

Holy Children of a Holy Father

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[0 : 00] So 1 Peter chapter 1, and we'll pick up at verse 13. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

For it is written, be holy, because I am holy. Since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him.

[1 : 10] And so your faith and hope are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

So, folks, we're in 1 Peter again this morning. And my question to you today is, given the amazing truths of God's word, given the amazing reality of what he has done for you, given what you have to look forward to, how do we live today?

[2 : 28] Because God's word isn't only intended to encourage us to believe something, but also intended that on the basis of that belief, we will change how we behave.

There are perhaps two dangers, aren't there? On the one hand, there's a danger that we focus really hard on what people ought to do. We have a list of right behaviors and wrong behaviors. We have examples to point to. Go and behave like Daniel. Go and copy the Apostle Paul. We focus on this sort of do this, do that, definitely don't do that, and so on, and so on.

We know what ought to happen for ourselves and for everyone else, but there's a danger that we've forgotten the basis on which God calls us to this kind of behavior. That's one danger.

And then on the other hand, we're sometimes in danger of looking at what God says and smiling, and then just going and getting on with our lives. Maybe it's a comforting thought, but little more than that.

[3 : 29] But if we do that, if we just smile and move on with our lives, then it quickly becomes irrelevant, doesn't it? I mean, maybe it's interesting to know that the moon is 3,474.2 kilometers in diameter.

You may or may not be interested in that. But unless you work for NASA, it probably makes little practical difference to your life to have that information. But God's Word isn't just interesting information for a few religious types to whom it happens to be relevant.

No, we have to be clear. God's Word has radical, practical implications for each and every one of us. And these verses in 1 Peter marry these two ideas together beautifully.

It avoids both of these dangers because the reminders of what God has already done are right there, interwoven with instructions of what we ought to do.

Some of the commentators, some of the learned theologians who comment on these passages, they say, well, in the preceding verses, in the section that we looked at last week, Peter gave the reasons.

[4 : 42] And now in these verses, he turns to the ethical implications. Now, that's true to at least some extent. There is inspiring stuff in those preceding verses. If you missed last week's sermon, then go back and watch it on Facebook or listen to the audio.

Because Peter sets out the living hope into which we have received new birth. And then what follows in these verses is certainly based on that. But it isn't quite that clear cut, is it, into the reasons last week and then the implications this week.

Because even as he turns to set out these implications for behavior, he can't help himself. Peter keeps turning again and again, turning back to what God has already done. Turning to reflect on the relationship that God has established with his children.

It's wise when you're looking at God's word. It's wise to look at the connecting words. And, as a word, doesn't give you all that much.

But when you have words like therefore, since, for, because, if you have those kind of words, then the writer is establishing one thing on the basis of another.

[5 : 52] And when we focus here on verses 13 to 21 that we're considering today, we have three clear commands. Peter says, set your hope on grace. That's verse 30.

Be holy in all you do. Verse 50. Live in reverent fear. Verse 17. Three clear commands. But you see, as we read through, how each of these commands of what we are to do is firmly rooted in what God has already done.

Rooted in the relationship that he's already established with his people. You have the therefore at the start of this passage. In other words, this command to set your hope on grace, it's rooted in those preceding verses.

In that living hope into which we are reborn that we thought about last week. Then verse 14, it's as obedient children that we're called to holiness. Verse 18 and following, it's because we have been redeemed.

And redeemed at such a high price, it's because of that that we live in reverent fear. So this morning we're going to work through each of these three commands in turn. Praying that our actions might be transformed, but that they would be transformed on the basis of what God has done.

[7 : 04] Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

This letter that Peter writes, it's filled with hope, isn't it? I mean, hence the title for this series, Living Hope Far From Home. Hence last week our focus on rejoicing in living hope, verses 3 to 12.

Because the reminder in these verses of the living hope into which we have been reborn, Peter now calls for our minds to be set upon that hope. A hope for the future.

A hope in grace yet to be fully revealed. Yet to be brought when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. A hope for the future. But a future hope on which we set our minds now.

Many of the translations put the word fully with the word hope rather than the word sober that the new NIV puts it with. Set your hope fully on this grace to be revealed.

[8 : 09] Set your hope fully on this grace because there isn't anything else to hope in. There is no other source of confidence for the future. Our lives today will be different if we're fixed on what is to come in the future.

Fixed on what's to come in the future. Not such that we ignore what's happening now. Not such that we don't care about what's going on around us. But fixed on the future because we know what's coming. We know Jesus is going to win.

We know we will be raised with him. We know he will wipe away the tears from our eyes. We know we will see him face to face. We will see his glory fully displayed.

We know these things are coming and therefore we know that our present trials are not to be compared to what is yet to come. We have hope.

So how do we fill our minds with this hope? Well, far, far from the fluffy, airy-fairy idea of hope that some might be inclined to think of.

[9 : 16] This call to hope is, says Peter, in the context of minds which are alert and fully sober. This idea of alert minds here in verse 13.

The idea here is of being ready to act. Prepared for vigorous exercise. Maybe you're familiar with the idea of girding your loins.

That's kind of gathering up the long, flowing garment that people dress in and tucking it in around your waist. Why? So that it's not there hanging around your feet, getting in your way when you need to run down the road.

Or walk a long way or go into battle. Peter says, gird up the loins of your mind. Now, the picture kind of falls apart a little bit, doesn't it?

But you can see what he's getting at. Mind's prepared for action. Mind's alert. Mind's ready to do something. Just like the Israelites back in Egypt.

[10:13] They had to eat the Passover meal with their loins girded so that they were ready to go at any moment. Well, so Peter says, your mind should be. Today.

Now. So far from disconnecting us from the present, having hope set fully on future grace means being prepared for action here and now.

Alert and ready to go. It's maybe been tempting, hasn't it? Tempting this past year to disengage a little bit.

To just kind of switch off. Maybe things have felt like there's not all that much urgency, is there? Maybe many of the things that would normally have kept us on our toes.

Many of the deadlines that fill our days. Maybe those things have gone away for most of us. And it's been easy to let our minds vegetate. And switch off with some old sitcoms or whatever Netflix's latest might be.

[11:12] It's tempting, isn't it, to switch off when it doesn't feel like there's anything to stay alert for. It's tempting to retreat into the world of fiction. But Peter says, hoping for the grace which is to be revealed means having an alert mind.

This is the same idea as when Jesus warns his disciples against falling asleep, isn't it? Alert and fully sober. There's certainly no place for drunkenness in the Christian life.

Getting drunk is in many ways antithetical to having a living hope. If you live in hope, you don't need to get drunk to distract yourself from it.

People get drunk often because everything seems hopeless. But for the believer. The call is instead to set your hope on the grace that is to come.

And this is sober in the broader sense too. Not just sober as contrasted to drunkenness, but sober in the sense of restraint, moderation, deliberate action.

[12:21] Christians, we're called to be prepared to act and to do so wisely in light of the future. Secondly, Peter calls us to be holy.

This is verses 14 through 16. What's the nature of holiness? Well, on one level, you need the whole Bible to answer that question, don't you? What it is to be holy.

But we can flesh things out at least a little bit here. First, Peter expresses holiness as contrasted to conforming to the evil desires that you had when you lived in ignorance.

Peter says you can't trust your desires. Too many of the things that you want are evil. Too many of them even now are tainted by the sinful inclinations of your heart.

Jeremiah 17, 9, The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Peter says you can't trust your heart. You can't trust the world around you.

[13:25] People are living in ignorance. Our ability to reason logically is corrupted. It's damaged by the fall. Even when people say they want the best for others, that may well not be true, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Peter says do not conform. That word conform only comes up one other time in the New Testament. When Paul instructs the Romans, Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will. No, you must. You must turn away from your old ways.

You must turn away from your own inclinations. You must turn away from the ways of this world.

And instead, verse 15, see the but there in verse 15, instead of conforming to evil ideas, rather be holy in all that you do.

How are you to be holy? Well, just as he who called you is holy. Verse 16, Peter uses language from the book of Leviticus, where God sets out the kind of holiness he expects from his people, at great length.

[14 : 41] Central to the idea of holiness is being set apart. Set aside for a particular purpose. reserved from common use in order to be pure for the right purpose.

It's sort of like the idea of how people have, you know, the good china and the everyday stuff. The good plates are set aside, reserved for a particular purpose, for when the queen comes to visit, or whatever it might be.

So too, in calling people to holiness, Peter, Moses before him, God behind it all, in calling people to holiness, they're calling for us to be set apart.

The people who receive this letter are supposed to live as exiles. They're not supposed to look just like everyone else in the land around them where they're living. And neither should you and I. We should look different. Now that's not just different for the sake of it. That's not that we look at the culture around us and say, well then I shall do the exact opposite.

[15 : 47] I mean, take that to extreme and you end up in a very odd place, don't you? Now the point is not just to be set apart in the abstract, but set apart for God.

To be set apart by the means that he has set out. Leviticus, God's people have this set of laws and regulations to follow, a set of laws that make them markedly different to the people around them. So too, we are called to act in a way that is markedly different. Now Peter knows that the dietary restrictions set out in Leviticus no longer apply.

The ceremonial laws no longer apply. There is no longer a division between Jew and Gentile. That's the point of Peter's rooftop vision in Acts chapter 10. The holiness of the true Israel, who are really God's people in this New Testament era, in these last days.

The holiness to which Peter calls these exiles and calls you and me. This holiness is seen in the fruits of an obedient life. Peter repeats God's call from the book of Leviticus.

[16 : 58] Be holy because I am holy. Not based on some idea of innate human goodness. No, based on the holiness of God.

That our holiness, in some sense, mirrors God's own holiness. Ed Clowney, he says, the pattern of holy living can't be reduced to a limited number of holy actions.

It's not about specific, concrete things. Rather, God's righteous deeds flow from his holy nature. So holiness patterned on his must express transformed hearts.

On the one hand, this seems to set an impossible standard. How can we be like a holy God? But on the other hand, there's a marvelous simplicity in a holiness that's patterned on God himself.

It doesn't require an encyclopedic grasp of endless directives and prohibitions. No, this holiness flows from the heart.

[18 : 09] And its key is love. To be holy is to love the Lord our God with heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We imitate the love of grace that saved us, the love of God's compassion poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

My friends, this is, at one and the same time, a terrifyingly high standard and a marvelously simple thing.

Transformed hearts rather than specific activities. But if that seems a tall order, we'll come back to the context of this charge.

Because Peter begins verse 14 by saying, as obedient children. Now, there's an implicit call to obedience there in calling us obedient children that plays into this theme of holiness.

But there's also a fundamental truth, isn't there, in calling us obedient children. The people to whom Peter writes, and I hope you and I as well, we are children of God.

[19 : 26] The relationship exists already. When he says be holy, that's not in order to please a harsh taskmaster. No, be holy because you rejoice in the love of your Father and because you long to please him.

And like every child, there will doubtless be times when you are more enthusiastic about pleasing your parents and times when you are rather less so. But like any good father, he will forgive you when you fall short.

Like any good father, he will gather you up in his arms when you come knowing you have failed. We are called to follow in the footsteps not of some theoretical philosopher and certainly not of a brutal dictator, but we're called to follow in the footsteps.

We're called to mirror the holiness of a loving father. And moving into our third command, verse 17 picks up this same theme.

Since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. So, yes, it is absolutely true.

[20 : 37] Those who are among God's elect can say, we have God as our Father. But don't misunderstand the nature of that relationship. Don't misunderstand the character of your Father.

He is indeed absolutely loving. And he is also the perfect judge. The two are not incompatible. And it's profoundly unwise for us to forget either dimension.

Peter says, because he's an impartial judge, we ought to live out our time as foreigners in reverent fear. Or we'll be judged by God, impartially, according to the same standard.

We cannot say, we have God as our Father and do as we please, following our sinful hearts. We can't do that any more than the Jews of Jesus' day could say, we have Abraham as our Father and think that everything would be well.

Jesus warned them that he could raise up perfectly good children of Abraham from the stones of the ground, thank you very much. As Karen Jobes puts it, the pagan life that God abhors will be no less abhorred if it is lived by one who professes to be a Christian.

[21 : 50] It's still abhorrent to whoever you say you are. The Christian who has been born again of the Father must live in fact as a child of God.

Why? Well, folks, if you have no desire to live according to what pleases the Father, or if that desire to please him exists on an entirely theoretical level with no actual impact, well, what you show then is that he is not in any meaningful sense your Father at all.

On that final day of judgment, your deeds will show the reality of your faith or otherwise. And to some he will say, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. And to others, he will say, well done, good and faithful servant. So we're called to act in reverent fear, knowing that we will be judged.

Maybe that feels on some level incompatible with this loving fatherly relationship, but it shouldn't feel that way. Because there's a kind of fear that does sit perfectly naturally alongside confidence and the living hope that Peter here commends.

[23 : 16] Maybe it's helpful to think about the experience of driving a car. You can be a very confident driver. You may well be a very competent driver.

And it's good to be confident. Undue hesitation can inconvenience or even endanger other drivers. With good reason, you can be faulted on your driving test for being too reticent.

But that confidence is not incompatible with healthy fear. It's fear of somebody coming the other way that stops you foolishly overtaking in a dangerous maneuver.

It's fear of the police or fear of endangering others that prevents us driving at dangerous speed. And so on and so forth. There is a healthy fear that sits alongside wise confidence.

confidence. It's alongside hope. And so too here in the reverent fear that Peter commends. Now this reverent fear again is commended on the basis of what God has done.

[24 : 24] Peter says, given that you have been bought at such a price, given that you were bought not just with gold and silver, but bought with the precious blood of Jesus.

The blood of the lamb without blemish or defect. Given what it cost to purchase you. Why? Why on earth would you squander that? Why would you be content to throw it away given what it cost?

How could you throw that in God's face and say, I don't care what you've done. I don't care about you. I'm going to go and do what I like. How can you do that? Peter says, he was chosen before the creation of the world and revealed in these last times for your sake.

Through him you believe in God who raised him from the dead and also glorified him and so your faith and hope are in God. The way of life from which you were redeemed, verse 18.

That old way of life was completely empty, devoid of hope. The things that you thought promised life and hope, those things cannot deliver.

[25 : 33] They might shimmer. They might glitter and sparkle. But the dead wood of your idols, however much silver you've covered it over with, or the allure of the balance in your bank account, the career that promises fulfillment, the romance, the family relationships, whatever it might be, they cannot deliver what they promise.

These things are empty when they're pursued apart from a relationship with God. All of them crumble and fail when you try to make them bear a weight that they were never designed by God to carry.

All of them will let you down. None of them are fit for your faith and hope. No, the only place of safety, the only source of confidence is to have faith and hope in God.

And so Peter gives these commands. Set your hope upon grace. Be holy in all you do. live in reverent fear. And he gives these commands on the basis of this relationship.

He says, since you have a living hope, set your hope on grace. Since you are obedient children, be holy in all you do.

[26 : 48] Since you call on a father who judges, and you were bought at such a price, live in reverent fear. my friend, see what he has done for you.

See what a life he calls you to live. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you again for this living hope that you have held out to us.

Help us to live in the light of it, we pray. Help us to live in hope, to set our hope upon that grace, to live holy lives, lives of reverent fear, rejoicing in what you have done for us.

Amen.