father’s family by divine summons. The Holy One has sovereignly, efficaciously and infallibly called every Christian to salvation. This call brings the sinner to God, and since God is holy, all those who are called must also be holy. Christians are a different people, a separated people, called by God out of this world for Himself, and they are to be like their Heavenly Father.

This should be translated “according to the Holy One who called you.” The holy life the Christian is to live is according to the norm or standard or pattern of God’s holiness. He is absolutely holy, free from all sin, perfect in every way. He is the Holy One.

Christians are not to conform themselves any longer to the desires and ambitions of the world, but are to conform themselves to a new ambition—to be God-like. There is a new desire—to be like God. If we refuse to allow the world to squeeze us into a mold, then the life of God will express itself in us and we will be holy.

“be holy yourselves also in all your behavior”

Here is the second command, “Be holy.” We Christians are commanded to be holy because the God who called us is holy. Those in the family of God must bear a family resemblance.

The first thing we should note is that the command is in the aorist tense in the Greek and could be translated, “be being holy,” or “become holy.” A better translation is to see this as an ingressive aorist that would be translated, “so you begin to become holy in every area of life.”

It is obvious that Peter has a process in view. Holiness is not an immediate, once-and-for-all transformation. Rather, it is a lifelong process. In fact, no one ever attains to complete holiness in this earthly life, but one does become progressively more God-like. Holiness, therefore, is not perfection but progression in Christ-likeness. It is not a once-and-for-all act but a continued process involving thousands of actions.

Many naive Christians think the Christian life is a Cinderella story—a fairy godmother waves her magic wand, and suddenly we are transformed with no more sin. But the problem is that when midnight comes, the whole thing falls apart. Then we wonder whether we have ever been saved at all. We must understand that the Christian life is not like Cinderella but is a war story in which true believers struggle to overcome sin every day of their lives. Through this process we will win the war, but we may lose some battles along the way.

The word “holy” in its basic form means “to set apart.” Holiness, therefore, is to be set apart from sin and unto righteousness. This involves a continual change of life and is related to progressive sanctification. A holy person is not someone who is a nice guy but someone who is struggling with sin. Holiness is not perfection but realizing that we are sinners and fighting sin in our experience. A holy person is a singleminded person. He is one who has fixed his eyes on a goal—total conformity to God—although he will reach this goal only in eternity. He has fixed his hope on Christ who is so important to him that he is not interested in anything that does not relate to Christ. A holy person is a dedicated person. He is dedicated to becoming more Christ-like in his experience as he moves through his earthly pilgrimage towards his eternal home.

Notice also that holiness is to be in “all your behavior.” Holiness is to be prevalent in every area of life. There is no such thing as a division of the sacred and the secular. Holiness is to reach into every facet of our existence—business life, home life, love life, recreational life, school life, and even our church life! We should be seeking to be Christ-like in every endeavor because God has commanded us to be holy.

There is a tremendous tension in a Christian’s life. He knows he will never be absolutely holy in this life. Yet, he realizes that God has commanded him to be holy even

as God is Holy. He also knows that God has sent the Holy Spirit to make him holy, and the Holy Spirit must do for him what he cannot do for himself. Yet, the Christian must strive for degrees of holiness in his life. God commands him to do an impossible task and then grants him the grace to begin to do it. The hand that points us to holiness is the hand which extends its grace to make us holy in degrees in this life. The flesh says, "I can't do it!" Then God steps in and says, "Let me do it. You must trust Me by faith and do the things I tell you in My Word, and I will give you power!"

Christian, the deeper we go in holiness, the more we push on in Christ-likeness, the more we will be satisfied with God and the more we will be dissatisfied with our own lives. But there is no substitute for becoming God-like, and when we experience this the more we will want to know of the Holy One. This was the experience of the Apostle Paul.

"Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14).

HEEDING THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMAND FOR HOLY LIVING (1:16)

"because it is written"

Peter quotes the Old Testament to prove that New Testament saints should be holy. This holiness of life is part of God's eternal moral law, and it is fundamental to God's children in both testaments. This is a perfect tense in the Greek and it could be literally translated, "It has been written and is still written." The holy character of God has not changed and His requirements for holiness in His people have not changed.

"YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY"

The command to live a holy life has the authority of the Old Testament Law behind it. Four times in the Book of Leviticus God said the nation of Israel was to be holy (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26). God gave this command to Israel to remind them that He had brought them out of Egypt and they were to be a distinct and separate people to Him. They were to follow no pagan gods, nor immutate heathen practices, nor pick up the attitudes and customs of the unbelieving Gentiles.

The Israelites professed to be God's people, and as His people they were to be like Him. Whatever god men may worship, they become like that god, whether it is a god made with the hands or one made with the mind (Psa. 115:8). If men worship the god of sex, money, pleasure, power or technology, they will become like the god they have made. If men worship the God of Scripture, they will become like that God.

Remember that the theme of 1 Peter is suffering. How does holiness of life relate to suffering? It is through suffering that God knocks off the rough edges of sin and sands and polishes us until He sees the reflection of Christ in us. God uses suffering to make us holy.

CONCLUSION

Is holiness living life as an “oddball,” wearing long hair, flowing robes, eating locust and honey and sitting on a flagpole? Is holiness of life wearing special clerical clothes and living in a monastery so as to be isolated from the world? Is holiness never smiling and looking like a sourpuss? Is it constantly talking in a superpious manner and mouthing religious quotes? No, biblical holiness is being separated unto God and from sin. It is being dedicated to Christ and having a heart for God. It is realizing our sin as Christians and dealing with it honestly before God. Holiness is making our lives open books before Christ and seeking to please Him in all we do. It is an internal attitude which results in the external fruit of the Spirit—love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23).

Holiness may be speaking a kind word to a spouse, cleaning up the house, seeking to treat our employees fairly and justly as businessmen. It is an attitude of joy in crisis, exercising patience towards our children. Holiness is beginning to become God-like and Christ-like.

If you are without Christ, I must warn you that you too will one day deal with the Holy One. You will come before God at that final judgment, and at that moment He will reveal to you all of your sins. His holiness will shine like ten thousand suns, and you will see every speck of your sinful life. You will beg Him for forgiveness and He will not give it to you. He will only ask whether your sins have been paid for and covered by Jesus Christ, His dear Son. In agonizing pain you will say, “I rejected the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, but now I know who He is and I want to accept Him.” Then God will say, “It is too late. Away from me, rebellious, unbelieving sinner. You shall be cast into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12).

Remember this, non-Christian, you will one day face the Holy One, for He is too pure to overlook your sins. The only way to escape the judgment of the Holy One is to believe from your heart in God’s sinless Son who died that sinners like you might have their sins forgiven and receive eternal life.