

Sermon 6: 1 Peter 1: 13-16: Holiness in Response to Grace

Outline:

Preparing your minds for holiness
Conforming your desires for holiness
Setting your standards for holiness

Introduction

When I was a young believer I spent a lot of time trying to determine what the right reasons for obeying God are. Early on in the Christian life you learn that the motives with which you do things are as important as the things you do. As I searched I found that there were two basic approaches for motivating the people of God to serve God. On the one hand we are to serve God because of who he is. Because he is God, and he made us, and owns us, it is his right to rule us, and so I should listen to him. This, of course, is perfectly correct, however, this on its own could give the impression that God is a tyrant. So, I soon realized that this truth had to be emphasized with another, that our obedience is in response to God's goodness. However, this truth too cannot stand on its own, for then it would give the impression that God needs to buy our obedience, and that we only need give it when he has fulfilled our conditions. At the end of it all, I realized that the highest reason for serving God is because he says so, however, he has made it easy for me to obey him. You see with all that he has done for me, I want to obey him. Just a quick glimpse of his love, or his grace, or his sufferings and sacrifice for me, melt the heart and cause my obedience to flow more willingly.

As you read through the Bible you will notice that more often than not, the authors of Scripture seek to motivate us, not simply with God's authority, but attempt to motivate us with his grace and love. God is sympathetic to our slow condition and does not simply seek to motivate us with, 'because I said so', although at times when our hearts are unmoved will have to be the ultimate grounds of our obedience; he motivates us with a display of his goodness which brings the heart to want to serve him, and more often than not, the obedience will then be offered, not grudgingly, but with joy, which is honouring to God.

In the text that we have before us Peter is trying to motivate us to be holy as our response to the wonderful grace of God that we experienced. From verses 1-12, Peter has been rehearsing the goodness of God to these people. They are God's elect, foreknown, sanctified by the Spirit, Sprinkled by the blood. They have been the beneficiaries of God's great mercy, New Birth, they have a living hope, and an imperishable inheritance. They have joy despite their trials, in their trials and because of their trials. They have joy inexpressible, and are more privileged than angels and prophets. And so are we. This brings Peter to a new section where he now wants to remind these people of their responsibilities, and so he begins with the word 'therefore'.

The well known rule about the word 'therefore' is, 'when you see a 'therefore' find out what it's there for'. A 'therefore', is a significant word which is asking you to do a certain intellectual task, it is asking you to recap and consider all that has just been said, before it asks you to do something else in light of that. Peter is asking his people to ponder the mercies of God to them, that they might feel motivated to fulfill their responsibilities to God. Peter here begins a whole section of moral teaching, and first in his list of responsibilities that he feels his

readers should fulfill, is the obligation to be holy. And so, Peter guiding us in our study today we are going to look at how to prepare our minds for holiness; how to conform our desires for holiness; and what our standards of holiness are.

Preparing your minds for holiness

V13a, 'Therefore, preparing your minds for action.' As we approach the issue of holiness, we see that as with all other things in the Christian life, it begins with the mind. the Puritans rightly believed that the way to the heart is through the mind, and that if you have a man's mind you will have the man. Well, the mind is the way to joy, maturity, peace, faith, and all other aspects of the Christian life, and Peter tells us holiness as well. Holiness is something that only the thoughtful will cultivate, the text is not implying that only people with high IQ's are able to be holy, no, but that holiness involves hard thinking on our parts to achieve it.

Peter uses a graphic word picture to illustrate what our attitudes are to be, in the original it translates something like, 'gird up the loins of your mind'. Perhaps you recognize this turn of phrase from the KJV. Well, in the ancient East, a man would wear long flowing robes, this would inhibit him from being able to do demanding tasks like running, so in order to be able to do something physical like running, the man would have to reach down and grab the back hem of his robe, bring it up between his legs, and tuck it into his belt. No doubt it probably looked like a large diaper. In this way he would no longer be restricted. Peter is telling us that we need to remove the restrictions that inhibit clear thinking, because we need clear heads in order to be holy.

Do you have restrictions that need to be removed? False teaching, like the Jehovah's Witnesses' is something that can clutter our minds. Being hounded by false guilt due to a shallow understanding of the gospel. Excessive and destructive TV watching can take away our readiness to be holy. As you read these words, you should picture the scene just before the Wimbledon final, or the final of the World Cup, or better the morning of a great battle. On each of these occasions what will you see? Will you see the athletes, indulging in a large meal that will give them cramps in the big game? Will you see a soldier with badly maintained weapons? No, you will see focus, intent, readiness, singlemindedness, nothing that will distract or deter. That is the attitude Peter tells us to have, our minds are valuable tools in the quest for holiness, we must always be ready.

The next thing Peter tells us to do in preparing our minds is be sober-minded. To be sober is to be clear headed and clear thinking. Being sober relates to the believer, not only in that the believer should stay clear of intoxicating substances like alcohol and drugs, but there are other things that can intoxicate the believer and draw them away from holiness. What are some of the things that can intoxicate us? Conspiracy theories; theological novelties; the latest fad. I think that right now Christian nationalism is an absorbing distraction. Leveraging our anger it is keeping us ragebaited and on a hair trigger to react to every injustice calling for Christian Nationalism as the cure. Standing over the sinful state of our world this theological 'I told you so' offers an idealistic future that appeals to what is making us angry and anxious right now. Some become so taken up in this new thing that they cause divisions, and damage by their overemphasis. For some it may be success, or money, or sickness. we need to be on our guards that there is nothing that will cause us to be swept up in feeling or passion away

from the truth. One lexicon offers the word 'calm' as a possible translation speaking to a need to be self-controlled and not controlled by something else in our thinking.

The third thing which Peter tells us we should do with regard to our thinking is, 'set your hope fully on the that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Peter began with an attitude of mind that we should have, then he told us what we must not do with our minds, and what should not control our thinking, well now he is being positive and telling us what to fill our minds with. And he directs our attention to the grace which will be given to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now you may be thinking, 'Well, what relation does hope have to holiness?', well, very much in fact. John too links hope and holiness, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:3). think of yourself all dressed up and on your way to a wedding, on the way you pass a play ground, a puddle of mud, some friends deeply involved in a game, what do you do? Do you jump in the mud, get dirty on the playground, and sweat in your good clothes, or do you walk right past because your going to a wedding? Perhaps you will if you are a child, but normally you walk past, because you remember where you are going. And so it is with hope and holiness, hope reminds you where you are going, you are going to a wedding.

But Peter brings in a particular point about hope and holiness. He tells us that remembering that we will be given amazing grace on the last day will cause us to strive for holiness, how is this so? Well, lets imagine that a friend of yours phones you to come round to his house because he wants to give you a thousand pounds. However, on the way you meet some of your other friends, and they are getting up to mischief, and they are throwing stones at your friends dog, smashing up his fence, and spray painting on his walls, will you join in or not? Naturally, you will not, your friend is going to give you a thousand pounds, how could you do such horrible things to him when he is being so nice to you.

Conforming your desires for holiness

Peter moves from our way of thinking to our way of feeling. And in verse 14 he gives us two things that will move us toward holiness, he gives us a description of what Christians are, and he gives a description of what we were.

He calls Christians 'obedient children'. Obedience is part of what we are. Faith without works is dead. Holiness without obedience is merely abstinence. This idea of children is one which undergirds this whole first section in Peter. Here Christians are Children, in 1:17, God is our Father, in 1:22, our fellow Christians are our brothers, and in 2:2, we as Babes in Christ should desire the pure spiritual milk of the word. Peter regards our holiness and fulfilling of our duties, not as the cold legal requirements of a soldier obeying the orders of another, but rather driven by the impulse of love found in a loving family. Once again God's fatherly generosity towards us shapes our filial obedience, Eph. 4:32-5:1, 'Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.'

Being obedient children Peter reflects on what we used to be before we were saved, and instructs them to be what they are, and not what they were. 'Do not

be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.’ Peter’s description of the unsaved person is very similar to Paul’s. In regard to their minds they are ignorant, and wondering around in spiritual darkness; and in regard to their desires they are consumed with evil desires. We used to be blind and enslaved, but now we are enlightened and free. Peter is saying, don’t go back, don’t regress. Peter acknowledges that the evil desires that once ruled us, are still with us and tempt us, but bids us to put up a fight, and not be conformed to them anymore.

Peter’s point of view about desire is very different to the attitude that is in the world today. Today our young people are being told that homosexual desires are natural, that bisexual and transvestite tendencies are natural. The World is saying that if you can’t help feeling it then it must be right and natural. Peter acknowledges that people feel things and have wicked desires, but the difference is he says that we must not indulge them, they are not natural, they are unnatural, they spring from our fallen natures, not the image of God in us.

This is very important for the believer to realize. The world lives a life dictated to by lust, we live a self controlled life. The world lives a life that allows desire to decide what is right and wrong, we believe in right and wrong desires. Excess of emotion is seen as fullness in life, and my personal right, we view excess in desire as a sign of death not fullness, and a sin. The world calls the wrong feelings right, they desire in excess of what is good, they feel too little of what is right, they are governed by feeling and not by choice, and so their desires become the bars of their prison and the drug of their addiction. And so we agree with Peter that in order for us to be holy, we need to make sure that we do not conform our desires after the way we used to.

Setting your standards for holiness

Peter has highlighted for us what we should do with our thinking, and what we shouldn’t do with our desires, he now gives us concrete standards of holiness that we must apply ourselves to. And of course, our standard of holiness is not taken from man, or angels, our standard of holiness is to be like God himself. Peter makes three points: how holy we must be, the answer is—as holy as God; how often we must be holy, the answer is—“so be holy in all your conduct”; and why we must be holy, “for it is written”.

God defines what holiness is, so it is important for us to look into God’s attribute of holiness. God’s holiness means firstly, that he is lifted high above all things (Isaiah 6:1-3), this is not the meaning of holiness that Peter is focusing on. Peter is focusing on God’s moral purity, which includes his total opposition everything that is sinful, and his delight in everything that is righteous. Here are some verses that highlight this in God.

Psalms 5:4-6, “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.”

Psalms 11:5-7, “The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.”

Habakkuk 1:13, "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong."

1 John 1:5, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

The most enlightening thing from these verses is not how holy God is, in that he does not do evil, but in what he loves and hates. It is possible to be relatively free from external sin, yet still love, lust after, and approve of sin. However, the person who is holy like God is holy, hates sin and delights in good, and as a by-product of that type of heart they also will not sin externally. This will affect the thought life of the believer, for there are some who are too cowardly to sin outwardly, but their minds are a pit of filth.

This view of holiness also saves us from a heartless externalism, where we get caught up in appearances like the Pharisees. This will challenge us to be pure in heart not only deed. God is of pure eyes that he cannot delight in and give approval to sin, you have a sinful nature that loves sin, but who are you trying to imitate your old self, or God?

Peter then tells us that we should be this holy all the time, "in all your conduct". Morning, noon and night; Monday to Sunday; at home, work, school, and even when you are by yourself. So whether, you are watching TV, cooking, chatting with friends, in all things strive for a holiness like God's. Why? "For it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" The authority of God's word seals it, we are under the highest orders, we must do it.

So, because God has been so good to you, be holy. How? By preparing your mind, controlling your desires and by imitating your holy Father.