

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, September 25, 2011**

**HOW NOW?  
Part Two**

**1 Peter 1:13-25**

Last Sunday we began to think together about the question:

- How now does God want us to live as His people, as followers of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in these extraordinary times?
- Amid the multitude of dangers, toils and snares we encounter at every turn?
- How now does God want us to live out our faith in Him, in this particular time and place in history – in the post 9/11 world in which we find ourselves?
- What kind of lives does God want us to live as citizens of the kingdom of God right here and now?

How now?

I suggested that the seven imperatives found in these verses in 1 Peter 1 are as relevant today as they were when Peter wrote this letter to 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christians who faced extraordinary circumstances and extraordinary challenges of their own to live out their faith in a culture that was not only inhospitable, but downright hostile to both their beliefs and their way of life. Chuck Swindoll describes it as the challenge of “staying clean in a corrupt society,” or “holy living in an unholy world.” We examined the first three of these imperatives last week, all of which are found in verse 13.

You will remember, I hope, that Peter laid the foundation for these instructions in the opening verses of this letter, reminding us that our way of life as Christians is rooted in the gospel. It is rooted in the message of salvation found in Jesus Christ. It is rooted in what God has done for us in the saving work of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross, where the sinless Son of God willingly gave up His life for us. He bore our sins in His body on the cross to set us free from sin and guilt, and to bring us back into a right relationship with God. How God wants us to live is built on the foundation of who God is and what He has done for us. It is built on the foundation of His grace, which, as I learned from Philip Yancey and have repeated again and again, comes free of charge to people who don't deserve it and never will.

Here is how Peter says it, beginning in 1:3: “In His great mercy (God) has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance in heaven that will never perish, spoil or fade” (1:3-4). Because of His mercy and grace shown to undeserving sinners – because the reality of God's saving love in His Son Jesus Christ has transformed the landscape of our lives, bringing beauty out of the ashes of our failure and rebellion, making us alive to the things of God, and giving us peace and joy and hope and a sense of meaning and purpose in life we never knew before – because God has

done all of this and more for us, this is how God wants us to live. This is the foundation which undergirds these directions from Peter.

Here are the three imperatives from last Sunday, all in verse 13:

1. Prepare your mind for action. Get your mind in gear and be alert at all times to what God is doing.
2. Be self-controlled in every part of your life. In the big things and the little things. Let the Holy Spirit produce in you the spiritual fruit of self-control, which is critically important because you cannot serve God's purposes when you are out of control.
3. Set your hope fully on the grace of God. And on the God of grace. People set their hope on all kinds of individuals, institutions, powers, possessions, technology, and other things. It seems to me that the Bible is realistic to the core in its warnings about the ultimate folly of putting one's hope in anyone or anything except God Himself. I didn't refer to it last Sunday, but listen to Psalm 145:

Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortal men, who cannot save (v. 3).

In more contemporary language, we might say:

Do not put your hope in presidents or other leaders;  
do not put your hope in this party or that party,  
as if they have all the answers,  
because they don't.  
Do not put your hope in the experts  
(even Einstein can be proved wrong).  
Sooner or later they will all die.  
If you put your hope in them,  
your hope is likely to die, too.

So, what is the alternative? Psalm 146, again:

Blessed is the one whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD our God (v. 5).

“Put your hope in GOD,” it says in *The Message*, “and know real blessing!” Unless your hope is set fully on the grace of God and the God of grace, your anchor will not hold when the sea of your life gets rough. Set your hope fully on the grace promised to you in Christ.

Three down, four more to go. Are you with me so far? I'm going to combine two of the remaining imperatives into one, so we'll call it three more to go, not four.

## **1. LIVE A HOLY LIFE**

The two to be put together are actually the negative and positive sides of the same principle, in which we find in verses 14-16, where Peter says: “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance” – in other words, when you lived in the spiritual darkness of unbelief, before you understood and embraced the gospel, and came to know and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of your life. “But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I (the LORD your God) am holy.’”

So, the first point today is to live a holy life. In negative terms, it means: “Do not conform to the evil desires” which once ruled your life. I’m sure many of you can hear the echo between what Peter says here and what Paul wrote in Romans 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Don’t just go along with the flow of the culture. Don’t let the poison of immorality pollute your soul. Don’t let the values of the world shape your values. Don’t allow your desires to control you or govern the way you live.

In positive terms, live a holy life, because God is holy. This call to holy living is sounded repeatedly in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus (see 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26). In the same way that God called the people of Israel to “be holy, for I the LORD your God, am holy,” He calls us to be holy in all we do, because He who called us to Himself is holy.

The root meaning of the word *holy* is “set apart.” Holiness in a believer’s life involves being set apart by God and for God. It involves being different from the world around us in our values, attitudes, and priorities in life, in the way we think and speak and act. Not for the sake of being different. But for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the glory of God. For the honor of His name. For the cause of the gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

The holiness of God speaks, of course, not only of God’s differentness and transcendence in relation to all of creation. It also speaks of His complete and absolute moral perfection, a standard which none of us can ever attain.

But still, God calls us to live a holy life – and gives us the grace and power to do it through the saving work of God the Son and the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit in our lives. To “be holy in all you do” is to live your life in a way that reflects the life and character of God, by letting God live His life in you. In *The Message* it says: “Let your life be shaped by God’s life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness.”

You may ask: “What’s the big deal about holiness?”

Let me tell you what the big deal is: “Without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one [especially, none of you, dear friends] misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:14-15). Holiness is a big deal because holy living pleases God. Holy living, in response to the riches of God’s grace

lavished upon us, aligns us with the purposes of God and makes us useful in the work of God's kingdom.

So, do not let evil, sinful, selfish desires rule your life. But make it your aim to live a holy life to the glory and praise of God.

## **2. LIVE AS STRANGERS HERE ON EARTH**

Look at verse 17: "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

As attractive and enticing as it is, as much pleasure and enjoyment as we find here, as attached as we become to what it offers, this world is not our home. Our life here is a temporary assignment, but it has implications for all eternity. Like Abraham, we are "aliens and strangers on earth," people "longing for a better country – a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:13, ;16).

I am blessed to be a citizen of the United States of America, and I gladly pledge allegiance to its flag and to the republic for which it stands. I am grateful to live in this nation. But my highest allegiance and loyalty in life are to a King and a kingdom greater than the USA. Paul speaks for all believers in Christ from every race and language and nation when he says in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly await the coming again of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we so long for the day to come when, as Paul says in Philippians 2:10-11, every knee shall bow everywhere in all of creation, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We are to live our lives as strangers here *in reverent fear*. Not the kind of fear that terrorizes or traumatizes our souls. Not the kind of fear that causes a kind of moral or spiritual paralysis. Not the fear of enemies who can kill the body but after that can do nothing more (Luke 12:4). No. Peter means that we are to have a proper attitude of reverent awe and respect for God, giving Him praise not only for His grace, mercy, and love, but also for His holiness, majesty, and sovereign power, living this life "with a deep consciousness of God" (*The Message*) at every moment.

We are to remember who God is. We are to remember that we belong to God. As Peter reminds us in verses 18 and 19, "it was not with perishable things like silver or gold" that we were redeemed by God and set free from the emptiness and futility of a life of sin, "but with the precious blood of Christ," the perfect lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. We belong to Him. And we are to remember that we are not yet home.

## **3. LOVE ONE ANOTHER DEEPLY, FROM THE HEART**

The final imperative is found in verse 22, where Peter says: "Love one another deeply, from the heart." How now does God want us to live? As people who love one another, in the same way that Jesus loves us. This principle of life is so basic, so foundational, and so necessary

that Peter repeats it in 4:8. There he says: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

Once again, Peter and Paul are on the same page. Paul writes in Romans 12:9: “Love must be sincere.” No hypocrisy. No pretending. No phoniness. Our love for each other, like the love of Jesus for us, is to be the real thing.

“Love one another as if your lives depended on it,” says Peter (1:22; cf. 4:8, MSG). Because maybe, just maybe, they do. In these extraordinary times, we need each other. We need love and support and encouragement and forgiveness and grace from one another.

I’m not sure who wrote this, but perhaps it will speak to your heart as it has spoken to mine:

I asked God to take away my pride, and God said no.  
 He said it was not for Him to take away, but for me to give up.  
 I asked God to make my handicapped child whole, and God said,  
 “No, her spirit is already whole. Her body is only temporary.”  
 I asked God to grant me patience, and God said no.  
 He said that patience is the byproduct of tribulation.  
 It isn’t granted; it is earned.  
 I asked God to give me happiness, and God said no.  
 He said He gives blessings; happiness is up to me.  
 I asked God if He loved me, and God said yes.  
 He gave His only Son who died for me,  
 And I will be in heaven some day because I believe.  
 I asked God to help me love others as much as He loves me,  
 And God said, “Ahhh, finally! Now you have the idea.”

It isn’t always easy to love one another, is it? Some of us are much easier to love than others of us. But I don’t find anywhere in the Bible where it says you don’t have to love people who are prickly or rub you the wrong way.

Love is hard work sometimes. Anyone who has ever been married, anyone who has ever been a parent, knows what I’m saying. Love can be hard work in the church, too, because we are all still sinners. Redeemed sinners, yes. But still sinners. Our sanctification is not yet complete. God is not finished with any of us yet, and won’t be until He calls us home. Until then, our mission here on earth – at least one essential component of our mission – is to love one another deeply, sincerely, from the heart.

Paul said it this way in Ephesians 5: “Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children” – which is what we are! – “and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5:1-2).

Put another way: “Watch what God does, and then you do it .... Keep company with Him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but

extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that" (MSG).

Dear friends, let us love like that. Let us love one another deeply, from the heart. Let us love each other with a love that is genuine, forbearing, forgiving, gracious, even sacrificial. Let us love one another with such an extraordinary love in these extraordinary times that many who do not yet know the saving love of God in their lives will see His love in us and be drawn to Him.

Lord, let it be so. Amen.