

First Peter

1:13-25

Introduction

There's a Johnny Cash song, *No Earthly Good*. It's main chorus goes like this: "*You're so heavenly minded and you're no earthly good.*"

I understand his sentiment; and with all due respect to our departed brother... **The truth is that those who do the most earthly good are the ones who are the most heavenly minded!**

- Peter was *heavenly minded*. He looked forward to the future, to what he called in verse thirteen "the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."
- Peter was also deeply concerned with your *earthly good*. In verse thirteen he said "therefore," and from this word forward his letter is a series of commands for living successfully on the earth.

The word Peter used to summarize being heavenly minded was "hope." The word he used to summarize being earthly good was "holiness."

We want to take a look at the relationship between hope and holiness. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Hope That Results In Holiness Is The Daily Decision To Look To Your Future, and #2 Holiness That Reveals Hope Is The Daily Discipline To Live For Your Future.

#1 Hope That Results In Holiness Is The Daily Decision To Look To Your Future (v13-16)

"Hope" was an ambitious theme considering Peter's readers were suffering and were about to suffer even more. Still, he did not flinch.

Look to your future and you will be hopeful that God, Who has begun His work of salvation in you, will complete it when you see Jesus.

You don't automatically look to your future in heaven. Things of earth have a tendency to crowd out thoughts of heaven. Your mind and its thoughts need to be directed to the future. Peter described three states of mind you must maintain: *activity*, *alertness*, and *acuity*. All of them are in verse thirteen:

1 Peter 1:13 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;

"Therefore" looks back at what Peter said in the opening verses. He said your salvation is being kept in heaven for you; and that you are being kept by God to definitely get there.

"Gird up the loins" is a custom we are not immediately familiar with. In the culture of the first century men wore long, flowing garments. If you were going to walk fast, run, or work, you would need to pull-up your garments between your legs and then wrap and tie them around your waist to keep you from tripping over them. "Gird up the loins of your **mind**" means you should understand that your mind must always be active. You can't let your mind wander or walk around on its own; you must understand your thoughts need to be pulled-up so you can make progress.

Then he said "be sober." While he certainly had in mind that you would not get drunk or be under the influence of other substances, the broader meaning is to not become intoxicated with anything out in the world. Instead you should remain alert.

Then he said "rest your hope fully..." "Rest" can be translated *set*. It's a word describing what you set, or focus, your mind to think about. You should practice mental acuity, with "acuity" meaning *the ability to resolve fine detail*. Set your mind to resolving the fine details of your future in heaven.

While we're mentioning songs... Billy Joel wrote *New York State of Mind*. In it he describes the feeling of being in New York City - the life and energy of the city. **Well, you and I need to be in a New**

Jerusalem state-of-mind! That's our city; that's where we're headed. Peter summarized heaven saying,

...the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

"Grace" is the further and final storehouse of spiritual blessings being kept on reserve in heaven for believers. They will be "brought" to you when Jesus is fully revealed. They will be brought to you when you see Jesus face-to-face.

Peter has not said exactly how you are able to practice this mind control over yourself. He hasn't given you any formula or steps. *And he won't!* Instead he said,

1 Peter 1:14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

This is a simple comparison and contrast. "Your ignorance" is not an intellectual slam. It is a description of your life before you were saved. You were **ignorant of God** - of His Word, and His will, and His ways. You were subject to your "lusts." These are the fleshly desires and drives which ruled your life, always seeking to be indulged.

Then you get saved! Once you trust Jesus Christ for eternal life you become "children." In context this means you receive a new nature - a divine nature - as God is now your Father. Your spirit is made alive and the Holy Spirit comes to reside within you. Your old fleshly lusts remain as long as you remain on earth in your physical body; but now you have this powerful new nature within you by which you are enabled and empowered to practice the mind control Peter has been discussing. God gives you victory over your lusts and you no longer need to "conform yourself" to your former way of life.

In verses fifteen and sixteen Peter described the key characteristic of the new nature you receive as a Christian by using the word "holy":

1 Peter 1:15 but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,
1 Peter 1:16 because it is written, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"

Instead of conforming to your old, fleshly lusts, you are to be "holy in all your conduct." The root word for "holy" is to be *different*. Peter used it to emphasize that you will act according to your new nature; you will act and conduct yourself differently because you are a child of God.

It's very simple, really, what Peter was saying. Before you were saved you had no choice but to follow and indulge your fleshly lusts. Now that you are spiritually alive you are enabled by God to follow His Word, His will, and His ways. You are God's child; like any child, you've inherited the nature of your parent and act accordingly.

Holiness is not automatic; you still have your flesh to contend with. But in order to even pursue holiness you must daily decide to look to your future. As a child of God you have been set free from the ignorance that leads you to indulge your lusts. You no longer live for this temporary, passing world. You have a New Jerusalem state-of-mind that affects everything you say and do.

We don't think about the future enough. We concentrate on the present and load-up on Christian self-help books and seminars. If you really want to see a change in your life, make a daily decision to look to your future.

#2 Holiness That Reveals Hope Is The Daily Discipline To Live For Your Future (v17-25)

I like Peter's simplicity. He reduces the Christian life to one word: *Holy*. God is holy and you *can* and *should* imitate His holiness. You do it by daily disciplining yourself to **live** for your future. As we've just seen and said, and as you know all too well from personal experience, your "former lusts" are still present within you. They will be with you until you leave this physical body behind - either through death or the Rapture. You are now able to obey God but must discipline yourself to do so.

Peter suggests at least four daily disciplines that can be summarized by four words: *call, consider, congregate, and concentrate*.

In verse seventeen your discipline is to "call on the Father":

1 Peter 1:17 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;

The word "call" means to constantly approach your Father for help. We might use the word "pray." Prayer, however, can be seen as more of a duty than a discipline. We speak long, eloquent prayers that are more for others to hear than for God; we preach in our prayers! So Peter used "call" to remind you of the personal aspect of keeping in constant communication with your Father for the help you'll need.

Your heavenly Father "without partiality judges according to each one's work." This is *not* the future judgment in which you will (hopefully!) receive rewards. This is an ongoing, daily evaluation by God. Knowing He's with you, you want to "conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here" on the earth "in fear." This is not so much the fear of discipline as it is the fear of disappointing. You want your Father to be proud of you.

In verses eighteen through twenty-one your discipline is to consider:

1 Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers,

1 Peter 1:19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

"Knowing" can mean *consider*. You are to consider - to give careful thought, to remember, to weigh in your mind. What are you to consider? That you have been "redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ..." You are to daily remember the Cross of Jesus Christ upon which He died that you might live forever! Your salvation was freely given, but that doesn't mean it was cheap. It was costly. It cost the Son of God, your Savior, His "blood" - a substance more precious than anything that exists anywhere else in the universe. By it alone can a man be saved from Hell and fit for heaven. Its value is such that "whosoever" in the whole human race who calls upon the Lord can be saved.

Jesus was the "lamb without blemish and without spot." In those few words Peter summarized the entire sacrificial system of the Old

Testament - from the sacrifice in the Garden of Eden forward until John the Baptist identified Jesus as God's full, final, and complete sacrifice and substitute, saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."

(While we're on the subject of considering Christ and His sacrifice let me invite you to share communion with us tonight).

The practical, daily benefit of considering your redemption by the blood of Jesus is in verses twenty and twenty-one:

1 Peter 1:20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

1 Peter 1:21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

These verses span eternity. "Before the foundation of the world," in eternity past, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit had "foreordained" their plan to save you. It was to send Jesus, Who was and is God, as a man so He could die as your Substitute and Savior. Jesus is now "raised from the dead" and has been given "glory." This looks to eternity future when God will finish all things He has promised.

Inbetween eternity past and eternity future is where we live - "in these last times." As we consider all this, "through [Jesus] [we] believe in God." The word for believe is to have *confidence*. The daily discipline of considering your salvation and how it spans eternity gives you confidence in God to live a holy life by putting "your faith and hope... in God."

In verses twenty-two and twenty-three your daily discipline is to congregate:

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

1 Peter 1:23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

The whole opening phrase of verse twenty-two, up to the word "Spirit," means the same thing as "having been born-again." The moment you were born-again you were given "a sincere love of the

brethren." You became a child of God. He's your Father and other believers are your brothers and sisters.

You must also "love one another fervently with a pure heart." You must continue to love them. Your love for them must grow in practical self-sacrifice.

Peter used two different Greek words for love. The first word he used was *phileo*, which is an affectionate love, a brotherly (or sisterly) love. The second word was *agape*. *Agape* is not related at all to feelings of affection; it is a decision to sacrifice for others. You discipline yourself to *agape* others.

Peter said you were "born-again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever." This is to say that you will share eternal relationship and fellowship with your brothers and sisters. One commentator paraphrases it, saying, "Love one another, for you have all been born-again into a fellowship of God's people which will last forever."

You're going to need to congregate with other believers in order to practice this daily discipline. You can *phileo* Christians in general; but in order to *agape* them, you must be around them, be with them.

In verses twenty-four and twenty-five your daily discipline is to concentrate:

1 Peter 1:24 because *"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away,*

1 Peter 1:25 *But the word of the LORD endures forever."* Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

The world around you is temporary; it is compared to "grass" that withers and dies. God's Word is permanent. It's only reasonable, therefore, to prefer God's Word to this world.

You should concentrate on God's Word. In his next letter Peter will tell you that in God's Word you find **everything** you need to live on this temporary planet and to advance in your walk with God.

Christians are concentrating less-and-less on God's Word. One example: So-called "Christian" psychology and psychotherapy. "Professionals" are sought-out more than pastors. I hear all the time that the principles and precepts of God's permanent Word (and I quote) "*Aren't working.*" Believers are looking for more than God's Word and the spiritual disciplines it presents.

The result is a generation of weak-minded believers who prefer their comfort to God's commands. Your help cannot ever come from the broken reservoirs of the world which cannot contain the living water of God's Spirit empowering His Word to enable you to walk in victory.

Let me illustrate discipline. A lot of you (guys especially) play golf. Ever wish you could play as well as Tiger Woods? Sure, he has a natural talent... But all of his biographers concentrate more on his work ethic. He was and is willing to put in the hours and hours of practice that are necessary to improve. Michael Jordan was the same way with basketball. He didn't even make his high school team on the first try! Every coach and teammate describe him as the hardest working player ever.

OK, you're not a full-time athlete... But you are a full-time Christian! The Christian life takes time and discipline to develop. God's precepts and principles work.

You must daily discipline yourself to live for your future. All that you see in the world is passing away, fading away; it has no real permanence, certainly no glory.

I should qualify what I just said. **You** will not pass away or fade away; neither will any person. You and they are here for a short season to determine their address in eternity. Discipline yourself to live for your future and let your holiness reveal your hope to others.

Conclusion

Only those who are heavenly minded can achieve any earthly good. Look forward with hope; live forward in holiness.