

Staying Clean In A Polluted World

Text - 1 Peter 1:13-21

Any pastor or special speaker who announces that he will be speaking on holiness will probably not get a large turnout. It is not a popular subject. Although it is not a popular subject, it is still a Bible doctrine for today, and any true preacher of the Gospel will need to talk about practicing holiness or holy living.

1 Peter 1:15a says “*But as he which hath called you is holy...*”

God has declared us to be a “*holy nation*” in 1 Peter 2:9. God views our position as “holy”, or set apart for him. Because I have been called by God to salvation and have been declared holy or set apart in my position, I am also to practice a separated or holy life (1 Peter 1:15-16). This does not mean that I’ll be sinless in this life, but it does mean that I will live a life that strives to be holy (1 John 1:8-10).

The root meaning of the word translated holy is “different.” A holy person is not an odd person, but a different person. His life has a quality about it that is different. His present “lifestyle” is not only different from his past way of life, but it is different from the “lifestyles” of the unbelievers around him. A Christian’s life of holiness appears strange to the lost (1 Peter 4:4), but it is not strange to other believers.

However, it is not easy to live in this world and maintain a holy walk. The anti-God atmosphere around us that the Bible calls “the world” is always pressing against us, trying to force us to conform. In this paragraph, Peter presented to his readers **FIVE SPIRITUAL INCENTIVES** to encourage them (and us) to maintain a different lifestyle, a holy walk in a polluted world.

THE GLORY OF GOD (1 PETER 1:13)

“The revelation of Jesus Christ” is another expression for the “living hope” and “the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Christians live in the future tense; their present actions and decisions are governed by this future hope. Just as an engaged couple makes all their plans in the light of that future wedding, so Christians today live with the expectation of seeing Jesus Christ.

“*Gird up the loins of your mind*” simply means, “*Pull your thoughts together!* Have a disciplined mind!” The image is that of a robed man, tucking his skirts under the belt, so he can be free to run. When you center your thoughts on the return of Christ, and live accordingly, you escape the many worldly things that would encumber your mind and hinder your spiritual progress. Peter may have borrowed the idea from the Passover supper, because later in this section he identifies Christ as the Lamb (1 Peter 1:19). The Jews at Passover were supposed to eat the meal in haste, ready to move (Ex. 12:11).

Outlook determines outcome; attitude determines action. A Christian who is looking for the glory of God has a greater motivation for present obedience than a Christian who ignores the Lord’s return. The contrast is illustrated in the lives of Abraham and Lot (Gen. 12-13; Heb. 11:8-16). Abraham had his eyes of faith on that heavenly city, so he had no interest in the world’s real estate. But Lot, who had tasted the pleasures of the world in Egypt, gradually moved toward Sodom. Abraham brought blessing to his home, but Lot brought judgment. Outlook determined outcome.

Not only should we have a disciplined mind, but we should also have a *sober* mind. The word means “to be calm, steady, controlled; to weigh matters.” Unfortunately some people get “carried away” with prophetic studies and lose their spiritual balance. The fact that Christ is coming should encourage us to be calm and collected (1 Peter 4:7). The fact that Satan is on the prowl is another reason to be sober-minded (1 Peter 5:8). Anyone whose mind becomes

undisciplined, and whose life “falls apart” because of prophetic studies, is giving evidence that he does not really understand Bible prophecy.

We should also have an *optimistic* mind. “Hope to the end” means “set your hope fully.” Have a hopeful outlook! A friend of mine sent me a note one day that read: “When the *outlook* is gloomy, try the *uplook!*” Good advice, indeed! It has to be dark for the stars to appear.

The result of this spiritual mind-set is that a believer experiences the grace of God in his life. To be sure, we will experience grace when we see Jesus Christ; but we can also experience grace today as we look for Him to return. We have been saved by grace and we depend moment by moment on God’s grace (1 Peter 1:10). Looking for Christ to return strengthens our faith and hope in difficult days, and this imparts to us more of the grace of God. Titus 2:10-13 is another passage that shows the relationship between grace and the coming of Jesus Christ.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD (1 PETER 1:14-15)

The argument here is logical and simple. Children inherit the nature of their parents. God is holy; therefore, as His children, we should live holy lives. We are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) and ought to reveal that nature in godly living.

Peter reminded his readers of what they were before they trusted Christ. They had been *children of disobedience* (Eph. 2:1-3), but now they were to be obedient children. True salvation always results in obedience (Rom. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:2). They had also been *imitators of the world*, “fashioning themselves” after the standards and pleasures of the world. Romans 12:2 translates this same word as “conformed to this world.” Unsaved people tell us that they want to be “free and different”; yet they all imitate one another!

The cause of all this is *ignorance* that leads to *indulgence*. Unsaved people lack spiritual intelligence, and this causes them to give themselves to all kinds of fleshly and worldly indulgences (see Acts 17:30; Eph. 4:17ff). Since we were born with a fallen nature, it was natural for us to live sinful lives. Nature determines appetites and actions. A dog and a cat behave differently because they have different natures.

We would still be in that sad sinful plight were it not for the grace of God. He called us! One day, Jesus called to Peter and his friends and said, “Come, follow Me . . . and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17, NIV). They responded by faith to His call, and this completely changed their lives.

Perhaps this explains why Peter used the word “called” so often in this letter. We are called to be holy (1 Peter 1:15). We are called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). We are called to suffer and follow Christ’s example of meekness (1 Peter 2:21). In the midst of persecution, we are called “to inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9). Best of all, we are called to “His eternal glory” (1 Peter 5:10). God called us before we called on Him for salvation. It is all wholly of grace.

But God’s gracious election of sinners to become saints always involves responsibility, and not just privilege. He has chosen us in Christ “that we should be holy and without blame before Him” (Eph. 1:4). God has called us to Himself, and He is holy; therefore, we should be holy. Peter quoted from the Old Testament Law to back up his admonition (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26).

God’s holiness is an essential part of His nature. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Any holiness that we have in character and conduct must be derived from Him. Basically, to be *sanctified* means to be “set apart for God’s exclusive use and pleasure.” It involves separation from that which is unclean and complete devotion to God (2 Cor. 6:14-

7:1). We are to be holy “in all manner of conversation [behavior],” so that everything we do reflects the holiness of God.

To a dedicated believer, there is no such thing as “secular” and “sacred.” All of life is holy as we live to glorify God. Even such ordinary activities as eating and drinking can be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). If something cannot be done to the glory of God, then we can be sure it must be out of the will of God.

THE WORD OF GOD (1 PETER 1:16)

“It is written!” is a statement that carries great authority for the believer. Our Lord used the Word of God to defeat Satan, and so may we (Matt. 4:1-11; see Eph. 6:17). But the Word of God is not only a sword for battle; it is also a light to guide us in this dark world (Ps. 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19), food that strengthens us (Matt. 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2), and water that washes us (Eph. 5:25-27).

The Word of God has a sanctifying ministry in the lives of dedicated believers (John 17:17). Those who delight in God’s Word, meditate on it, and seek to obey it will experience God’s direction and blessing in their lives (Ps. 1:1-3). The Word reveals God’s mind, so we should *learn* it; God’s heart, so we should *love* it; God’s will, so we should *live* it. Our whole being—mind, will, and heart—should be controlled by the Word of God.

Peter quoted from the Book of Leviticus, “Ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). Does this mean that the Old Testament Law is authoritative today for New Testament Christians? Keep in mind that the early Christians did not even have the New Testament. The only Word of God they possessed was the Old Testament, and God used that Word to direct and nurture them. Believers today are not under the ceremonial laws given to Israel; however, even in these laws we see moral and spiritual principles revealed. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the Epistles, so we must obey them. (The Sabbath commandment was given especially to Israel and does not apply to us today. See Rom. 14:1-9.) As we read and study the Old Testament, we will learn much about God’s character and working, and we will see truths pictured in types and symbols.

The first step toward keeping clean in a filthy world is to ask, “What does the Bible say?” In the Scriptures, we will find precepts, principles, promises, and persons to guide us in today’s decisions. If we are really willing to obey God, He will show us His truth (John 7:17). While God’s methods of working may change from age to age, His character remains the same and His spiritual principles never vary. We do not study the Bible just to get to know the Bible. We study the Bible that we might get to know God better. Too many earnest Bible students are content with outlines and explanations, and do not really get to know God. It is good to know the Word of God, but this should help us better know the God of the Word.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD (1 PETER 1:17)

As God’s children, we need to be serious about sin and about holy living. Our Heavenly Father is a holy (John 17:11) and righteous Father (John 17:25). He will not compromise with sin. He is merciful and forgiving, but He is also a loving disciplinarian who cannot permit His children to enjoy sin. After all, it was sin that sent His Son to the cross. If we call God “Father,” then we should reflect His nature.

What is this judgment that Peter wrote about? It is the judgment of a believer’s works. It has nothing to do with salvation, except that salvation ought to produce good works (Titus 1:16; 2:7, 12). When we trusted Christ, God forgave our sins and declared us righteous in His Son (Rom. 5:1-10; 8:1-4; Col. 2:13). Our sins have already been judged on the cross (1 Peter 2:24), and therefore they cannot be held against us (Heb. 10:10-18).

But when the Lord returns, there will be a time of judgment called “the Judgment Seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:9-10). Each of us will give an account of his works, and each will receive the appropriate reward. This is a “family judgment,” the Father dealing with His beloved children. The Greek word translated *judgeth* carries the meaning “to judge in order to find something good.” God will search into the motives for our ministry; He will examine our hearts. But He assures us that His purpose is to glorify Himself in our lives and ministries, “and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:5). What an encouragement!

God will give us many gifts and privileges, as we grow in the Christian life; but He will never give us the privilege to disobey and sin. He never pampers His children or indulges them. He is no respecter of persons. He “shows no partiality and accepts no bribes” (Deut. 10:17, NIV). “For God does not show favoritism” (Rom. 2:11, NIV). Years of obedience cannot purchase an hour of disobedience. If one of His children disobeys, God must chasten (Heb. 12:1-13). But when His child obeys and serves Him in love, He notes that and prepares the proper reward.

Peter reminded his readers that they were only “sojourners” on earth. Life was too short to waste in disobedience and sin (see 1 Peter 4:1-6). It was when Lot stopped being a sojourner, and became a resident in Sodom, that he lost his consecration and his testimony. Everything he lived for went up in smoke! Keep reminding yourself that you are a “stranger and pilgrim” in this world (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11).

In view of the fact that the Father lovingly disciplines His children today, and will judge their works in the future, we ought to cultivate an attitude of godly fear. This is not the cringing fear of a slave before a master, but the loving reverence of a child before his father. It is not fear of judgment (1 John 4:18), but a fear of disappointing Him or sinning against His love. It is “godly fear” (2 Cor. 7:1), a sober reverence for the Father.

I sometimes feel that there is today an increase in carelessness, even flippancy, in the way we talk about God or talk to God. Nearly a century ago, Bishop B.F. Westcott said, “Every year makes me tremble at the daring with which people speak of spiritual things.” The godly bishop should hear what is said today! A worldly actress calls God “the Man upstairs.” A baseball player calls Him “the great Yankee in the sky.” An Old Testament Jew so feared God that he would not even pronounce His holy name, yet we today speak of God with carelessness and irreverence. In our public praying, we sometimes get so familiar that other people wonder whether we are trying to express our requests or impress the listeners with our nearness to God!

THE LOVE OF GOD (1 PETER 1:18-21)

This is the highest motive for holy living. In this paragraph, Peter reminded his readers of their salvation experience, a reminder that all of us regularly need. This is one reason our Lord established the Lord’s Supper, so that regularly His people would remember that He died for them. Note the reminders that Peter gave.

He reminded them of ***what they were***. To begin with, they were slaves who needed to be set free. The word *redeemed* is, to us, a theological term; but it carried a special meaning to people in the first-century Roman Empire. There were probably 60 million slaves in the Empire! Many slaves became Christians and fellowshiped in the local assemblies. A slave could purchase his own freedom, if he could collect sufficient funds; or his master could sell him to someone who would pay the price and set him free. Redemption was a precious thing in that day.

We must never forget the slavery of sin (Titus 3:3). Moses urged Israel to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt (Deut. 5:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22). The generation that died in the wilderness forgot the bondage of Egypt and wanted to go back!

Not only did we have a life of slavery, but it was also a life of *emptiness*. Peter called it “the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers” (1 Peter 1:18, NIV), and he described it more specifically in 1 Peter 4:1-4. At the time, these people thought their lives were “full” and “happy,” when they were really empty and miserable. Unsaved people today are blindly living on substitutes.

Peter not only reminded them of what they were, but he also reminded them of *what Christ did*. He shed His precious blood to purchase us out of the slavery of sin and set us free forever. *To redeem* means “to set free by paying a price.” A slave could be freed with the payment of money, but no amount of money can set a lost sinner free. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can redeem us.

Peter was a witness of Christ’s sufferings (1 Peter 5:1) and mentioned His sacrificial death often in this letter (1 Peter 2:21ff; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1). In calling Christ “a Lamb,” Peter was reminding his readers of an Old Testament teaching that was important in the early church, and that ought to be important to us today. It is the doctrine of substitution: an innocent victim giving his life for the guilty.

The doctrine of sacrifice begins in Genesis 3, when God killed animals that He might clothe Adam and Eve. A ram died for Isaac (Gen. 22:13) and the Passover lamb was slain for each Jewish household (Ex. 12). Messiah was presented as an innocent Lamb in Isaiah 53. Isaac asked the question, “Where is the lamb?” (Gen. 22:7) and John the Baptist answered it when he pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In heaven, the redeemed and the angels sing, “Worthy is the Lamb!” (Rev. 5:11-14)

Peter made it clear that Christ’s death was an appointment, not an accident; for it was ordained by God before the foundation of the world (Acts 2:23). From the human perspective, our Lord was cruelly murdered; but from the divine perspective, He laid down His life for sinners (John 10:17-18). But He was raised from the dead! Now, anyone who trusts Him will be saved for eternity.

When you and I meditate on the sacrifice of Christ for us, certainly we should want to obey God and live holy lives for His glory. When only a young lady, Frances Ridley Havergal saw a picture of the crucified Christ with this caption under it: “I did this for thee. What hast thou done for Me?” Quickly, she wrote a poem, but was dissatisfied with it and threw it into the fireplace. The paper came out unharmed! Later, at her father’s suggestion, she published the poem, and today we sing it.

I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed;
That thou might ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead.
I gave, I gave, My life for thee,
What hast thou given for Me?

A good question, indeed! I trust we can give a good answer to the Lord.