

**“LIVING HOPE; HOLY LIVING”**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In our study of this letter, we have been reminded that salvation is a precious gift. In Jesus Christ, we have been born again to a living hope. Our God is preserving an eternal inheritance for us in heaven, and he is preserving and perfecting us as we wait for the day when we will come into that inheritance. We have received the fullness of what the prophets had long hoped for. And our eyes have been opened to see things into which angels long to look. For the first twelve verses of this letter, Peter expounds upon the wondrous riches that have been lavished upon us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is important for us to keep this preceding context in mind, because the passage that we are studying today begins with the word “therefore.” The word “therefore” tells us that this passage is based upon what was said in the preceding paragraphs. It tells us that the commands given in these verses are directed towards those who have received the salvation described in the earlier part of the chapter. In other words, we can only live as Christians if we have first received the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Our obedience to God’s commandments is the fruit of our salvation, not the cause of it. But it is a necessary fruit. Because God has blessed us with such a great salvation, he also calls us to certain responsibilities. We have been born again to a living hope, and this living hope

calls us to holy living. This is the theme of today's passage. In this sermon, we will consider four points that the Lord teaches us in these verses: (1) Christians are called to holy thinking; (2) Christians are called to holy conduct; (3) Christians are called to holy fear; and (4) the blood of Jesus Christ is the basis for holy living.

## **II. CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO HOLY THINKING (v. 13)**

We begin with the first point: Christians are called to holy thinking. Verse 13 begins with these words, "Therefore, preparing your minds for action." This is the translation given by the ESV and the NIV, and it certainly conveys the basic meaning of the text. However, a more literal translation of the original would read like this: "Therefore, girding up the loins of your mind." This is what we find in the KJV, and also in the marginal note in the ESV. While the phrase "gird up your loins" may sound strange to our ears, it was a familiar metaphor in the ancient world. In those days, everyone wore long robes, and a person would have to pull them up and tuck them into his belt or tie them around his waist if he wanted to be ready for hard work or for warfare, or if he needed to be able to move quickly. This is why the Israelites at the time of the exodus were commanded to eat the Passover with their loins girded. They needed to be ready for a speedy exit from the land of Egypt.

Peter is using this metaphor in reference to the way Christians should think. He calls us to gird up the loins of our minds and to be sober-minded. He is saying that we need to be mentally alert. We need to live in constant vigilance, keeping watch against sin and worldliness, and looking with anticipation for the return of our Lord. A sober-minded person is someone who refuses to become intoxicated by the world's way of thinking. Worldly thinking indulges and feeds sinful thoughts. It looks for happiness and comfort in the things that this life has to offer. It makes spiritual realities seem dull and irrelevant. If you are a Christian, you need to be sober-minded. Be self-controlled and disciplined in your thinking. Keep your mind alert by keeping God's Word always before you. Keep watch against worldly patterns of thinking by maintaining communion with God in prayer. As a Christian, you are called to holy thinking.

### **III. CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO HOLY CONDUCT (vv. 14-16)**

This brings us to our second point: Christians are called to holy conduct. Peter writes, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." When a person becomes a Christian, he or she is called out of the world and adopted into God's family. A Christian is a child of God. Like any good human father, our heavenly Father expects obedience of his children. He calls us to turn away from "the passions of our former ignorance" and to submit to his instruction and guidance. As children of God,

we are not to be controlled by our tempers or by our selfish desires, but by the counsel that we receive from the Lord in his Word.

But what happens when we ignore this teaching? What happens when Christians willingly give themselves over to their passions? What happens when we run headlong into sin, even though we know better? At such times, we may find that our conscience is disquieted within us. We may find that God has withdrawn our sense of his love for us. We may find that our delight in him and our desire for him has grown cold. What should you do if you find yourself in that situation? There is only one thing to do. Cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Embrace Christ even more firmly, because you now see your need for him all the more clearly.

There are occasions when Christians give in to their passions. But this does not change the fact that we are called to be holy in all of our conduct. The God who calls us and makes us his children is a holy God, and he calls his children to be holy in every aspect of our lives. I am sure that you have heard this before, but maybe you wonder what holiness looks like. What is this holy life to which God calls his children? The great 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher J.C. Ryle gives twelve characteristics of a holy person. Listen to these qualities:

- 1) A holy person loves what God loves, and hates what God hates.
- 2) A holy person endeavors to shun all sin and to keep all of God's commandments.

- 3) A holy person strives to be like Jesus Christ.
- 4) A holy person shows patience and forbearance when others offend him.
- 5) A holy person practices self-control and self-denial.
- 6) A holy person pursues brotherly-kindness in all of his dealings with others.
- 7) A holy person seeks out opportunities to do good to others.
- 8) A holy person strives to be pure in heart.
- 9) A holy person seeks to please God in everything he does.
- 10) A holy person makes humility his greatest ambition.
- 11) A holy person does his best at fulfilling his duties and obligations.
- 12) A holy person cultivates a spiritual-minded approach to life.

And we could add a few more qualities from a list by the Puritan Thomas Watson:

- 1) A holy person frequently calls his heart to account.
- 2) A holy person is often in private prayer.
- 3) A holy person is grieved by the suffering of the church.
- 4) A holy person is content with his present condition.
- 5) A holy person endures persecution for Christ and his gospel.

That is a good snapshot of a holy person. It is quite a list. What is your response to a list like this? Does it sound too extreme? Does it sound legalistic? It is neither extreme nor

legalistic. If you have been born again, then God has set you free from sin's bondage, and he calls you to live a holy life. It is not excessive to pursue holiness with all your might. It is in keeping with your identity as a Christian. Remember what Jesus said about lukewarm believers: he said that he was about to spit them out of his mouth. And remember how Jesus warned us against trying to serve two masters. He said that it cannot be done. You have to choose. You cannot pursue holiness in a half-hearted manner. If you are trying to do so, then Jesus Christ does not really have your heart.

And it is not legalistic to try to be as holy as you can possibly be. Legalism takes place when we think that our obedience earns God's favor. But that is not what Peter is saying in this passage. He is not saying that we earn salvation by living a holy life. Remember the "therefore" at the beginning of the passage. You are called to holiness because of the gracious favor that God has already bestowed upon you in Jesus Christ. God saved you so that he might make you holy. He saved you in order to conform you to the image of his Son. You do not pursue holiness in order to earn God's favor. You pursue it because Jesus has already earned God's favor for you. But Jesus did not save you so that you could continue to live in sin. He saved you so that you might be holy.

It is true that no one is able to attain perfect holiness and perfect obedience to God in this life. However, there is a kind of obedience that is acceptable to God through faith in Christ. God is pleased when his children approve of his commands; when we delight in

his commands; when we desire to walk in his commands; and when we strive to walk in them. Thomas Watson says that such “obedience is true in its essence, though not perfect in its degree, and where it comes short, Christ puts his mercies into the scales, and then there is full weight.” (*A Godly Man’s Picture*, 174) If you are a Christian, you are called to holy conduct.

#### **IV. CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO HOLY FEAR (v. 17)**

This brings us to our third point: Christians are called to holy fear. Verse 17 says, “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” As Christians, we have the great privilege of calling upon God as Father. However, we dare not presume upon this relationship, thinking that it will cause God to overlook our sin. It is true that in Christ we have forgiveness of our sins, but this does not mean that we are free to go on indulging the sinful nature. God is an impartial judge. He does not show favoritism. He looks into our hearts, and he is not deceived by those who show a vain pretense of religion. He knows our hearts, and he is not pleased with those who claim to love him but whose hearts are still controlled by the world. We need to remember that professing Christians will be held accountable on the day of judgment. Jesus taught this when he said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 7:21) This does not

mean that we earn salvation by our works. It simply means that our profession of faith in Christ will be tested and proven by the life we have lived. True faith produces the fruit of holiness in the lives of God's children.

This is why Peter tells us that we need to conduct ourselves with fear throughout the time of our exile. That word "exile" reminds us once again that this world is not our home. Our status here is that of pilgrims. We will only enter into our true home on the day when Jesus returns and establishes the New Jerusalem. But while we live in this world, we need to walk with an attitude of holy fear and reverence towards the Lord. The world is a dangerous place for the children of God. There are many snares, many pitfalls. Remember, your profession of faith will be tested by the way you have lived your life. Walk carefully before the Lord as you go about your life in this world. Pay careful attention to the details and particulars of your life and pursue holiness in all of these things. The God whom you serve is a God who is thoroughly holy, and he looks for holiness in the particulars of your life. Walk in holy fear.

**V. THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IS THE BASIS OF A HOLY LIFE (vv. 18-21)**

This brings us to our fourth and final point: the blood of Jesus Christ is the basis of a holy life. This is the message of verses 18-21. The reason why we are called to live a holy life is because we have been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ. God has

paid a ransom to set you free from the empty life of those who are still enslaved by sin.

If you have been ransomed by Christ, then you have been set free from the guilt and the power of sin. And this is the fulfillment of the plan that God established before the beginning of time. Christ “was foreknown before the foundation of the world.” His role as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people was decided from all eternity.

Theologians refer to this as the Covenant of Grace. Our Confession of Faith describes the Covenant of Grace as the covenant by which God “freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.3) This is what Peter is teaching in this passage. He is saying that in Jesus Christ God has provided the only way for sinners to be ransomed from their empty way of life. And he also says that the only way that anyone can have this ransom applied to their lives is by God’s power to make them willing and able to believe. Christians are those “who through [Christ] are believers in God.” We are believers in God through Jesus Christ. Jesus is not only the source of our redemption; he is also the source of the faith by which we lay hold of this redemption. Faith is a gift that is given by Jesus Christ. It is only through him that we are believers in God. It is only through his blood, applied to us by faith, that we become God’s holy people.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

If you are a Christian, then you are called to a life of holiness. You are called to holy thinking, holy conduct, and holy fear. But this is not something that you pursue in your own strength. God is the one who makes his children holy, and he does so by uniting us to Jesus Christ by faith. Jesus is the source of our salvation, from beginning to end. He is the source of our new birth. He is the source of our faith. He is the source of our holiness. The only way to live a holy life is to keep on abiding in Christ. Consider these closing words from J.C. Ryle:

“Would you be holy? Would you become a new creature? Then you must begin with Christ. You will do nothing at all, and make no progress till you feel your sin and weakness, and flee to him. He is the root and beginning of all holiness, and the way to be holy is to come to Him by faith and be joined to Him... Would you continue holy? Then abide in Christ. He says Himself, ‘Abide in Me, and I in you... He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit’ (John 15:4,5). It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell, a full supply for all believers’ wants. He is the Physician to whom you must daily go, if you would keep well. He is the Manna which you must daily eat, and the Rock of which you must daily drink. His arm is the arm on which you must daily lean, as you come up out of the wilderness of this world. You must not only be rooted, you must also be built up in Him.” (*Holiness*, pp. 47, 48-49)

**Sermon on 1 Peter 1:13-21**  
**OT Reading: Leviticus 19:1-18**

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**Rev. Andy Wilson**