

## The Call to Holiness

I Peter 1:13-16

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

In the first 12 verses of this epistle, the Apostle Peter has laid the foundation of who we are in Christ and the glories of salvation. These are 12 rich, rich verses; full of precious truth about the gospel. That’s the foundation. It’s the most important part; it must be right. But no one builds just a foundation. You lay a foundation so you can build on top of it. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has laid the doctrinal foundation for this epistle, and now he begins to build upon it. In I Peter 1:13-16 we see that as children of the holy God, we are called to live holy lives.

Peter begins this passage by exhorting Christians to “gird up the loins of your mind” (v. 13). This is a powerful Biblical illustration. In Bible times the men would gather up the ends of their robes and tuck them into their belts. This is what “gird up your loins” means. This makes movement easier. You’re much less likely

to trip. You're ready to move fast, to fight if you need to. In Exodus 12:11 the Israelites were commanded to eat the first passover meal with, "your loins girted, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand." Another example of this language can be found in I Kings 18:46, "And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." In Job 40:7 God said to Job, "Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me."

The Christian must prepare his mind for action: "Gird up the loins of your mind." Why must we prepare our minds? The Christian life is not passive. The gospel is a call to action. We have received the gospel and now we are to go, we are to teach, we are to baptize, we are to make disciples.

Three different times in the book of James we are told, "Faith without works is dead." If your faith doesn't lead to action in your life, it is a dead, worthless faith. A faith that believes in God and fears Him, but doesn't move you to obey Him, is only as good as the devils' faith. James 2:19, "Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble." True faith will lead us to action as we seek to obey God and honor Him with our lives.

Paul points to the reality that true faith will be active faith. In Titus 1:16, while speaking about false teachers, Paul says this, "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." Twice in Titus 3 Paul speaks about the necessity and value

of good works. All of this points to the reality that the Christian life is not passive. We are called to action.

We face active opposition. This sin-filled world opposes the cause of Christ. The natural man opposes the cause of Christ. Satan opposes the cause of Christ. We are called to live out an active faith and we face active opposition, therefore we must prepare our minds. We understand the need, now we must understand the method.

How are we to prepare our minds? This verse tells us. First, “be sober.” We are to be serious. We are to be watchful. We have many foes that try to derail our walk with God. Peter repeats this command two more times in this short epistle. We must be sober. We must be alert to present danger.

Next, this verse says, “hope.” We are to look forward to the grace that is to come. Jesus Christ will return. When Christ returns, we will experience the totality of salvation. Is your Christianity faltering because of hopelessness? Falter no more! Ground your hope in the promises of Jesus Christ. Read back over the first few verses this epistle. If you are a Christian, the future is bright. We have great hope in Christ!

Peter began this passage by telling us to prepare our minds for the task at hand with soberness in the present and hope for the future. Next, Peter points to our identity.

As Christians, we are the children of God. “As obedient children” (v. 14a). Peter has already talked about our position in Christ. In verses 3 Peter told us that we have been “begotten again.” In Christ, we have been born again. When, by the abundant grace of God, we entered into salvation, we were born in righteousness. Not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are no longer separated from God. The sin that was a barrier between us and God is gone, covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. We have been redeemed from sin and brought into the family of God. This is the reality of our second birth

In verse 4 Peter told us that we have an “inheritance . . . reserved in heaven.” This is a reality of our salvation. It is an unshakeable reality. When we are born again, we become children of God, adopted sons and daughters. As adopted children, we have an inheritance. We become joint heirs with Christ. Romans 8:16-17 reinforce this truth, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

Now, in verse 14, Peter references this reality once again. As Christians, we are the children of God. Back in verses 3 and 4 Peter referenced our position as God’s children while communicating what God has done for us. Now Peter writes about our responsibility as children of God. Notice that this verse says, “as obedient children.” Obedience to God is a result of what God has done for us in

salvation. Look again I Peter 1:2, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” We haven’t been brought by the grace of God into the family of God to continue to fulfill the lusts of our flesh. We have been brought by the grace of God into the family of God to live in obedience to God’s commands.

Peter began this passage by telling us to prepare our minds. Next, Peter points to our identity as children of God. Before, when Peter has talked about our position as God’s children, he was talking about what God has done for us. Now he points to our responsibility. Finally, Peter speaks of our calling to live holy lives.

We are called to holiness. First, this passage tells us what ***not*** to do. “Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance” (I Peter 1:14). Some people say, “You are what you eat.” That’s true for the physical body. What I eat is the material that becomes my body. The natural man, an unsaved man’s unregenerate spirit, is what he lust’s after. People all around the world fashion themselves, they conform themselves, to their lusts. Whatever an individual is given to lust after, they conform themselves to that lust. And they do so in ignorance. The world truly believes that happiness can be found in satisfying the lusts of the flesh. On and on and on they press, hoping to find fulfillment in their lusts. It is a hopeless pursuit.

James 4:2 says, “Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.” In that passage James is speaking to Christians, but the nature of lust is still the same. The end of lust is lust. Lust will never fulfill itself. Trying to fulfill lust only leads to more lust.

Peter says, “No more!” In the past we were defined by our lusts which we pursued in ignorance. Peter now tells us what we should be defined by. Holiness. Read again verses I Peter 1:15-16, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

We need to define the term “holy.” A standard dictionary definition for “holy” is, “dedicated or consecrated to God or a religious purpose, sacred.” This definition does not really work for this passage. Are we to be dedicated, consecrated to God, sacred, as God is? Clearly that’s not the same idea.

The word that is translated as “holy” in this passage is defined by Strong’s Concordance “sacred, or holy, or saint.” That’s sort of helpful, but it’s also vague. What exactly does it mean to be holy?

Listen to how Noah Webster defined “holy” in his 1828 dictionary: “Properly, whole, entire or perfect in a moral sense. Hence, pure in heart, temper, or dispositions; free from sin and sinful affections. Applied to the Supreme Being, holy signifies perfectly pure, immaculate and complete in moral character.” That

seems to really capture the what the Bible calls “holy.” Webster goes on and says, “Man is more or less holy as his heart is more or less sanctified, or purified from evil dispositions. We call a man holy when his heart is conformed in some degree to the image of God, and his life is regulated by divine precepts. Hence, holy is used as nearly synonymous with good, pious, godly.” That seems to really encapsulate how we use the word “holy.”

This issue of holiness has been a great struggle for Christians. Is the command to be holy a command we can fulfill? Are we capable of living a holy life? The standard of Holiness is God Himself. Can we live up to that standard? No. God perfectly represents holiness. We can never live up to that perfect standard. If we approach this issue with the idea that holiness is something we achieve by our actions we will develop the mindset that we become holy by doing what God tells us to do. We will believe that we achieve a state of holiness by living according to God’s commands.

Is that what the Bible teaches? I want to be very careful here. This command to be holy is a command for us to do. It is a call to action. Everything Peter has said so far in this passage points to that. However, I believe to properly grasp this command, we must understand who we are in Christ.

In Christ, we are identified as holy. I Corinthians 3:17, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” Colossians 1:21-22, “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies

in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.” Jesus has reconciled you. To “present you holy.” Colossians 3:12a, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,” Twice in chapter 2 of I Peter, Peter refers to Christians as “holy.” In I Peter 2:5, Peter says that we are a “holy priesthood.” In I Peter 2:9, Peter says that we are a “holy nation.” In our text and in all of these verses I have just mentioned it is the same word that is translated as “holy.”

Because of our position in Christ, we are holy. We are not told to achieve holiness for ourselves. That’s impossible. We are called to live in the holiness we have received from Christ. This makes all the difference in the world when it comes to living out this command.

If we try to be holy on our own we are trying to get for ourselves what has already been given to us in Christ. In direct contrast, when we live in the holiness we have received in Christ, we are are not striving for something in our own strength; we are resting on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

I’m going to repeat myself because I want to do my best to communicate this idea clearly: We do not achieve holiness by something we do. We are declared holy because of what Christ has done for us. These verses command us to be holy as God is holy. This isn’t a command to do or become something new. This isn’t a command to strive for a goal we can never reach. This is a command to live out our



identity in Christ. Again, look at our text: I Peter 1:15-16, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” God, who has called us, is holy.

Remember, Peter is talking about our responsibility as the children of God. I found this quote from Matthew Henry’s commentary helpful, “We must be holy, as God is holy: we must imitate him, though we can never equal Him. He is perfectly, unchangeably, and eternally holy; and we should aspire after such a state. The consideration of the holiness of God should oblige us to the highest degree of holiness we can attain unto.” We are called to live out holiness in every aspect of our lives. Not our own holiness. But the holiness we have received from Jesus Christ.

This command to live holy is universal, it affects every part of our lives. Verse 15 says, “in all manner of conversation.” “Conversation” as it is used here, means behavior or lifestyle. True holiness is not like a coat we put on when we come to a church service and then take off when we go home. The holiness we have received from God will affect, it must affect, every area of our lives.

We are to be holy in every area of our lives in all circumstances. All work we do, whether religious or carnal, we must be holy. Whatever condition we find ourselves in. Whether we are rich or poor. Whether we are healthy or sick. Whether we are exalted or humbled. Whether we are surrounded by witnesses or alone with God. We are to be holy. Toward all people, whether friends, or enemies,

or total strangers, we are to be holy. We are strive to reflect the perfect moral character of God. In light of the holiness of our God, we should seek the “highest degree of holiness we can attain unto.”

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” This is not an impossible command. This is a command to live out our identity in Christ.

In this passage Peter lays out, in no uncertain terms, that we are to be holy. We have been declared holy in salvation. Holiness is part of our identity in Christ. But we must take that reality, and live it out in our lives. As children of the Holy God, we are called to live holy lives.