

The Call To Holiness

1 Peter 1:1

Preface: Call To Holiness

It is asserted by many, and I don't disagree, that the First Epistle of Peter is an exhortation to Christians to live a life of trust and obedience. Peter's goal seems to be to get the people of God to behave like the people of God. It is his goal to get us to live a certain way. In short, Peter is conveying to us that God is calling us to live a holy life.

Half-time Speech

We see this pretty clearly in verses thirteen through seventeen of chapter one where Peter writes what could be likened to a motivational half-time speech given to a football team that has been taking a beating for the first thirty minutes of the game. He writes,

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance; ¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, ¹⁶ because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’ ¹⁷ And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear” (1 Peter 1:13-17).

The Call/The Approach

I would like to do two things in this section: First, I would like to examine what Peter is specifically calling us to in verses thirteen through seventeen. In other words, how is he telling us to live? Then I would like to examine Peter's approach to getting us to live that way.

In his first twelve verses Peter introduces what he, with apostolic authority, views as the necessary things that need to be taught and known in order to properly stimulate the Christian to that life—the life of holiness. The “therefore” at the beginning of verse thirteen suggests that what he has written so far should evoke a response in us that will satisfactorily motivate us to get into the game and play the second half with greater intensity and efficiency.

A Different Approach

It is with a sense of grief I will state, at the onset, that what we will find in verses one through twelve is quite different than what we see foisted upon the Christian community under the guise of victorious Christian living. What we will see in verses one

through twelve (Peter's approach to motivate Christians) is not what I see placarded in Christian bookstores. It is not what I see as the emphasis in most Christian radio and television programming. And it is not what I see in most Christian conferences to which I am invited. On the contrary, I have found that people who emphasize what Peter emphasizes are often thought to be either divisive in their doctrine or just in love with theology (as if it were some sort of metaphysical tinker-toy.) They are said to be so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good.

Words Of God Over Words Of Men

It is not my desire to slam away at modern Christians and I hope that I am wrong and getting more wrong every day. But I will lay this upon the table of your consideration and allow you to draw your own conclusions. Let us consider the Spirit-inspired words of Peter over and above the thoughts and counsels of men—even if the men are clergy, myself included. Peter calls us to holiness. Again, Peter has just spent twelve verses expressing things that he believed would inspire his readers to a certain behavior. First let's examine the behavior.

I. The Call To Holiness

Gird Up

He tells his readers to gird up the loins of their minds. At a time when both men and women walked in robes it was necessary, prior to a long journey or hard labor, to tie up the flowing garment with belts. This way the journey can be made or labor done without undue impediments. Peter tells his readers to gird up the loins of their minds. In other words there is a great deal of unnecessary mental tapestry that is encumbering our thinking.

The world and the church are replete with, what amounts to be, psychologists and motivational speakers whose purpose is to get us to think or behave in such a way as to get the most out of life—even out of our Christian life. These well-meaning types of programs usually consist of helpful hints on successful Christian living or a list of ascetic disciplines that will help us reach a level of deeper spirituality. Some of these things may be good, some not so good.

I would suggest that to know and meditate upon what Peter will tell us in the first twelve verses is the girding up of the loins of our minds.

Sober

Another call to action by Peter is the call to sobriety. Although this may apply to eating and drinking I think Peter is enjoining us to a general temperate disposition in all things. We shouldn't allow any action or affection to "carry us away." This can apply to an unhealthy amount of time and interest dedicated to sports, hobbies, talking on the phone, internet use, television, etc. Or maybe we find ourselves continually in arguments, losing our temper or dwelling on evil things and festering bitterness.

Paul says that he buffets his body and makes it his slave. Peter calls us to have, what amounts to be, self-control. We are to control our passions and not vice-versa. People should not be able to look at us and utter the words “This guy is losing it” regarding anything we do.

Rest Fully On Grace

Peter then charges us to rest *our* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words we are not to allow what we perceive the case to be now to be the source of our hope. It is nice when things are going well and it is fine to enjoy good times. But people who allow “things going well” to be the source of their hope are walking across a slippery tight-rope in high winds without a net.

There is a place where our hope belongs. It should rest upon the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This can mean one of two things: How Jesus is revealed to us in the gospels or, more likely, Peter desires that we set our hopes upon the heavenly realms—when Christ comes again and the eternal state of infinite joy, peace and comfort subdues us forever.

Obedient Children

Peter then tells us that we should behave as obedient children, not conforming ourselves to the former lusts, *as* in our ignorance. Biblically speaking the word ignorance has a moral connotation. Paul writes in Ephesians,

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17,18).

Basically Peter is telling us that we should not behave the way we behaved prior to being saved. We are children of God and we should behave as such. Peter continues this type of thinking in the next two verses.

Be Holy

A holy God has called us to be holy. Holy means separate or different. Some versions go so far as to say “peculiar.” The conduct of a Christian should be quite distinct from the conduct of the world. There is some debate about how it is a Christian goes about leading a holy life and conducting himself in a holy manner but the answer is quite obvious. We are to seek, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength to love God and love our neighbor. This is the greatest commandment and is the summary of the law. So in an amplified sense, we are to seek to obey the law of God. James writes,

“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

There are many things that can be meant by the phrase, “not being under the law.” But to live in such a way as to disregard or ignore the law of God as the Christians rule of life is not one of them. God is holy. We are called to be holy. And God’s law is an extension of His own character and nature. Therefore Paul tells us in Romans 7:12, **“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.”**

Fear God

Finally Peter writes, **“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear.”** Without getting into too much detail on this verse Peter is, in short, saying that if we truly consider ourselves children of God, or Christians, we should live our life on earth with a good, righteous, reverent fear of God.

II. Peter’s Approach

Having examined the call to holiness, what did Peter write in his first twelve verses that made him feel confident enough to start verse thirteen by stating “therefore.” It is as if he were saying, “What I have said up to now should be sufficient for you to begin leading this holy life to which you were called.” So, what did he say in his first twelve verses? This subject will be discussed in the pages to follow.

An Apostle Of Jesus Christ

Peter starts by self-addressing his letter, **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”** The words we’re about to study contain apostolic authority. Apostle means “one sent forth.” In the loosest sense an apostle can be the guy who delivers your pizza. He has been sent forth from Dominos with your dinner. In it’s strictest sense, Jesus is considered an Apostle (Hebrews 3:1) because He was the Son, sent forth from the Father. In its normal New Testament sense, however, an apostle was a specific, designated office. There were, initially, twelve apostles. Then there were eleven apostles. When Judas was replaced we see Peter give a requirement for a biblical apostle.

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21,22).

An apostle had to be a witness of the resurrection. I always seek to seize the opportunity to remove from the neck of modern evangelicalism the false claim of modern-

day apostles. The canon is closed. The scriptures are sufficient. There are no more apostles in the general biblical sense. God confirmed and attested apostleship by granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands (Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2). You and I needn't respect, fear nor acknowledge people who consider themselves apostles. The foundation has been laid. It is built upon but not extended.

To The Pilgrims

Here Peter is likely addressing the scattered church. In some places the term "pilgrim" or "alien" or "sojourner" may mean Christians who are still on earth. It is likely, by his reference to the dispersion, that he is indicating the actual scattering of Christians through Asia Minor. He now makes his first strong, apostolic statement. This is the beginning of things Peter believed Christians should center on in order to be properly motivated to live a holy life. The first thing he addresses is something that many churches and Christians stay clear of. It is a subject that one of my seminary professors told me was a big waste of time to discuss. The subject is "election."

Election

Peter thought it was necessary to expose to his readers the roots of their salvation. He calls them the "elect." What Peter wanted them, and wants us, to understand is that our involvement in the things of God—the fact that we are included in His covenant family and are saved—is a result of Him calling us to Himself. There are many reasons why this is critically important for Christians to know this. Some reasons are assurance, humility, the proper glorification of God for our salvation and much, much more.

Tempted To Quit

These particular dispersed Christians were grieved by various trials (verse 6). There was a great temptation to abandon the faith and go back to a less difficult way of life, namely Judaism. This was the theme of the entire Epistle to the Hebrews. Perhaps you were at one time part of a team that was struggling, or you worked for a company that appeared to be going belly up, or part of a project or ministry that didn't seem to be flourishing. A natural response would be to question whether or not you made the right decision. Maybe you should quit. Maybe the price is too high.

Peter is assuring his readers that our inclusion in the kingdom of God, and whatever difficulties or trials that come with it (in the case of many of his readers, death itself), is not something which resulted from our own intellect, whim or emotional dysfunction. Our inclusion is a result of God electing us and calling us to Himself.

President

Suppose I thought it was necessary to defend the life of our president. It would be one thing for me to arm myself and go on a self-determined mission wondering all the while if what I was doing was at all valuable. If things became difficult I would probably

think to myself, “What am I doing? This was a bad idea. I must not have been thinking clearly.” But if I were commissioned by the White House to do the same thing I would be assured (at least in a limited sense for this illustration) that what I was doing was necessary, valuable and my commission was laid upon me by forces wiser, stronger and more capable than myself.

Foreknowledge

Peter tells us that we are the ‘elect’ **“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.** Some will argue that this means that God chose us because He knew that we were going to choose Him. One well known pastor and radio personality used the illustration of going to the race track. He asserted that a person who goes to the race track, knowing who are the winning horses were going to be in advance, would surely pick the winners. Of course this is nothing but another form of works salvation. Whether the works are past or future doesn’t matter.

God knows something is going to happen because He determines it to happen. A simple cross reference will give us a wider view of election. In a parallel passage Paul writes,

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29).

God’s foreknowledge cannot be separated from His foreordination. God knows what will happen because He makes sure it will happen. The amount of philosophical gymnastics that have been played to deny this true has pushed many people’s understanding of God to ridiculously impotent levels. I don’t want to get too philosophical here but I will ask two questions: If God knows you’re going to do something is it possible that you won’t do it? If God knew you were going to do it before the foundation of the world is it possible that your will was the primary cause? The answers to both of these questions both Biblically and logically must be ‘no’.

Sanctification Of The Spirit

Peter finishes the second verse by writing **“in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.** Two more things are found in verse two. The Holy Spirit of God exercises His energies of sanctification toward the elect in such a way that it produces these two things: Obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Sprinkled Blood

Some of you will recognize the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus as alluding to the Old Covenant ritual recorded in Exodus 24 where Moses would use hyssop to sprinkle the sacrificed blood of oxen on the people of God. David equated this with being cleansed in

Psalm 51:7. In short, the sprinkled blood of Jesus is the gospel. It is our being cleansed by His sacrifice on the cross.

Obedience

Obedience is also included in the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Those who have been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus evidence that work of the Spirit through a demonstration. The demonstration is the fruit that is always born when God has spiritually begotten a child.

Law And Gospel

Essentially what we see in verse two is the law and the gospel. The Holy Spirit saves us by the blood of Christ and calls us to holy living. These are the two sides of the coin. These are always working together. In Ephesians 2 Paul writes,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,*⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

We are saved by grace for good works. The two must always be there. To what extent the works must be present is impossible for one man to determine for another. It is more of a self-examination. Suffice it to say they should both be present.

Conclusion

As Peter seeks to motivate us to holy living he calls to our attention first and foremost the divine effectual election and calling of God. He has chosen us as His peculiar people. His Spirit has come upon us with the application of the sprinkled blood of Jesus and the natural result of this should be a desire to obey. It is a holy calling from a holy God. It is my prayer that all who hear these words will recognize it for the divine thing that it is and trust and obey.