

*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. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 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, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:13-25*

Over all the years, since I was called by God into full time pastoral ministry, Nancy and I have had the privilege of serving our Lord Jesus Christ in a number of cultures, countries, states and provinces all over the world. We have done so not only in a number of churches but also in places like drug infested slums and isolated fishing villages and homeless shelters in poverty stricken inner cities and maximum-security prisons and hospitals and care facilities and people’s homes. One of the first things we learned about serving Christ in these ways is that you had better prepare yourself before you go - because it will be easy to lose your focus and forget your purpose when you step into an environment that is vastly different than your own. Regardless of wherever you go and whatever you do and whomever you work with and whatever happens – you are always, in various ways, to different degrees, you are influenced and affected by that environment. So you really need to know who you are and what you are called to do before you go, and you need to continually remind yourself of that when you are there.

In one sense, this is what the apostle Peter was trying to tell the Christians he was writing to in his first letter here. Those Peter was writing to had been born into numerous environments, but now they had become born-again into the Kingdom of God, where Jesus reigns and rules in the hearts and lives of his followers. But their kingdom status put them in direct opposition to their environments, and they now were being persecuted - suffering in political, social and personal ways because they were followers of Jesus Christ. Peter began his letter by singing the praises of the God who had given them a great salvation. Reflecting on that salvation, now Peter gets to the heart of his letter: an exhortation on how we are to live in society as Christians who are being oppressed, excluded and persecuted.

Though our ultimate destiny in the Kingdom of God, is the fulfillment of our living hope, our salvation in the risen Jesus Christ – which is an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us – we are to do much more than that just glory in that. We are called live out our living hope, our great salvation, right now in the here and now. Since we have received the great benefits of salvation – a great mercy, a new birth, a living hope, and an assured inheritance – we are to be different than our environment in how we live our lives, especially during times of suffering and persecution. In our text from last week we learned that when we respond to suffering and opposition with joy, we demonstrate to the world that Jesus is more glorious and precious to us than any pain and difficulty we might endure. This morning Peter tells us that we can live out our living hope, our great salvation, by remembering and reminding ourselves of the fruit that the joy of Jesus produces into the life of a born-again follower of Jesus – especially in times of oppression, suffering and persecution.

As we begin to look at our text for today, take note that the first verse begins with the conjunction *"therefore"* – and wherever you find the word *"therefore,"* it's an indication a logical conclusion has been reached from what has just been said before. In the first 12 verses of chapter 1, Peter wrote about the assurance of salvation and about the fullness of salvation. Then, in verse 13 he writes, *"Therefore,"* i.e. *because* our salvation is so assured and so full, certain conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions follow in verses 13 through 25 - conclusions which are the four kinds of fruit we bear that the joy of Jesus produces into the life of a born-again Christian, that make up the fullness of our salvation.

Peter points out this fruit of our salvation with four imperatives or commands. These are not so apparent in most English translations because translators have tried to make the language flow smoothly and thus have not used the tenses Peter used. But we see these kinds of fruit in verse 13: *"SET your HOPE..."* - verse 15: *"BE HOLY..."* Verse 17: *"CONDUCT yourselves with FEAR..."* Verse 22: *"LOVE ONE ANOTHER..."* The focus of these four commands - *hope, holiness, fear, and love* – reveals the fruit that we bear that the joy of Jesus produces into the life of a born-again Christian - that make up the fullness of our salvation, which will be seen in times of oppression, suffering and persecution.

1) In the midst of opposition, suffering and persecution born-again Christians should bear the fruit of hope. *"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"* (1 Peter 1:13). The hope that Peter is telling us we should fully set ourselves on is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. That is the greatest hope we could ever want! That hope gives peace and confidence and settledness in the face of struggle, conflict and opposition. *"Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* Our English word *"hope"* implies *possibility*. The Greek word here does not, and might better be translated as "having a confident expectancy." It is faith projected out for a grace to come in the future. It suggests an attitude of positive expectation and *optimism* which ought to prevail in our lives.

Peter begins this command with the phrase *"preparing your minds for action."* Some Bible translations use the phrase *"girding up the mind"* which gives a better picture of the meaning of the word Peter used here. The word *"girding"* is an image taken from the practice of gathering up the long, flowing, robes that people wore then, in order to facilitate walking or working. They would tuck their robes under a belt at the waist, and then they would be ready for action. Perhaps the contemporary idiom would be to "cinch up your belt," or "hitch up your pants," or "roll up your sleeves" - something you do in preparation for work. It is the *"mind"* which must be girded up. Paul uses a similar image in Ephesians 6:14: *"Having fastened (girded) on the belt of truth."* What is being said here is that *we are to prepare our mind for action based on what we know is true. The foundation of all progression in the Christian life is the truth of the Word of God.* It is not experience or visions, but the Word of God. And so Peter says the first step is to *prepare our minds what the Word says.* That is what keeps us stable and steadfast. When everything else is falling apart around us, go back to the one thing we know is true -the Word of God - and pull our minds together with the truth. And also remind ourselves of what is really true.

In 2 Peter 1:16 the apostle writes, *"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* In order to substantiate that statement he brings out the reality of his own eyewitness experience with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. He saw the Jesus glorified. That was a never-to-be-forgotten experience for Peter; he never got over it. Then, in 2 Peter 1:18, he says, *"We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."* But he doesn't stop there. He goes right on to say, *"And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts"* (2 Peter 1:19). What Peter ultimately rested his faith upon was not the vision on the mount, but the Word of God. All of our experiences have to be tested and tried on the basis of the Word of God. It does not matter what our experience has been, nor how glorious our vision. We rest our lives upon the Word of God. The Word must test all experience.

*“Preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded.”* Peter is telling us here that a mind fixed on the Word of God makes sobriety possible. The Greek word translated *“sober”* means exactly what our English word means: “not drunk” – but it’s contextually it’s meaning is not about being drunk with alcohol but rather about being drunk with fear, anxiety, and temptations. Be calm and self-controlled; be at peace. To be *“sober-minded”* means to keep our wits about us when everyone around us is falling apart. We can see beyond the observable to what ultimately is real. It is the Word that cinches up our mind. It is the Word that enables us to be sober. And thus being sober, we then can *hope* completely-without reservation, on the grace of the fullness of our salvation - which is to be ours at the revelation of Jesus Christ in the midst of the struggle of opposition, suffering and persecution.

2) In the midst of opposition, suffering and persecution born-again Christians should bear the fruit of holiness. *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’”* (1 Peter 1:14-16). Here Peter issues the second command to *“Be holy.”* In the face of what seems to be the impossibility of being holy, Peter first deals with some negatives. In essence he says, *“Do not be like the children of ignorance. Once you were caught up in sensuality, drunkenness and idolatry. Don't go back to that time, when you didn't understand what God wanted from you.”* It's amazing how many people have no idea of what God wants from human beings. But born-again Christians don't have that excuse. Based on the Word of God, we know what God wants from us. As His children, we are to keep walking in obedience to Him. Although we are sometimes tempted to follow the world, we now have the power of the resurrected Christ within us to enable us to withstand these temptations.

On the positive side, Peter tells us: *“He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* To be *“holy”* means to be separated from all that is sinful and impure; to be set apart unto God and become conformed to His character. God is entirely free from any form of evil and He is a Being of absolute moral perfection. And so for us, the command to be holy as God is holy means that we are to make conscious choices to allow the indwelling Jesus Christ to set us free from a lifestyle of sin and be set us apart to live a holy life - and experience the wholeness and fullness and joy and glory of what we were created in God’s image to be.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 the apostle Paul asked: *“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”* In Christ, that is what we are--not what will be someday. In Christ we are holy right now – not in the flesh, but in the spirit. In our position before God, we are holy because Jesus died on a cross in our place for our sins and rose from the dead - defeating sin, evil and death. That’s why we feel burdened and guilty when we think, say or do things that are contrary to the commands and principles of God. His holy standards and the world's practices just don't mix.

So when Peter says we are to be *“obedient children”* - he means that born-again Christians who are obedient to God’s commands and principles, are obedient by nature - because we have been made partakers of Jesus’ divine nature. We are holy not because we have some natural ability to be so, but because we have received from God His very nature. In 1 John 3:9 the apostle John says, *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”* That nature of God in us cannot sin. That is the new nature we are given when we invite Jesus Christ to come into our lives, so that now we are children of obedience. We have his nature, and that nature will express itself--unless it is hindered in some way. And those hindering factors are taken up in the next phrase: *“Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.”* Our word *“passions”* has a sexual connotation, but the Greek term here merely refers to desires and ambitions . Once we were conformed to the world's passions and desires and ambitions. Whatever the world was seeking, we sought; what the world was doing, we did. Now, Peter says, we are to bear the fruit of conform ourselves to a new ambition to be more like God.

There is a new conformity--to God himself. If we refuse to allow the world to squeeze us into its mold, then the life of God will express itself in us, and we will be holy. Now, there is a measure of conformity to the world which all of us have to assume. These are the superficial conformities in matters such as dress, customs, and cultural practices that are not contrary to Scripture, which we cannot avoid. Peter is not talking about that sort of disconformity, but rather about the attitudes and beliefs of the world. It is these we are to reject. So Peter says the life of God will manifest itself when we resist the tendency to conform to the world. Know that the command "*be holy*" in English is "be becoming holy" in the Greek. Peter has a process in view. Sometimes we think the Christian life is like Cinderella's story of where a fairy godmother waved her magic wand, and suddenly everyone is transformed. The problem is that when midnight comes, the whole thing falls apart. And then we wonder if we ever had been transformed. *True biblical born-again holiness is not about an immediate transformation – but rather, a lifelong process.* And if we give God the right to be Lord in our lives, and allow him to sit in judgment on our tendencies to conform to the world's way - God's life will become manifest in ours, and we will "be becoming holy." We see this in that many who claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior sometimes struggle with addictions or enslaving habits for many years before they are delivered. God does grant deliverance in His time, though we may struggle for a long time. But God does not see our failure but the attitude of our heart and our desire for him to be Lord. Holiness is a process. In the midst of opposition, suffering and persecution born-again Christians should bear the fruit of holiness.

3) In the midst of opposition, suffering and persecution born-again Christians should also bear the fruit of fear. "*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, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God*" (1 Peter 1:17-21). It sounds strange for Peter to call us to "*conduct ourselves with fear*" when so much of the Bible is a summons to faith. But Peter could not possibly be talking about the kind of *cowering fear* we would usually associate with this word. This is not cowering from God; it is rather, to be *a godly fear of awe before God, which* causes us to live out our lives with a deep sense of responsibility.

God expects us to look at life with a sense of responsibility, because we are responsible for what we think, say and do in life. We know that, because the Word of God tells us that God is a judge: "*if you call on him as Father who judges.*" God is our Father, with all the characteristics of fatherhood which come to mind when we use that word. But he is still also our judge. He is not a pushover. He is not a wuss. He is a judge, and he is an impartial judge. The word translated "*impartially*" literally means that he does not judge "by the face." He does not care what we look like, how old we are, our gender or our background. These are all superficial factors to God. Rather, God judges us by our works, what we do. This is what Peter is telling us in our text for today: "*If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear.*"

Again that sounds strange, because we know from Scripture that we are never judged on the basis of works, what we do. Remember, Peter is speaking to born-again Christians here. He is not talking about a judgment to condemnation. Those of us who truly know Jesus Christ will never be condemned. Scripture promises that. Our salvation is secure. Those who truly have been truly saved will endure to the end. We will never have to stand before God and account for our salvation on the basis the works of what we do. But what Peter is talking about is the final judgment seat of Christ, where we as born-again Christians will give an account for what we haven't done, and for how we have used the resources God has given us, and for how we have ministered to those in great need, who have nothing to offer us in return. This is how we are to "*conduct ourselves with fear*" because we are responsible for how we live our lives for God and what we do for God and others while we are here on earth.

Paul also tells us that the second incentive to bear the fruit of godly fear is the nature of our salvation: *“Conduct yourselves with fear . . . knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”* This is amazing! God himself died for us!! This should always give us pause in times when we wander from God’s call in our lives. We bear the fruit of godly fear when we consider the impending judgment of Christians, and our responsibility to live out our lives under the scrutiny of God, and the amazing reality of God's grace, mercy and love.

4) In the midst of opposition, suffering and persecution born-again Christians should also bear the fruit of love. *“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you”* (1 Peter 1:22-25). Peter commanded these Christians in Asia Minor to love because they were not only suffering due to pressures from the community around, but now, having been born again, they were struggling with members of their own spiritual family. Jews and Gentiles were now brothers in Christ, masters and slaves were now brothers, so all the relationships they were accustomed to had changed. Peter says, *“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.”* In other words, *“Since you have come to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, God has cleansed you; you are pure. Now I want you to reach out in sincere love to each other. I want you to have genuine affection, without hypocrisy, for one another. I want you to reach out in 'agape' love, to stretch yourselves out in sacrificial love for one another.”*

We are commanded to *“love.”* The word Peter uses for *“love”* indicates unconditional love, a love which does not hesitate to love the unlovable and unresponsive. Many of us have been called to live out our lives in circumstances where our love is not returned. That is a tough way to live. But Peter says that because of our new birth, because our hearts have been changed, we now can love with divine love. Before Christ, all of life was self-centered. We loved ourselves, we thought in terms of ourselves, everything pointed in toward us. But when Jesus comes into our lives, and we experience the new birth, and our thoughts begin to go out to others, because that is our nature. That is what we are, because of Christ in us. We do not have to try to produce that love. We can respond to people in need, reach out to them, regardless of their unloveliness, knowing that the love of God himself is in us with a love that never flinches. 1 John 4:10 says, *“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* That is giving love even when people do not respond.

That kind of love is still scarce in the church today. There is plenty brotherly love demonstrated among Christians, but not nearly enough sacrificial love. Peter is asking for self-sacrificial love for other people. That’s hard and inconvenient. You can lose a whole weekend doing self-sacrificial love. You can even lose weeks and months and years because you care about someone else. But that's the way God wants us to live in fervent love for one another from the heart. And that does not allow complaining and grumbling that you have stretched yourself out to minister to somebody. Learning how to do that is a process. We are all so different from each other. Sometimes we feel if others would just live like we want them to live, we could really get along. But no one checks with us. People just show up in our lives with their strange habits, strange manners, strange dress, strange smells, and strange smiles. But, Peter tells us, we have been purified, we have been born again, and those realities have immediate consequences in our lives to enable us to love one another right now. We have *“been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”*

It is here then that Peter quotes Isaiah 40, saying that it was the Spirit and the word of God, spoken and written, that changed their lives, and that eternal word of truth continues to speak to mankind in every generation, in any and every environment. It is an unchanging, vital, ever-present truth: *'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.'* And this word is the good news that was preached to you." Hebrews 4:12-13 says, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* Every generation has the same experience of looking into this Word and seeing a reflection of itself. This is no temporary, passing word. *"The word of the Lord remains forever!"*

In Christ we find our living hope through the living Word of God. The truth of God's Word tells us that in the midst of opposition, suffering and persecution born-again Christians should bear the fruit of hope, holiness, fear and love. These are the fruits of our salvation: A *hope* based on the second coming of Jesus Christ. A *holiness* based on the conformity to the character of God. A *fear* of God based on a deep sense of responsibility to live for God. And a *love* based on the sacrificial love of God to send his son Jesus Christ into the world to die on a cross in our place for our sins - defeating sin, evil and death so he would rise from the dead so we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back to God so we might have a new life here on earth and an eternal life after we pass away from this world.

*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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* 1 Peter 1:3-12

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