

“The Call to a Holy Life, Part 1”

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Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 1:13-16, ESV

Called to Be Holy

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Who can forget the scene in the first Spiderman movie when Uncle Ben counsels his nephew, Peter Parker, “With great power comes great responsibility.”? Stan Lee is not only a brilliant creator of cartoon superheroes, but he must be a bit of a theologian for he gives Uncle Ben a line that mirrors Jesus’ words in Luke 12, as Jesus describes a faithful and wise servant who is given charge over the rich man’s entire estate while he is away on business. This manager is given the task of caring for all the other servants of the household. Jesus says the servant who is found to be faithful with this charge when the rich owner returns will be rewarded with more responsibility and more honor. But, if the servant said to himself, “My master is not going to return for a long time,” and he mistreats the other servants, beating them, withholding food from them, and spends his time partying and getting drunk, Jesus says the rich owner will return on a day when this manager does not expect and he will be severely punished and thrown out of the house with other unfaithful servants. Then Jesus concludes in Luke 12,

⁴⁸ *“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.”*

No greater gift could be given than the gift of God’s salvation. No greater power could be entrusted than the power of God’s grace at work in a life. Thus, to all who are given grace, much will be expected. To all who are given God’s salvation, much is required. God’s salvation brings upon our lives weighty responsibility.

This is the message Peter drives home in our text. Remember, in the first twelve verses of this letter, Peter does not utter one imperative, one command, not even one practical application. Instead, Peter celebrates the marvelous truth of God’s great salvation given to us through faith in Christ Jesus. That is why Peter says,

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Peter is writing to encourage discouraged believers. His first audience is men and women who are tempted to become disheartened as a result of the malicious response of the world toward them. They are suffering for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Verses 1-3, Peter reminds them of who they are in Christ; they are the elect of God and they now call God “Father”. Then in Verses 4-9, Peter reminds them of their privileges in Christ; they now possess a living hope in reference to their future and they possess an inheritance which is secured and protected by God Himself, never perishing, never spoiling, never fading. In Verses 10-12, Peter reasons the greatness of their salvation by noting this salvation was communicated to them, not by mere man, but by God’s Holy Spirit and this great salvation causes the angels in Heaven to marvel when they think about it and when they look down upon Christ’s church.

Now Peter is ready to step on our toes and he is ready to drive home an application. In God’s design, all practical life application is rooted in the God’s doctrine of Himself and of His salvation. When God gives us a cool cup of water to drink, He always takes us to the spring from which the water was drawn. God never gives a commandment separated from sound doctrine.

We, as Christians by definition, are people who are interested in sound doctrine. After all, we are called “believers” because we are a people who are identified and defined by what we believe in reference to God. With this said, we observe also for the believer sound doctrine never hangs lifeless like some masterpiece painting to be observed but never touched. Sound doctrine is always given for the purpose of life transformation. As Christians, we love the doctrine God reveals to us in Scripture because we long to be like Jesus. We are interested in doctrine because we are interested in life transformations. Ours is no intellectual interest, but a passion to be fashioned into the likeness and image of Jesus Himself. This is biblical Christianity!

As we think about this, have we departed from biblical Christianity? Have we become interested in doctrine alone, but not in life transformation? Are we interested in Bible study but not with God stepping upon our toes, offending us regarding our own priorities and values and ways of life? Or, equally corrupt, have we become interested in living for Jesus, but neglectful of the revelation regarding the revealed doctrines which make such a life possible? Both of these errors shrivel the church to such smallness as to make her wholly irrelevant to those who need the spiritual life. Here Peter roots his call to action in the soil of God’s Doctrine of Salvation.

That is the pattern throughout the New Testament. After describing our great salvation in the first twelve verses, Peter asserts two specific responses which follow on the heels of our salvation. In these two responses, we discover one focuses upon our heart, a heart response, and the other upon our hands as an action. Peter addresses the responsibility of the heart, first.

The heart response simply calls us to set our hope fully on God’s future grace, as we read in our text,

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

One principle of Bible interpretation says whenever you see a “therefore” in the text of Scripture, look to see what it is there for! It will always point us back to what has been previously been taught. It is an application build upon the doctrine which has been presented. The “therefore” points back to the salvation Peter has been describing and launches the rocket of application from that secure and sound dock. Notice also, in Verse 13, Peter only gives one command, which may be difficult to see, depending upon the translation you use. The central command Peter calls us to obey is: We set our hope fully on God’s grace. In view of having received such a great salvation, let us never lose sight of where God’s grace is ultimately taking us.

If you are reading from the New International Version, the New King James Version, or the New American Standard Bible, it is difficult for you to see there is only one command in this verse. For instance, from the New International Version, to note this, we read,

¹³ Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

It seems as though there are three commands: Set your minds for actions; be self-controlled; and set your hope fully upon the grace of God. The English Standard Version, I believe, accurately translates the Greek text, the language of the New Testament, and it shows only one command. The call to prepare our minds for action and the call to be self-controlled are not separate commands, but they are participles which help us understand how we obey this one command of fixing our hope fully upon God’s grace. We re-read the text again,

¹³ Therefore, (by) preparing your minds for action, and (by) being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here is the central command Peter is offering: Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What is this “hope”? What is biblical hope? Is biblical hope that dreamy “pie-in-the-sky” kind of optimism which simply looks upon the sunny side of life? Is biblical hope merely uncertain, wishful thinking? No, not at all! Biblical hope is different from man’s hope. The human idea of hope is “to wish for, to expect, but without certainty of the fulfillment; to desire very much, but with no real assurance of getting your desire.” That is the way we often use the

term hope, but that is not the way the biblical writers used the term hope. God uses the word hope in Scripture to indicate an absolute certain expectation regarding our future.

A biblical definition of hope is: “A strong and confident anticipation of a positive future that God makes certain for us.” Hope, as used in the Bible, is never a sincere desire for some uncertain future event to happen, but hope in the Bible is a full assurance, a complete confidence, God is going to fulfill His gracious promises to us. Hope is an eager expectation of God’s promised blessings absolutely will become ours in the future, and they are ours now, except we are not holding them in our hands. They are just beyond us and they will be in our hands in a future day. In hope, our faith connects to God’s promises so we experience the joy in the future blessings of God, and because we know they are certain we are not fearful they might not come to fruition. Even before we have them in our hands we possess great joy in them. This hope becomes an energizing influence in our lives particularly when we experience trials and griefs of various kinds. This hope causes us to lift our eyes off the difficulty of the moment, off of the horizontal plane, and look upon the vertical plane, out into the future of what is ours. Hope helps us see past the darkness of the night to the bright light of the morning Son.

Peter is calling believers to act upon the secure gift of God’s salvation, which is what we have, by setting our hearts upon a positive outlook regarding our future, an outlook which is absolutely certain and rooted in God Himself. No matter how dark the present might be, the future is always bright for the believer.

That is not true for the unbeliever. This hope is a Christian hope and it is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. For the believer the night will pass and the morning will break bright and eternal for us.

Notice Peter’s first command in this letter to a discouraged and persecuted people is a command which requires action of the mind or soul, and not an action of the body. He is not telling us to take our hands, our feet, or our bodies and do something. The first action is an action of the soul; it is an action of the mind. This command becomes difficult for action-oriented people. Action-oriented people see this command as a waste of time and an unnecessary use of energy. The man of action says, “I do not want to think about it, I just want to do it.” He shouts, “Give me something for my hands to do!” Remember who is writing this letter: Peter!

Peter is the quintessential man of action. Peter jumped out of the boat and onto the water when Jesus called him. He did not think about it. He jumped out of the boat and began walking on the water. Peter is the first to verbally declare “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”¹ Peter rushed into the group of soldiers surrounding Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and takes a sword and begins slicing away and he slices down upon the ear of poor Malchus and he slices his ear off.² Peter is the one who, in hearing the tomb was empty, raced past John, who arrived first and was standing outside the tomb in contemplation, and went headlong into the tomb to see what was there.³ Peter was a man of action, but Peter now understands action before mental preparation often leads to absolute disaster in the Christian life. If we do not take time, as Christians, to mentally prepare ourselves we will not be ready to act.

Peter boasted to Jesus, on the night Jesus was betrayed, “I will never deny you. I will go to prison. I will even die for you, but I will never, ever deny you.”⁴ Jesus took Peter into the Garden and said, “Peter, stay awake. Watch and pray because you need to become spiritually and mentally prepared for this night of temptation.” What did Peter do? He is a man of action. His body is tired, “I do not need mental preparation and soul preparation. I need sleep.” Peter falls asleep; not once, not twice, but three times.⁵ Jesus returned and said to him, “It is too late, Peter. The hour of darkness is upon us,” and later that morning a little servant girl comes up to Peter and says, “I think you are one of the disciples!” “I never knew the man!”⁶

This is what gets men and women of action into trouble. We fail to observe the instructions of God’s Word regarding mental preparation for our soul to be ready for the temptations and trials which are going to be thrown upon us by broken world. Peter, in writing this letter, understands his error and he understands the path to joy is a path which is rooted in the grace of God, and he tells us, “Fix your hope upon the grace.”

¹ Matthew 16:16

² Matthew 26:51

³ John 20:1-6

⁴ Matthew 26:33-35

⁵ Matthew 26:36-45

⁶ Matthew 26:71-72

It is vital we observe Peter is not calling us to manufacture hope in our souls. Peter places the weight of setting our hope upon the grace of God, which is our responsibility, but he does not set upon us the responsibility of creating hope. Hope is one of the gifts God gives us when He gives us new life. We read that in 1 Peter 1,

³ According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

How does hope come to the soul of a believer? It comes to us by God's grace, it is His gift, but then we are called to set the sight upon God's future grace. God gives this gift of a living hope so we will be able to endure hardship and hold onto joy when misery, persecution, and even death cut across the path of our lives. Peter urges us to put this gift of living hope to use by picking it up and holding it firm to our soul. He urges us not to let this gift of hope lay dormant and unused, but to activate this hope in our lives. He knows this spiritual action of the heart is central to our joy and our walk with God.

There are several key principles we learn from this verse. First, our hope rests in something God does and not in anything we do. The focus of our hope is not what we do, but it is what God does. Our hope is certain because God is the object of our hope. Our hope does not rest upon the frailty of man or the uncertainty of circumstance, but our hope rests upon the sovereign grace of God to accomplish all the plans and purposes He set out for us. Is it not wonderful to know God always accomplishes His plans and His purposes?

Jeremiah, the suffering prophet, will say, in Jeremiah 32,

¹⁷ Ah Lord GOD! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee.⁷

That is the object of our hope!

Daniel the prophet will say, in Daniel 4,

³⁵ All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"⁸

Out God is a God who does all He pleases. That is the object of our hope, and because the object of our hope is secure, we are certain regarding our future. When our hope is set fully upon the sovereign grace of God, our hope is secure. However, when our hope is placed in a human leader or in our own ability then our hope is tenuous at best.

We celebrate the Fourth of July and we ask, "Why do we have hope for our nation's future?" If our hope rests in our President or our Congress or our industry, our own ability to make an economy tick, or our military might, we have no certainty, no confidence, and no firm basis upon which to plant our hope and have a positive outlook regarding our future. This is the reason why moving away from being one nation under God is disastrous. This removes hope from a people. Woe to the nation whose faith and hope are in themselves. I fear that is the direction we are heading and that is why I pray for a revival, because our only hope as a nation is in God. Hope is a great theme Scripture presents to us, but hope in what? That is the question. Is our hope anchored in God and in His grace or is our hope fastened to human achievement and human ingenuity? It is only when our hope is anchored in God we have a certain and secure future.

The second principle Peter presents to us is: Hope received by past grace must become hope captivated with future grace. The grace of God promised to us in the future must become our yearning. If we do not set our hope on God's future grace and we set our hope as a lover sets his fascinated attention upon his new bride, then the gift of hope will not keep us from despair when trials come. We will become one of those complaining Christians who relish in their pessimism and dark view of the future. This cynical hopelessness does not glorify God to hold it. I know there is much to complain about on the horizontal plane, but we are not a cynical, pessimistic people. It is not because of what we see out here because we are realists on the horizontal plane, but it is because of what we see vertically and what God promises us out, into the future. As believers we have reason to see the sunshine behind the dark clouds for Jesus

⁷ King James Version (KJV)

⁸ New International Version (NIV)

died as an atoning sacrifice for our sins and He rose from the grave and He promises to return in power and glory! All this, in Christ, is a life transforming gift from God!

It is possible to receive a great gift and never practically benefit from it. That is why Peter says, “Beloved, you have received this great gift. Now set your hope upon the grace of God which is to be yours in Christ Jesus.”

What difference does this command make for the believer? Many Christians are despairing, despondent, and discouraged through hardships which come upon them, not because of the circumstances. Let us not ever relinquish control over the direction, the mentality, the attitude, and the angle and bent of our soul over to circumstance. That is not what Scripture does. The reason why the believer becomes complaining, embittered, frustrated, and angry is not because of what is happening here, but it is because we have lost site of this commandment and instruction God lovingly gives to us. We are failing to enjoy the benefit of God’s great gift of hope to us.

All through Scripture we see people holding onto hope in times of trial. I think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar was furious at them for their refusal to bow down to the statue he had made and he threatened to throw them into a fiery furnace. They answered, in Daniel 3,

¹⁶ “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

How can these three young men, faced with a horrible and agonizing death, say that and have that response? They set their hope fully on the sovereign grace of God which will be revealed at the end and on the last day.

Notice the word “fully”. Peter calls us not to a half-hearted, meager hope, but a full-bodied, robust, and hardy hope. Notice, also, hope’s object is the grace which is future. God, at great cost to Himself, has given us grace in our past and grace in our present to redeem us, but here hope’s target is not so much the grace which has already been given. I believe that is faith’s target. Faith and hope are like twin sisters – it is hard to tell them apart at times – but faith does look back at God’s accomplishments and embraces them for the present and for the future. Hope always looks forward with eager anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s promises. Peter tells us to hope for the grace which will be given,

¹³ ...set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Peter is talking about Jesus' Second Coming. Our hope envisions that future day when Jesus triumphs, rules, and reigns.

Paul will say, in 1 Corinthians 15,

¹⁹ If in Christ we have **hope** in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If this is all there is for the believer, then what is our hope all about? It is all about the future and the destination we are holding onto. Titus will write, in Titus 2,

¹³ ...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

Our hope connects to a future day when Jesus returns and rights all the wrongs, rewards all the faithful, fulfills all the promises, and puts to rest all our worries. Do you see that day? The clearer you see that day as a result of hope the more your joy will never, ever be taken from you, not in this broken world.

How do we set our hope fully on the grace of God? Peter gives us two practical steps. First, prepare you mind for action, as he reminds us at the beginning of Verse 13. Other translations, such as the New King James Version, says,

¹³ “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind . . . “

Peter offers us a word picture to help us understand this commandment and instruction, but the word picture is somewhat ancient. We do not “gird up the loins” of anything today, but we remember from our Sunday school lessons, people in the 1st Century wore long, flowing robes. What would they do if they were walking down the street and a battle broke out or a police officer saw a crime being committed? What would they do? If they run in the long, flowing robes, it is likely they will be tripped by it, so they took the back of the robe and tucked it into their belt and the robes become a pair of shorts. They are ready for action.

That is the word picture Peter is using: Take these flowing robes, which are yours, gird them up and get ready for action. This relates to robe of our mind. Paul uses the same analogy in Ephesians 6,

¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth.

He wants us to know our hope will be set upon God’s future grace only if we become thinking Christians. Peter does not tell us to prepare for the battle which sin and Satan and this world throws at us by pumping up our emotions through a revival sing, through a summer camp, or through a praise rally. There is much to be commended in these events, and there is certainly nothing wrong with them, but these warm, moving gatherings do not produce a stability and hope when disaster strikes. We must have a firmer foundation than that upon which to build Christ’s church and our personal lives. Emotional Christianity feels great for a time, but if we do not prepare our minds for action, dark and difficult trials will rob us of our joy and of God’s glory! If we are to hold onto hope, we must give God our minds.

God does not commend to us an anti-intellectual faith, or a mindless commitment. God gave us a Book and it is a pretty big and substantial Book. What part of you engages with a book? It is your mind which engages with a book. He gave us a Book so we would read it and think about what He says. Someone may say, “I am not a reader!” If you are a Christian you must become one, at least of one Book. God calls you to think and He has given us instruction so our hope would become firm. Paul says, in Romans 15,

⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Peter is saying the same thing: The pathway to hope is through the mind.

One reason grievous trials and painful ordeals rob us of hope is because we neglect to prepare ourselves with our minds meditating upon God’s Word. Our minds are too active worrying about our circumstances, too frustrated over the course of events, too angry with people around us, and too little meditating upon God’s revelation regarding our joyful future.

The second step is: Be sober-minded,

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The New American Standard Bible reads: ...keep sober *in spirit*. The New International Versions reads: ...be self-controlled.

The opposite of “sober-minded” is “drunken-minded”. Alcohol causes the drunken person to create a reality which is distorted and not connected to real life. God’s Gospel, on the other hand, causes us to connect to the reality which God has created and to think clearly about it; not be muddle-headed. Unbelievers are blind to this real world of God’s creation. It is a world, first, which reflects His glory, but it also not just a material world but it is a spiritual world. As believers we are given sight to see. We know God exists. We know the spiritual realm is true and real, but as believers, after having been given sight, we are still in danger of having that sight distorted as we live under the influence of spiritual alcohol, the influence of the alcohol of materialism, of pride, and of fleshly passions. These will impair our judgment and keep us from seeing straight and thinking straight.

Peter is urging us not to let some substance foreign to God intoxicate our thinking and our mind, but rather to think clear so we can see the value which is Christ and treasure Him. Hope requires unimpaired vision. Is there anything impairing your vision today?

How does hope really help us in times of trial? Recently, I was talking to a friend who is going through a very difficult time in his life, and it may be the most difficult time he has ever experienced. He cannot see his way completely through it at the moment. He is fighting for peace, joy, and encouragement in his present trial. My friend said to me, "I wish I could see into the future." What I believe he meant by that is, "If I knew how this all would turn out, then I would be able to rest and gain strength. I wish I could see into the future!" I replied to my friend, "We can! That is the good news of the Gospel"

We can see into the future. We are just not looking far enough out. We want to know what the next few weeks and months hold, but that is not going to help us. We can see with great clarity of eyesight into what the future holds for us. Here it is: Jesus Christ's return and all of those who are in Him are glorified are changed in a moment into His likeness and we rule and reign with Jesus forever and ever. That is where this is all headed.

Peter says, "Here is the first commandment and the first instruction upon the basis of your salvation: 'Fix your hope upon the grace which is going to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'"

The heart response is: Fix your hope. The hand response is: Be holy in the way you live. Later, Peter will say,

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵
but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Notice the order. We will discuss the specifics of the hands in the next study, but notice the heart precedes the hand. That is vital.

John acknowledges this in the third chapter of his first letter, as he says,

² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

If you take this first step, which leads to the other step, because discouragement and despair breeds disobedience and justification for our sin, and you get this right and say, "I know my future," then you can hear the call to be holy in all you do.

In order to set one's hope on God future grace, one must have received God's past grace. Have you received the grace of God offered to you in Jesus Christ? Have you trusted in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, the One who died upon the cross for your sin, the One who ever lives to make intercessions for you, the One who is coming again to establish His rule and reign, and have you called upon Him and said, "God, you are my God and Jesus is my Savior and my Lord. I commit my way to Him and I trust in Him." God's offer is profound for everyone. If you call upon Him in faith, God will be gracious and kind and He will offer you life. That is where everything begins.