

# “HOLY”

...or just a good boy?

1 Peter 1:13-25

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at **JF Believers Church**  
in **Menomonie, Wisc**  
on **March 17, 2019**

**1 Peter 1:13-25** *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children,*

*not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.*



Peter began his letter by acknowledging the trials, tribulations, testing's, and persecutions that the greater church had been suffering through. While I have every reason to believe that Peter felt compassion and sympathy for the readers, he still yet herein calls upon them to be strong. He had reminded them that Christ too had also suffered **before** them and **for** them, and that their pain did not compare to what was waiting for them eternally, not to mention the plethora of blessings they had already received in Christ **in this life!** Peter didn't exactly tell them to "suck it up" but he also wasn't coddling them or fueling their self-pity. He calls them to "...think clearly and exercise self-control"...and to "Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world."

But Peter didn't just ride rough-shot over them, but rather for the next 4 and ½ chapters...and even into the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter he wrote in follow up, he would instruct the believers there on just how to do this diligent faithfulness and what such a life was to look like practically speaking. This life they had been reborn into certainly was not a salvation from all of life's troubles and difficulties, but rather a transformation in thought, attitude, and priority as they would pass through them. As 'new creatures' we are now passing through this life with "eyes wide open."

Thus we should have a clarity and understanding that the unbelieving world does not have. And frankly, we should have an enduring spirit that surpasses someone trying to make their way through this world without Christ and the gospel understanding. This means many of us need to grow up. We have maturing to do! Certainly our salvation brings us a very real rescue from this world and from the eternal 'payment' that will come from being a part of it. But we are still ambassadors-on-assignment here and thus we live with much of the same storms it produces yet with a peace and joy in the midst of such.

It's praise worthy to see that even without the level of understanding of the gospel and salvation that we have today, the players in scripture still overwhelmingly endured such suffering. There was still such a passionate love for their God and a desire for His kingdom pursuits. Today's prosperity, material centered thinking, and self-absorbed culture has proven to be our worst enemy, while sadly such snuck in the back door because we never expected something that is so physically and emotionally pleasing could be our very destruction! One would have to wonder that if verse 13 was written to these folks,

what would Peter, *and Christ Himself*, say to **us** today? For people today are frankly so fragile and emotionally sensitive that truthfully a vast amount of us can be spiritually sidelined by a “splinter.” We are so often insulted, angered, discouraged and simply put out of the race because of minor incidental issues that we paint as epically devastating experiences! It is the full manifest of a “mountain out of a mole hill.” How can our lives even begin to compare with what they went through to be a follower of Christ?

Thus, Peter is honestly asking us herein to “man up.” It is such a needed call today for the church at large! Christ suffered beyond description for all of this and He actually expects us to follow in His footsteps! In the next chapter, Peter elaborates further on this issue by declaring “*For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.*” 1 Peter 2:21 NLT

Verse 14 calls upon us as believers to “*gird up the loins of your mind.*” Or the NLT says “*So think clearly and exercise self-control.*” This seems to be the closest thing in scripture to telling us to “face the music.” To “pull ourselves together.” The “girding up of the mind” may seem to be a strange phrase, but it would be clear to the original readers of this letter. You see, in eastern countries, people wore long, flowing robes. When they wanted to walk fast or with a minimum of hindrance, they would tie the robe up around their waist with a belt. In this way they ‘girded up their loins.’

So you see that Peter’s call herein was not merely a call to hang tough for the sake of appearance or because it was the religiously right thing to do. It had in it the idea that by doing so you are ready and prepared to move. To serve, to fight, to run, to live and love, to get ‘out there’ into the fray for God and kingdom. Peter is simply saying gather up your loose thoughts and tuck them in tightly so that you are ready to run and face the day.

But our response to the fires of life are so often wholly worldly. We still tend to run to the world for *their* answers and assistance, which essentially says they have the answer, *not* us.

The bottom line in all of this is that while the prophets and believers of old lived and died so much for us who would follow, the fact is that many of us essentially live today solely for ourselves and our comforts and our feelings. And there can be no greater insidious cancer! For when I become the center of my universe, the universe becomes so very small, empty, meaningless and depressing. We fail on this account when we refuse to yield ourselves totally to Christ as our Lord. We want salvation, but we reject surrender, Lordship, repentance and other-centeredness.

There is something in the Christian experience that requires the mind to run hard against competing ideas, emotions and persuasions. But the problem often comes from a lack of girding up – when the troubles and challenges come that require a readied mind, so often we are found wanting. Instead we tend to embrace a lifestyle of mental apathy where we soak in the latest cultural novelty with wild abandonment. Absorbing all the world’s ideas is as good for mind girding as absorbing all the McDonald’s in the world is for an athlete. We end up bloated, out of breath and pinned to the ground by those who are enemies of the Gospel and by our own lusts and emotions.

Paul spoke of this in Romans: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. And how do we do this? For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

All of this process involves what Paul calls the “dying to self” and Peter calls the “seeking after holiness.” What we will naturally seek after as true born again believers is seeing and thinking about life from God’s perspective. Such is not a perfect road, for we are still fallen creatures. But I caution you in that, as such a truth is not meant to be an “out” or an excuse! Because the scriptural reality is true rebirth brings true change...a heart that desires to be like Christ. And to allow ourselves too much latitude in this could be a mistake with eternal consequences! “*For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*” Romans 8:6

Peter does not just tell us to knock off the poor behavior and then leave us to flail about and languish in our failure. He goes on to tell us that the answer is not to click our heels together and give a snappy salute, but rather the path lies in the pursuit of holiness. In our rebirth, we now have the power and thus the ability to walk in holiness! God did His part, and now it's

up to us to do ours! It doesn't say *become* holy, or *receive* holiness, but it says **be** holy! So it stands to reason that the choice as well as the power is ours! God would never ask of us anything that we are unable to attain to. Holiness is given to us. It is our choice to walk in it or not!

What exactly is this thing "holiness?" Holiness is a characteristic, an *attribute*. It has in it the idea of a way of living...a way of being. Not a situational decision, but a lifestyle. One that seeks in all matters to be as Christ. The Christ who...facing the most incredibly daunting issue one could imagine, said "*not my will Father, but yours...*" The call to "be holy" is common throughout scripture. In fact scripture calls for us to "be holy" at least 40 times. Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible says, "The primary Old Testament word for *holiness* means 'to cut or to separate.' In the New Testament the word for holy, *hagios*, is the same root word for *saint* and *sanctified*. Therefore, *holiness* is a cutting off or separation from what is unclean, and a dedication to what is pure."

God is inherently holy. It is the very nature and embodiment of His being. Seeking such an attribute is the driving force of our diligence and dedication. It is what is to drive us onward. Yet for many of us, our reasons for being here vary greatly. The motivator may be morality, peer or family pressure, or maybe we are just your current secular community until something better comes along. But what God wants from us is *holiness*. And that is intrinsically *deep*.

In the act of seeking to be holy as He is holy, there lies something that most of us tend to despise and reject in this new 'Jesus light' age of the church in which we are living, and that is to "fear" God. Such is a common and repeated concept in scripture, though few are inclined to embrace the principle today. Thus it represents one of the biblical mandates that have been seemingly tossed out in order to make our God more gentle, palatable, and socially acceptable in what we have already pointed out is our present age of "fragile sensibilities." And yet, here it is in front of us! Verse 17 says "*...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.*"

"*...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.*" The Old King James once again uses that term "sojourn" or "sojourner." When we forget our mortality...when we forget that none of us stay very long here, we begin to grow comfortable, lazy, and distracted. Verse 17 uses the term "if"...if we call upon Him, then we are therefore bound to come under His rule of Lordship. There is no halfway...no compromise! No obedience, *no blessing*.

This idea of "sojourning" does not mean we cloister ourselves in some monastery or a cave somewhere, rejecting societal interaction and contact with people. We must seek to be missional, and evangelistically and relationally engaging, but we best be "suited up" for such a war or we will not survive it. It was when Lot stopped being a sojourner, and actually became a resident in Sodom, that he lost his way as well as his testimony, which then was followed by a famously spectacular "crash and burn." We must be in this world but not part of it. That was the prayer of Christ. (John 17:15)

**Fear?** There is of course the constant effort to 'dodge the bullet,' where we seem to be compelled to ask what this really means. As if we are thinking maybe there was something perhaps lost in the translation from the Greek that would soften the impact. Ok...what does it mean? To "fear God" means that we are to "hold Him in awe, to reverence His holiness, power, sovereignty, and wisdom." But it also quite simply and quite plainly means that we are to literally be afraid of His judgment and potential wrath!

Understanding this principle is crucial to our relationship with Him! For God longs to have a close intimate and gentle loving relationship with us...like my earthly father did me. But when I was growing up, I also never forgot that my dad had the 'power of the state' behind him...meaning the ability to discipline me in various ways which all brought me some degree of discomfort. I didn't like it, but it made for a very lucid clarity in my life. I could rebel and have the wrathful dad, or I could obey and have the fellowship of unity and peace of stability. He, like my God, always loved me in either case, but how that love was manifested in my real world was my choice. And it still is with my heavenly Father. My options seems to be a pat on the head or a slap on the head.

Verse 17 tells us that we will be judged "according to our works." This is not speaking of being judged as to my redemption...my salvation state. That is not an issue of works, but grace: HIS! This speaks of rewards and the manifest of my "grace endued salvation." Romans 2:6 reminds us that He is the one who "will render to each one according to his

deeds". This truth should cause us some pause, if not some legitimate fear! Is there any one of us that can jump to our feet on this matter and shout a hearty "Hurrah?" Are any of us that sure about our deeds?

*"...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."*

When we are fully and constantly aware of what was paid to get us out of there, we are far more likely to stay out of there. When we forget that it was the cross...the fact Jesus literally allowed himself to be brutally and horrifically murdered so we could walk free, we are on the road to ruin. Those who are able to "return to their vomit," are seemingly unaware that they give up steak and lobster to have it! It's one of Satan's greatest coops; that we would be persuaded to go back to that vile while leaving the bountiful blessings of obedience!

The price paid for your salvation is beyond human comprehension. Its value is priceless and timeless! Paid for not with temporal things, like money or material possessions, but literally with the life of the Son of God! And please note the language of the NKJ...that you were redeemed not just from sin, but moreover even from your "aimless conduct."

Some of us have apparently been redeemed from the guilt and penalty of our sin, but are still wholly under the power of our "aimless conduct." We drift from one direction to another. From job to job, church to church, boyfriend to boyfriend, from one living arrangement to the next. We don't know for sure where we have been and we certainly don't have any idea where we are going. We are "aimless." No Godly direction, goals, or calling in our lives. We're just...well...**here**. Born again today? Then you have been "redeemed from that." When will we get that through our heads? God has a plan for you, even if you don't!

How do you know that you 'get this?' Because it makes you stand in awe and worship. It makes us "marvel!" It makes us act. Yes, God saw the whole movie played out in His timeless eyes, long before He even created us. Yet He went ahead and created a species that would overwhelmingly reject Him, and then died for those same individuals who for thousands of years have refused to even acknowledge Him. One could wonder what could motivate such a decision, especially in light of His foresight into man's wickedness, stubborn hearts, and self-centered pride. But He tells us, (and His children know it to be true!) that he did so because he loves us, and longs for a relationship with us. Even if only one would come, it would have been worth it all!

Let us remember the context of this letter...a suffering people. A persecuted and hurting group of believers that now struggled with their faith and their lack of strength. Again, while Peter seemed to express some genuine compassion for these fellow believers, he never gave them a free pass. Instead he is calling them into remembrance. He is reminding them what God gave, what Jesus did, what they have because of it, and how they should live now due to such.

How I wish I could reach those of you that have so forgotten. The memory has faded and now the sorrow of a fallen world and/or your "aimless conduct" has caused you to lose sight of the road behind you and how God has been there every step. You are blinded by the mere moment of eternity that you currently stand in, and it seems like all that matters is right now, but will it 1000 years from now? Will it matter then?

*"You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth..." Verse 22*

Now herein lies the core of this issue and a lot of us aren't going to like it. "You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth..." Is Peter adding to the requirements of salvation? Absolutely not. But he is clarifying the fact that true salvation does not bring us merely a belief in the truth, it brings us an obedience to it. Jesus Himself reiterated this fact in Matthew 7:21 *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."* Ignore this nuance, and it can cost us eternity. Hell will be full of folks who believe all that we believe today! What starkly separates the possessor from the professor is **obedience**.

James put it this way, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone. It is always accompanied by "newness of life". (John Piper)