

A Pilgrims' Primer on Sanctification

1 Peter 3:8–12

The Fourteenth Sermon on First Peter

© 2014 Daniel R. Hyde

One of the reasons why I'm loving our time in 1 Peter is that we see how the pattern of Israel's life in Egypt, coming out in the exodus, going through the wilderness, and finally entering the Promised Land is a type and pattern of our lives in sin, coming out in Christ, going through this world like a wilderness, and finally entering the new heavens and new earth. And Peter focuses our minds and hearts on how we are to live between exodus from sin and entrance into heaven in this world as pilgrims. And from 2:11 all the way through to 3:12 he writes out the pilgrims' sanctification. Tonight we come to a concluding summary of sanctification.

So what is sanctification? The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers in this way: "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness" (Q&A 35). In other words, sanctification is God's work in us and through us. It is God's gracious work in us to change us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ and it is God's work through us enabling us to live righteous lives. And our passage tonight gives us a primer, that is, a Cliff's Notes summary of this gracious work of God in and through us.

1. ***Sanctification and the Church (v. 8)***
2. ***Sanctification and the World (vv. 9–12)***
3. ***Sanctification and Eternity (v. 9)***

Sanctification and the Church (v. 8)

Peter first of all speaks of *sanctification and the church*, that is, how we live transformed lives among each other as fellow pilgrims. We see this in verse 8 where he says, **Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.** Notice sanctification is not ethereal but concrete.

What's key to see here is that this list of five characteristics of sanctification is not a random, laundry list of things to do. No, it's organized in what we call a chiasm. The first and the last correspond to each other, the second and fourth correspond to each other, and then in the middle there is the heart of the list.

How are we to live as fellow pilgrims with each other? Peter says, first, we are to have **unity of mind**, that is, we are to live in harmony with each other. This is what said in Philippians 2:2, “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” And to do this means each of this is to have a **humble mind**. Look at that famous passage in Philippians 2:3–4 where he says, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Second, Peter says we are to have **sympathy** and **tender heart[s]**. Sympathy is rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). Jesus does this perfectly for us according to Hebrews 4:15 and so we are to strive for it with each other. And tenderheartedness is to be full of compassion—when one person suffers in the

body you also suffer because you are so connected. This is expressed so beautifully in Ephesians 4:32 when Paul says, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” And finally, in the middle of this exhortation is the characteristic of **brotherly love**, *Philadelphia*. He later tells us in 2 Peter 1:7 that we are to be increasing in this love.

Sanctification and the World (vv. 9–12)

The second way Peter summarizes sanctification is in verses 9–12 as he describes how we are to live in relation to *the world*. The sum of the sum is in verse 9: **Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.** We are not to repay evil for evil (Rom. 12:17). Instead, we are to seek to do good, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:15. How do we do that? By blessing, not cursing others (1 Cor. 4:12). Does this sound familiar to you? This comes right from the lips of our Lord in Luke 6:27–28: “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, spray for those who abuse you.”

Peter substantiates this from the Old Testament by citing Psalm 34, which was a Psalm of David when he pretended to be crazy before Abimelech:

**“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,**

**and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”**

How are we to live among unbelievers in the wilderness of this world?

Notice how powerful our words are because they reveal our hearts. We are to keep our tongues from speaking evil and from speaking deceitful ideas. And with our lips we are to seek peace with our neighbors as pilgrims seek peace and protecting in a foreign land. One way this was illustrated in the early church was in the apologists' letter to the Roman Emperors. Tertullian wrote of praying for the Emperor:

(4) Looking up to Him, we Christians—with hands extended, because they are harmless, with head bare because we are not ashamed, without a prayer leader because we pray from the heart—constantly beseech Him on behalf of all emperors. We ask for them long life, undisturbed power, security at home, brave armies, a faithful Senate, an upright people, a peaceful world, and everything for which a man or Caesar prays. (Ch. 30)

Against the accusation that Christians did not care about the Emperor or Empire, Tertullian wrote, “If you think that we have no interest in the emperor's welfare, look into our literature, the Word of God” (Ch. 31.1). He then went on to say, “So, it is not without a Forum, not without a meat market, not without baths, shops, factories, inns, market days, and the rest of your business enterprises that we live with you—in this world. We are sailors along with yourselves; we serve in the army; we engage in farming and trading; in addition, we share with you our arts; we place the products of our labor at your service” (Ch. 42.2–3).

Sanctification and Eternity (v. 9)

Finally, I want you to notice something in verse 9 in which Peter speaks of our sanctification in this life and its relation to *eternity*. Back in Psalm 34, when David spoke of life, lengthy days of good, and the earth, he was speaking of the temporal blessings of the Old Covenant in the Promised Land. But notice that when Peter speaks of living such a sanctified life his reference point is not this world or any particular land in which Christians dwell. After all, these believers were living under Roman rule and were not experiencing their “best life now.”

And as we’ve seen, when Peter speaks in this letter of salvation in its full-orbed sense of everything beginning from regeneration all the way to glorification, he speaks of it in eternal, heavenly, and ultimate ways. Theologians call this the eschatology of salvation. Our sanctification now may or may not result in what Peter cites David here as calling **good days**. But we do know that sanctification will result in the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading and which await us in heaven, as 1:4 says. This ultimate sense of salvation will be revealed in the last time at the revelation of Jesus Christ as 1:5 and 1:8 say.

And one day we will have the result of our sanctification. Until then, seek to live sanctified lives within the church as well as in the world. Amen.