

“A New and Different Way of Life,” Part 1
1 Peter 1:13-21
October 10, 2010
Faith Community Church

We’re continuing in our study of 1 Peter. I think it will be helpful if we begin today with a quick review of what we’ve studied so far. In the greeting to the letter, verses 1-2, Peter instructs and/or reminds his readers of their new identity. They are “elect strangers.” Elect, because they are chosen by God to be saved and sanctified, and brought into his family. Strangers, because they are aliens to the world, which is at odds with God. Yet they are *resident* aliens, dispersed as God’s people throughout the world. In verses 3-9, Peter praises God for what he has done for these Christians, as well as for all who believe. The praise also serves to teach. Peter reminds his readers of the living hope they have received as a result of their new birth. This hope is sure, and it looks forward to the inheritance they will receive as members of God’s family—an inheritance that is unlike any earthly inheritance in that it will not perish or be defiled or fade. What is this inheritance? Peter equates it with salvation of their souls, which is both a present reality and a future reality to be fully received when Christ is revealed. He reminds them that this inheritance, this hope, this salvation—is reason for joy, despite the trials they’re enduring because of Christ. These trials have a purpose: to refine them and prove their faith genuine, resulting in future glory. Then in verses 10-12, which we looked at last week, Peter reminds his readers of the privilege they enjoy as recipients of this salvation. Both the prophets and the angels longed to get a clearer picture of this salvation.

We’ve talked about how part of Peter’s purpose in writing these things is to encourage these Christians in the midst of their sufferings. As we’ve looked at these three paragraphs, we’ve seen some application implied in what he has taught. But today, as we come to verses 13-21, Peter moves from theological truth into explicit application of that truth. He moves from the indicative—saying what *is*—to the imperative—saying what *should be*. And what should be is *based* on what is. We know this from the very first word of verse 13: “**therefore.**” Peter has painted this wonderful picture of his readers’ identity and inheritance. He wraps that up in verse 12 and then moves on in verse 13 with “therefore…” do these things. “Because of all this that I’ve told you, live this way.” Let’s read our passage to see what he has to say. [READ]

Now, there are several commands Peter gives here, and we’re going to look at them. But before we do that, I want to point out a key word for understanding this passage. In the original, the word or its cognate appears three times. It’s harder to pick up on this in the English. The NASB, which I read, uses three different English words to translate this one Greek word. But I want to point them out to you. First, at the end of verse 15, the English word is “**behavior.**” Then in verse 17, it’s “**conduct yourselves.**” And in verse 18, it’s “**way of life.**” Behavior, conduct, way of life. Peter is not talking about isolated actions. “Way of life” is a comprehensive concept, which includes actions, thoughts, words; home, work, society; family, friends, strangers; sacred and secular. What’s more, the way of life Peter instructs his readers to adopt is contrasted with their former way of life, which is also the world’s way of life. He says, “Don’t live that way anymore. Instead, live this way.” And so that brings us to the key point for the day: In light of our salvation and identity in Christ, we are to live in a completely new and different way. What does this new way of life look like? As I’ve said, Peter gives several commands in this passage, as well as a couple commands in the following passage that we’ll

look at in two weeks, thus the “part 1” of the sermon title. But for today, we’re going to look at three broad commands and an additional reason for obeying these commands.

First, let’s look at verse 13. Here, the command is: **Set your hope on God’s grace.** Read verse 13 again: **“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.”** Now, as we read the verse in English, we see three commands here: prepare, keep sober, fix your hope. But the *main* command of the verse is the third one: fix your hope. The first two support or describe this third command. Let’s look at each one and how this works. He begins with the admonition to **“prepare your minds for action.”** A literal translation would be “gird up the loins of your mind.” This is an idiom. It comes from the fact that they wore robes in ancient times. And if one were going to run, or prepare to fight, or engage in some other physical activity where one’s robes would get in the way of free range of motion, men would pull up their robes and tuck them into a sash or belt around their waist. A modern idiom would be “Roll up your sleeves.” And here Peter is applying the idiom to the mind. Our minds are to be ready for action. This implies readiness, preparation. And it warns against laziness.

He goes on to say “keep sober in spirit.” This is *how* we’re to prepare our minds for action. The word can refer literally to being sober, i.e. not drunk, but has wider usage to refer to being wise and self-controlled. **“Be self-controlled”** is actually how the NIV translates it. Let’s think about being literally sober versus being literally drunk to see what Peter’s getting at. When you’re drunk, you’re distracted. You lose focus. Your perception of reality is altered. You can forget yourself. You can do things or say things that go against who you are and do damage to your goals and desires. And it’s not just alcohol. We can go to excess and be “drunk” on many things. But when we are sober, when we are self-controlled, we don’t go to excess, we don’t make rash decisions, we don’t get confused or disoriented.

Now we come to the main command, **“fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** We talked about this two weeks ago, but it’s worth saying again. Biblical hope is not simply a wish for the future. Biblical hope is confident, assured expectation of what is yet to come. It is based on the promises and character of God and on the finished work and resurrection of Christ. Back in verse 3, remember, Peter said that we have been **“born again to a living hope,”** which he then equated with our inheritance and the salvation to come. Here, he says the same thing using different words: “the grace” that will be ours when Christ comes again. In verse 3, he told us *about* the hope. Here, he tells us what to *do* with the hope. We are to set our hope on this grace. And we are to do so *completely*.

Let’s tie this all together. The way in which we fix our hope completely on the grace to come is by preparing our minds for action and by being sober-minded or self-controlled. How does this work? Sharp, ready, disciplined, self-controlled minds ward off distraction. And distraction can make us lose sight of our identity in Christ, and it can make us lose sight of what awaits us in Christ. And let’s face it: there are plenty of distractions. Probably the most pertinent distraction to Peter’s original readers was the suffering they were enduring. When we’re suffering, it’s easy to focus on the suffering. We can feel sorry for ourselves. We can question God’s goodness. We can lose perspective. But all this draws our attention away from God, from all he’s already done and is doing for us, and from the inheritance we’ll receive from him. We can also get distracted by the activities and pleasures and comforts and values and priorities of this world. We can even be distracted by the good things, God’s gifts of common grace, given for our enjoyment. Evil or good, these things can become our focus, rather than God. We can even fall into the trap of putting our hope on the things that unbelievers put their

hope in. And we know that the things like wealth or power or prestige that unbelievers put their hope in will ultimately fail—these constitute dead hope.

I said that Peter is talking about a new and different way of life. Our hope is part of that new way of life, but it also drives that new way of life. Think about it. Hope motivates actions. A person whose hope is in achieving wealth—their actions in life will be geared towards achieving that hope. A person whose hope is to live life to the fullest in a hedonistic sense—their actions in life will reflect that desire. A person whose hope is fixed on the return of Christ and what they will receive at that time—their actions will work towards being and getting ready for that day. There's a song by Carolyn Arends that talks about an elderly woman in her congregation and the lessons they learn from her. The song title is "Getting Ready for Glory." Peter wants his readers to be getting ready for glory. Jesus wants his disciples to be getting ready for glory. In Luke 12, he's talking about his return, and he says this:

³⁵ **“Be dressed in readiness, (by the way, the verb used here also means girding up your loins) and keep your lamps lit. ³⁶Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks.**

Now, this fixing our hope on Christ's return and getting ready for glory doesn't mean sitting around idly or retreating from the world. Paul warned against this in his letters to the Thessalonians. Nor is it only doing “spiritual” things, though that's certainly part of it. But getting ready involves this new and different way of life. And again, when we set our hope on what is to come, we prepare ourselves to live that kind of life in the world. We'll see in this passage and the rest of 1 Peter that Peter makes some pretty challenging ethical demands on his readers. Some of these actions and attitudes will even cause greater persecution. But if we are resolved in keeping our hope on what's ahead, it makes obedience easier.

Set your hope on God's grace. Here are some questions to ask ourselves: **Where is my hope?** Is my mind ready and sober? Or am I distracted? Am I so fixed on the return of Christ and the grace that will be given you at that time that it affects, informs, and drives your actions, thoughts, feelings, decisions, and attitudes?

Let's look at verses 14-16. Here the command is **Be holy in all you do.** As we'll see, he gives a further basis for this command, but he is still building off of the “therefore” of verse 13, so that this exhortation to holiness is also given in light of the truths of verses 1-12. In our English translation, we have two commands, one negative and one positive. But like in verse 13, the first command is subordinate to the second command, which is the main one. The first command, **“do not be conformed to the former lusts”** is part of how we are to obey the second command, **“be holy.”** Let's look at each of these.

First, let's look at lust. Though having lusts and seeking to fulfill one's lusts is seen positively by many in our day, that's not at all how the Bible speaks of lust. The word used here means an intense desire, but of its 38 occurrences in the New Testament, in only three is the desire a positive thing; all the rest are negative. Several weeks ago, in our series on the Holy Spirit, we talked about the desires of the flesh or the sinful nature as in contrast to the desires of the Spirit. What does Peter say about them here? He says they are **“former.”** That is, they were characteristic of the old way of life. They are to have no part in the new way of life we've been brought into. Furthermore, he says that we engaged these lusts **“in [our] ignorance.”** The world says throw off the old morality, the old restraints. Follow your passions, indulge yourself. And in this way, you'll be free and happy. The sad truth of the matter is that living according to our lusts is living in ignorance. It's ignorance because following our lusts has negative

consequences in this life, even if they're not immediate (let alone the consequences at the judgment). It's ignorance because there is an infinitely better way to live, that God has shown us. These lusts are also a matter of conformity. Peter says "do not be conformed" to them. This word occurs one other time in the New Testament—do you remember where? Right, Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world." We have a new identity in Christ; we have new birth. But we have to recognize that the pressure to conform to the world around us is strong. If we aren't careful, we will be squeezed into its mold. But Peter says, "No, that's not what you are called to."

Instead, Peter says, we are to "be holy... in all [our] behavior." Now, before I look at this command more in-depth, I want to pause a moment to look at what this command is grounded in. Peter began verse 14 by addressing his readers "as obedient children." Peter is referring to our status as believers here. Remember back in verse 2, Christians are chosen by God "to obey Jesus Christ." We said this primarily refers to obedience to the gospel, that is, faith. So he's saying "This is who you are, so act it out." He calls his readers "children." This relationship has also been alluded to earlier in the letter. Christians are God's elect, and he is our Father. The call to holiness is based in this familial relationship. The children are to possess and exhibit the traits of the Father. Peter is explicit about this in verses 15 and 16. He says, "but like the Holy One who has called you, be holy yourselves also." And he quotes from Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." In quoting this command, originally given to the people of Israel, Peter is again identifying Christians as God's people.

Let's look at the command itself. Holiness has two interrelated meanings. The primary meaning is that of being set apart. This is why God says he is holy. He is completely *other* in his nature and in all his attributes from anything in his creation—in quality, in perfection, in magnitude, in his very existence. Isaiah writes, "To whom will you compare God?" The implied answer is "no one." The second meaning of holiness has to do with moral purity, which also makes it a perfectly apt description for God, who is absolutely pure in his moral perfections.

How does being holy apply to us? In the same two ways. Now we cannot be *other* in our being in the same way that God is *other* in his being. However, as his children, we are called to be set apart. We are called to be *different*. The book of Leviticus—which Peter quotes—is primarily about two things: 1) God's holiness, and 2) The ceremonies and rituals and practices in which the Israelites were to engage, in *respect* of God's holiness and also in order to be *different* from the nations around them. In a similar way, though Christ has fulfilled the ritual aspects of the law, Christians are called to be *different* from the world around us, in our customs and ways and habits and practices.

We are also called to the moral purity aspect of holiness. God has revealed his holiness, his moral purity and standards in the moral elements of the Old Testament law—chief of which is the Ten Commandments. He reveals his moral character *throughout* the Old Testament—through what he says about himself and in how he acts. And he has supremely revealed his moral character in the person of Jesus Christ and his life. And so the call to holiness means that we are to take on the moral characteristics and actions of our Father, and of the Lord Jesus. As noted earlier, in verse 16 we come to the first instance of the word meaning "conduct" or "way of life," here translated "behavior." Is there a limit to this? Is it just some behavior? No—it's *all* behavior. Our holiness is not to be compartmentalized, something we Americans are so good at doing. Holiness is not just about "religion." It's about our *way of life*. Our holiness—our family resemblance to God—is to permeate every area of our lives. And note that holiness is not

merely a matter of externals. True holiness results from *inner* transformation, which is then displayed in *external* action.

Be holy in all you do. No problem; got any *real* challenges for us? Again, let me offer some penetrating questions for us to ponder as we consider application of this point. First, **Is personal holiness a priority for me?** How can I make it more of a priority? What practices am I engaging in towards growth in holiness? Is it a matter of prayer for me? Second, **Are there areas in my life where I am still living in conformity to my former lusts?** If so, we need to repent and ask God to help us put those desires of the flesh to death. We need to wage war against those tendencies. Earlier I mentioned Romans 12 as the other place where the word “conformed” appears. Paul wrote, “**And do not be conformed to this world,**”—and Paul gives an antidote: “**but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**” A huge part of being conformed to Christ’s character is having our minds renewed. We need to think differently about things, abandoning the world’s perspective in favor of God’s perspective. How are our minds renewed? You know—Scripture. That’s also how we better know God’s holy character, so we know what it is we’re shooting for. This leads to the third question: **What area of positive holiness—that is, conformity to God’s character—do I need to grow in now?**

The third major command is **Live in reverent fear of God.** Verse 17: “**If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;**” Here is the second instance of our key word, translated now as “conduct.” Peter says “**If**” you call on God. Peter doesn’t think there’s a possibility that his readers don’t do so. The grammar indicates that this condition is assumed to be true. But the “**If**” makes them think about it. Peter has already established the new relationship his readers enjoy with God as their Father. But he reminds them that although he is their Father, he is also still their Judge, and they will be held accountable to him, just as everyone is. The Father-child relationship is not a license for living however we please. Last week we talked about the great *privilege* of salvation. There is also a great *responsibility* that goes along with salvation. Namely, we are to live in obedience to the God the Father and Judge, knowing that there is accountability, and that our lives will be assessed at the judgment seat. Edmund Clowney speaks of two common errors in thinking when it comes to God’s judgment. First is to think that since Christ has died for us, there is no accountability for Christians. Second is to think that God’s judgment implies justification by works in addition to salvation by grace. He then explains:

The New Testament writers do not share the confusion of either error.... God’s final judgment will glorify his justice; he will pronounce for all the redeemed the satisfaction of Christ’s atoning death and the merit of his perfect obedience. Yet the faithfulness of the Lord’s people will also be displayed, not as the basis of their acceptance, but to show the reality of their faith in the Saviour. To those who have been unfaithful, the Lord himself will declare the folly of their hypocritical confession: ‘Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”’ God’s examination of his saints will also make evident the worthlessness of shoddy ministry. Heavenly reward will be proportionate to the faithfulness of the Lord’s redeemed stewards.

Therefore, because God is holy, because God is Father (who also disciplines his children), because God is Judge, Peter calls us to fear God, and to let that fear inform our personal conduct. He adds, “**during the time of your stay on earth.**” As several other translations make clear, this “stay” is temporary, as foreigners. Now this fear is not a terror-based fear, because he is our Father and because Christ has paid the price for us. But it is *reverent awe* in accordance with who God is. The author of Hebrews makes a similar point (12:28-29):

²⁸Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.

Question time again: **Do I fear God?** Do I hold God in reverent awe as is fitting in recognition of who he is and who I am? Have I become too familiar, too flippant in my relationship with him? And furthermore, **Does my way of life reflect this fear?** As we go about our business, do we remember our accountability and responsibility to God? Do we remember that he sees all things? There is a hymn of confession, “We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought.” One of the stanzas is, “We have not feared you as we ought, nor bowed beneath Thine awe-ful eye; Nor guarded deed and word and thought, remembering that our God was nigh. Lord, give us faith to know Thee near, and grant the grace of holy fear.” Oh, that we would be God-fearing men and women! How different our lives would look! That certainly would set us apart from a world which treats the holy God of the universe at best casually and many times with disdain and wanton disrespect. **Live in reverent fear of God.**

We come now to verses 18-21. We’ve determined that the basis for Peter’s moral teaching here is based on the truth he presented in verses 1-12. In these final verses, he gives another reason for obedience. It’s most directly linked to the last verse and its call to fear God, but certainly the reason given here can motivate us in the other commands also. The reason boils down to this: **We were redeemed at a high price so that we might live this way.** What does it mean that we were “redeemed”? Peter is using language that would be familiar to his first readers. The word was used to refer to the paying of a price to set a slave free. The price could be paid by the slave himself or by a third party. But it was usually paid to the owner through the temple treasury, with the idea that the god or goddess was buying the slave. Thus the person would be free in the eyes of his former owner and of society, but would be considered a slave of that god or goddess. That’s the Greco-Roman background, but redeeming a slave was also familiar in Jewish culture. And in fact, redemption was a key way of understanding God’s deliverance of his people in the Old Testament, in particular deliverance from foreign exile. For example, Deuteronomy 7:8b:

...the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Isaiah speaks similarly about God redeeming the people out of exile from Babylon.

Peter says Christians have been redeemed. Out of what? We could say many things, but here, Peter says in verse 18, “**from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers.**” Here’s the third occurrence of our key word. And this is actually quite an insult, because in Greek culture, the ancestral way of life was held in high regard. But Peter calls it futile, vain, useless. Because it was false and contrary to God and led to destruction. Peter’s readers not only inherited this way of life, they followed it themselves before they came to Christ. Now, today, we may not be able to relate as easily to this, especially if we were raised in Christian homes. Those of us who were not raised in Christian homes can relate, though. Even if we became Christians at a young age, there was still a “before” way of life. And although “the old ways” aren’t as venerated in our culture, still, there is an American ethos that we have inherited, and which can permeate our thinking, even if we grew up in Christian homes. And parts of that American ethos are, to be blunt, idolatrous and opposed to God—futile. And again, Peter is comparing how we used to live with how we should live now—and the two are totally different! And surely implied in Peter’s thinking is “The old ways are futile—why would you ever go back to them? Why would you ever dabble in them? You were a slave, but you’ve been redeemed!”

And how were we redeemed? Not the ordinary way. No, it was not “with perishable things like silver or gold,” but with the precious blood of Christ, the perfect sacrificial lamb. The Son of God, of infinite worth and value, poured out his blood on the Cross in order to redeem us from bondage and futility! The worth of Christ should be self-evident, but Peter goes on to describe him in verses 20-21: He and his sacrifice were destined before the foundation of the world. He appeared for our sake. Through him we have faith. God raised him and gave him glory, so that we have faith and hope in God. In the song “Here I Am to Worship,” we sing “I’ll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross.” Peter’s point is “Don’t take this redemption lightly, remember what it cost. Let that thought motivate you. Live accordingly: in reverent fear, in holiness, and in hope!” **Because we were redeemed at a high price so that we might live this way—a completely new and different way.**