



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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**Volume 18 Issue 19**

**May 12, 2019**

### **A Glorious Salvation, Part 3**

Splattered throughout history is the blood of the saints. As most of you know, the first persecution that ever broke out against Christianity was carried out by the people of God. Following the martyrdom of Stephen, Luke wrote this:

Acts 8:1b, "And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Yet the persecution didn't stop there. After their Jewish brethren had their fill, Christians became the special object of attack of the Roman empire. As we've seen, this first occurred on a national scale under Nero in 64 AD when the empire, perhaps needing amusement on account of the sad state of affairs under Nero, turned to the sport of capturing, torturing, and killing Christians. They were brought to the Colosseum and ordered to fight. They were dressed up like sheep where lions were then released to eat them. They were bound in rope, doused in pitch, and lit aflame where they were used to illumine Nero's garden at night. They were tortured, crucified, impaled, scourged with the whip, and subjected to all manner of humiliation.

Now we know the reason for this ire is that the world hates Christ, hates His Kingdom, and so does NOT understand what we are and what we stand for.

John 15:19, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

From this I want you to see that Christianity is the object of scorn and hatred in this world simply because we are Christ's children! So, way before you and I might do anything to garner their hatred, the world hates us! And yet, because the Holy Spirit dwells within us AND part of His work is to "convict the world of sin" (John 16:8), there are times when the world is put off by what we do - specifically our desire to serve the Lord by striving unto holiness and purity of life.

1 Peter 4:4, "And in *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign *you*."

John MacArthur wrote of this verse:

Ancient sources, both Christian and non-Christian, provide ample evidence that it was Christians' reluctance to participate in many conventionally accepted amusements and ungodly civic ceremonies, and their refusal to engage in idolatrous, immoral functions that caused unbelievers to hate and revile them. That led to unjust persecution and suffering for righteousness' sake. (MacArthur, 2004, pp. 229-230)

It was on account of this last form of persecution that Peter exhorted his persecuted brethren in our passage unto Holy Living. Recall at this time, Christianity was under severe attack primarily because it was deemed to be silly and stupid (recall Rome hated anything new and Christianity appeared to them to be a new religion). So, Peter wrote this epistle to encourage and instruct his persecuted brethren. And yet one of the reasons God's people were being attacked was on account of their "moral superiority"- they no longer caroused with their non-Christian friends. As such, they were maligned!

Accordingly, Peter exhorted his brethren to strive unto holy living, yet — and this is important — NOT to avoid persecution, BUT because in Christ God has made us His

children and so given us a holy calling that goes beyond the things of this life!

We must become that which God has made us to be in Christ.

1 Peter 1:15, “But [ἀλλά (*alla*) which is a strong adversative; in contrast to their ‘former lusts,’ v. 14] like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior.”-

It may seem obvious, but what is the command here? Notice the two key words here: “be” and “holy.” “Be” comes from γίνομαι (*ginomai*) and speaks of “becoming” in the Greek. When it is a command, as it is here, it refers to a requisite and ever-changing growth involving both outward as well as inward constitutional properties. “Holy” ἅγιος (*hagios*); as most of you know, this word primarily means “set apart” and so different. As we have been “chosen... by the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (v. 2), the call of holiness in this context is a call therefore to realize in our person the glorious position which has been attained for us in Christ — which is why I’ve identified the focus of this section as, “We must become that which God has Made us to be in Christ.”

Together the words depict an ever and increasing “becoming” on the part of the child of God in which his thoughts, motives, and conduct correspond to the glorious position to which they have been set apart! In fact, if there is an emphasis to Peter’s command here, it is on our behavior.

Secondly, the verse says, “be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.” The word is ἀναστροφή (*anastrophē*) which comes from στρέφω (*strophō*) which means to turn and ἀνά (*ana*) which serves to intensify the main verb. In its most essential form the word therefore refers to the life that results from a radical turning. As such, it came to be used either of (1) the epitome of a life that has turned *AWAY FROM* God (and so godless behavior) or (2) the epitome of the life that has turned *TO* God (and so holy behavior). In fact, it is a favorite word of Peter as he uses it eight out of its thirteen occurrences in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Peter’s thinking here is that because God is holy AND we now are part of His family, we too must be holy!

From this we conclude that holy living, thinking, and desiring is NOT an option when it comes to the child of God! It most certainly was NOT an option for Peter’s contemporaries who at the writing of this epistle were being attacked, ridiculed, tortured, and martyred on account of their desire to serve God! In this regard: it would have been quite tempting for any in Christ seeking to avoid conflict or ruffling the feathers of his Roman neighbors to sin just a little:

- Showing up at an inn and getting a little drunk.
- Spending just a little time with a prostitute.
- Offering an empty sacrifice to a false god.
- Acclaiming allegiance to the cult of Caesar.

Yet Peter's word of exhortation here saw the big picture. Looking at man we might think that a little sin couldn't be that bad. But Peter pointed them to look to God and so His standard... which you will recall is perfection...

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

**\*\*OR\*\***

Leviticus 19:2, "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'"

We'll talk about this next week. However, we, God's people, must see that the standard when it comes to our behavior — what we do, what we allow our minds to think upon, what we say, how we dress, etc. — is NOT society, BUT the Lord!

This is the call of a weighty salvation! See,

- Knowing where we are going!
- Knowing that God is in control of all things!
- Knowing that someday we will attend a Wedding Feast with a dress code of moral purity.
- Knowing the purity of our Lord.

We must strive to become in practice today what God has already made us in Christ: Holy! Yet how do we do this? How do we grow in practical holiness as children of God? Peter gives us the answer in v. 14 which is a necessary preface:

1 Peter 1:14a, "As obedient children..."

The word for "obedient" is ὑπακοή (*hupakoē*) and literally means "to listen under" and is reminiscent of the discipleship groups of the day in which disciples sat under the teaching of a master with the goal of becoming like the master. Here as a genitive noun, it means that obedience is expected to characterize the child of God<sup>2</sup> as well as to be that which distinguishes him from the unbeliever. And so, unlike the unbeliever, it is anticipated and expected that we will be "children of obedience" for in Christ we have received a new nature (in contrast to "children of disobedience," Ephesians 2:2)!!

I love this! Peter does NOT see the child of God as a renegade or rebel when it comes to Christ, His Kingdom, and so His calling (that is what we *WERE* prior to salvation [cf. 1 Corinthians 6:11]). He doesn't assume the lowest expectation. RATHER, he knows that not only do we have a new nature (we have been adopted into God's household), BUT the Spirit of God "...is at work in [us]" giving us both the will and the ability "to work for *His* good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)! So Christian, you are going to grow in grace. That which will characterize us is obedience!

Yet how does the Spirit of God bring this to pass? The answer is found in the little statement in front of us, “as obedient children...” It points us back, specifically/directly to the previous exhortation/condition referenced in v. 13c, “...fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Being obedient to that is the necessary precondition to fulfilling of any call to holiness!

Accordingly, recall what we saw last week when we looked at v. 13b. For what are we to live, long, and be consumed by in this life? “The grace to be brought to [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ”!

This expression primarily has in mind the Wedding Feast of the Lamb when the Bridegroom- Jesus- rises from the table, approaches us individually, looks us in the eye, and gives us “praise, glory, and honor” (1 Peter 1:7) ending with the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25: 21, 23) Yet we also saw that “the grace to be brought to us” went beyond this moment to include everything promised, referenced, and spoken about in vv. 1-12 regarding our future salvation! In this regard, let me remind you, the essence of salvation is a love-relationship with Christ! We see that in the first 12 verses here:

1 Peter 1:1b-2a, “...who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...”

Recall that “foreknowledge” is NOT foresight, but the setting of God’s love upon us from eternity past. God saved us to have a deep, abiding relationship with Him!

1 Peter 1:8, “And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, the more we focus on, pursue, and so enjoy our love relationship with Christ (the more 1 Peter 1:12 becomes the lens through which we view the world), the more we will grow in holiness! The more we long for, cherish, adore, and so glory in Christ, the more we will grow in holiness!

A man was in a losing struggle with lust and all the warnings and commands in Scripture seemed to do very little to help him. In fact, it seemed that the more he heard sermons on the subject, the more he fell! But then he read the book by Francois Mauriac titled, “*What I Believe.*” In it Mauriac admitted how the plague of guilt had not freed him from lust. He concluded that there is one powerful reason to seek purity. (Piper, 2005, p. chapter 27) It is what Christ gave in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Mauriac wrote, “It is the ‘precious and magnificent’ promise that the pure see God that empowers our escape from lust.” (Mauriac, 2012)

When we read that it is the “pure in heart that shall see God” we tend to think that Jesus is here talking about salvation future- when we die or when Christ comes back. But that is NOT the case! The “blessings” of the other Beatitudes all refer to present endowments

which continue into glory! And so it is with this Beatitude.

Accordingly, the purer we become in thought, motive, and practice as Christians, the greater will be our apprehension and enjoyment of Christ! Responding to this truth, the struggling pastor wrote:

The thought hit me like a bell rung in a dark, silent hall. So far, none of the scary, negative arguments against lust had succeeded in keeping me from it... But here was a description of what I was missing by continuing to harbor lust: I was limiting my own intimacy with God. The love He offers is so transcendent and possessing that it requires our faculties to be purified and cleansed before we can possibly contain it. Could He, in fact, substitute another thirst and another hunger for the one I had never filled? Would Living Water somehow quench lust?' (Piper, 2005)

The answer from Matthew 5:8 is a resounding, "Yes!"

So Christian, understand the necessary preface to every call to holiness. In order to advance in our growth in grace, we must take our eyes off of our conduct, duty, track record, and place them on Christ! Did you get that? It is akin to two very important patterns that Christ laid down for us when it comes to His Kingdom: *You win by losing* (Luke 9:23-25) and *You lead by serving* (Mark 10:43b-45). And now thirdly: *You grow in holiness NOT by trying harder, BUT by gazing upon Christ!* It is counterintuitive, but it is the way God ordained it to work...

When you focus on your conduct, thoughts, or behavior when it comes to holiness, you will become "twice the son of hell" (Matthew 23:15)! For looking inward will never enable you to break free from a sinful proclivity. The only way to grow in holiness is by looking without!

Imagine sitting on one of those saucer sleds, holding on to the handles, and trying to lift yourself off the ground. You can pull as hard as you wanted, but you will never move upward. If you are going to get off the ground, what must you do? Look outside of yourself! J. D. Greear describes it this way:

The gospel is not just the A-B-Cs of Christianity; it is the A through Z. Every virtue of the Christian life grows out of the deeper experience in the gospel. Spiritual growth happens not by going beyond the gospel, but going deeper into it. (Greear, 2016, p. 60)

That is exhortation given by Peter. "As obedient children" looking NOT within, BUT upon the grace that awaits us in the future, "be holy"! This is an exhortation that is attainable to all in Christ!

1 John 3:2-3, "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. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him

purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

Though counterintuitive, this is a natural progression in the Kingdom of God!

Titus 2:11-12: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

Chuck Swindoll put it this way:

If the question in the first section was, ‘How can I remain joyful in the midst of suffering?’ the question in the next is, ‘How can I stay clean in a corrupt society?’ ¶ Throughout history Christians have responded to this question with all sorts of extremes. Some have adopted a hermit mentality, hiding away in caves, living in virtual solitude. Others have modeled a monk mentality, dwelling only with believers in a close-knit community, away from the world’s reach. Those with a utopian mentality have attempted to rebuild a perfect society from the ground up- a world without worldliness [think of New England Puritanism; think of Baptist fundamentalism]. Interestingly, each approach falls under the idea of a sanctification by isolation- withdrawing from the world in some way to keep it from rubbing off on them. ¶ Unlike hermits, monks, and utopians, the Bible has a very different approach. Believers have a mission to accomplish in the world, and therefore we can’t afford to lock ourselves outside the world. The Christian’s solution to the problem of holy living in an unholy world is not isolation, but insulation. (Swindoll, 2014, p. 154)

And that insulation being the glorious truth given to us in 1 Peter 1:1-12. The more we look upon Christ, enjoy Christ, worship and exalt Christ, the more we won’t want to sin lest in sinning we limit our capacity to love, know, see, and serve Him!

## References

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> He uses it in reference to the evil pattern of life of unbelievers (1 Peter 1:18; 2 Peter 2:7) and the good pattern of life of believers (1 Peter 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16; 2 Peter 3:11).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John 8:31–32; 14:15, 21; 15:10; Rom. 6:17; Ephesians 2:10; 1 John 5:2–3; cf. Luke 6:46.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also John 17:3; Matthew 7:23