

1 P E T E R

A V E R S E B Y V E R S E S T U D Y
T H R O U G H P E T E R ' S E P I S T L E

SESSION OBJECTIVE: 1 PETER 1:14-21

To understand the importance of taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

No Plan B

Reading the Bible starting with Genesis, one can get the idea that because things went bad roughly 3 chapters in, God needed a *Plan B* of sorts to bring humanity back into fellowship with Himself.

Chronologically, the story of salvation can appear that way. God created everything including man and woman, who were meant to enjoy perfect fellowship with Him, and because of their rebellion, now God will have to fix their sin (which gets worse and worse with every generation leading up to Noah). After the flood, God calls Abraham and forms a people of His own possession. He gives them the law and tells them to be a light to the unbelieving Gentile world (Is. 49:6). They don't listen, and in phases all of them are brought into exile (several times, in fact). Then, finally, God the Father sends His Son Jesus to be the ultimate remedy for man's conundrum.

That is not, actually, how the story goes. Neither Abraham, the law, Israel, Moses, nor the prophets, were ever intended to be the answer to man's problem, or at least not in that way. They were all meant to bring about God's ultimate Plan A, Jesus Christ, who was, "foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you" (1 Pet. 1:20). Jesus' incarnation, life, death, and resurrection was not a new idea in the heart of God, but one that existed before creation! Jesus is the lamb slain before the foundation of the earth (Rev. 13:8). God's Plan A was always Jesus because it is a perfect plan for us, "who through him are believers in God" (1 Pet. 1:21).

Obedient Children

In light of the redemption we find in Christ, believers are no longer, “strangers from the covenants of promise” (Eph. 3:12), but instead, “obedient children” (1 Pet. 1:14). As obedient children, we are given both a negative command (“don’t do this”) and a positive one (“do this”). Below is an outline of each.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO FORMER PASSIONS

The first thing Peter says is, “do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.” The word for passions in the Greek is ἐπιθυμία (epithumia), and it means something like, “a strong desire.” It’s not inherently bad, as Jesus uses it to express His desire to have the Passover meal with His disciples prior to His crucifixion (Lk. 22:15). It is often used, however, to describe an, “irregular or violent desire.” It’s a word that can encompass anger, rage, and also unbridled sexual desire. The latter definition is confirmed by the context here. It’s not simply a strong desire, but the strong desires, “of your former ignorance.”

There is a lot to unpack in this phrase. For one, this passage indicates that there exists passions in the life of a believer that are a residual from the past, prior to knowing Christ. Paul exhorts the believers in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5, saying, “that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.” In other words, “Stop acting like non-believers who have no control over their worldly desires.” Not having the ability to control the passions of the flesh is a distinct and unique characteristic to non-believers. Since believers have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit in them (1 Cor. 3:16), they also have access to the fruit of the Spirit which includes self-control (Gal. 5:23; 2 Tim. 1:7).

This is an important point to consider. Peter is not saying that believers will no longer struggle with these former passions. It is both a dangerous and damning thing to presume that Christians will not struggle with their flesh. The point of this passage, as obedient children, is to no longer be conformed by them. The Greek word here is συσχηματίζω (sychēmatizō), and it means, “to fashion in accordance with.” In other words, believers have the freedom in Christ to no longer fashion their lives in accordance with their former passions. They will, however, struggle and wrestle with their former passions (Rom. 7:15; 1 Tim. 1:15).

BE HOLY

The call to holiness and, in general, goodness is a continual theme throughout 1 Peter (2:12-15, 20, 24; 3:6; 4:2, 19). Instead of conformity to the former passions of unbelief, Christians are to be conformed rather to the character and nature of God in His set-apartness. Peter says, “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). The word here for conduct is the Greek word ἀναστροφή (anastrophē), and it means, “conversation or mode of life.” In other words, the way you conduct yourself in relationships and in the broader social sense is important, and it should be done in concert with the direction of the Word of God. Peter employs the Old Testament to drive this truth home (1 Pet. 1:16). He quotes Leviticus 11:44, “I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.” The context of this passage is fitting for Peter’s argument. In Leviticus, the people of God are being called by God to live set apart from the regular accepted practices of both Egypt and Canaan. They were to be *different*. Peter is making that same argument, and the same argument applies to us today as well - we are to live differently than the world around us. We are to reject that which is morally, socially, and practically acceptable, and instead live our lives in conformity to the Scripture. Again, we have the freedom to do this because God has called us to holiness (1 Pet. 1:15).

CONDITIONAL LIVING

Verse 17 includes what we would consider an, “If/Then” conditional statement. Peter says, “If you call on Him as Father who judges impartially to each one’s deeds, (then) conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” In other words, God as the Heavenly Father, will judge everyone impartially according to how they lived, regardless of any other outlying qualification. He says, “conduct yourselves with fear,” because as Hebrews puts it, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). If we believe God is impartial (and He is), then we should take great care in the way we orient our lives so as to not fall into judgment, knowing we will be judged like everyone else.

This is not to say that people are saved by works, however, as is sometimes argued. The New Testament’s message is clear: We are not saved by works; we are damned by them. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9) because our works (or lack thereof) would condemn us before an impartial judge. However, the point of Peter’s statement is not soteriological (about salvation), but rather about the importance of continuing to live a life of holiness, and so to make this passage about anything else is to miss the point entirely.

The Lamb Already Slain

Peter returns to a central claim of his letter in verses 18 through 21, that we are not capable of living a life of holiness because of our sin, but that God has made us clean by the blood of Jesus. He has made known His plan of redemption through the prophets (1 Pet. 1:10), that He would collect to Himself an elect people (1 Pet. 1:1), those whom, “He has caused to be born again” (1 Pet. 3). A question that might arise is, “What about people before Christ lived in the flesh? Were they not saved? Were they not a part of God’s elect?” On the contrary, the price paid for these elect believers happened in the heart of God before time began. Peter says that Jesus is, “a lamb without blemish or spot, foreknown before the foundation of the world, but made manifest in the last times (hello, post-trib!) for your sake” (1 Pet. 1:19-20). It is through this Lamb that we are able to call ourselves, “believers” (1 Pet. 1:21). It is by His blood that we have the freedom to live in non-conformity to the flesh, to desire the things of the Spirit, and ultimately to find freedom from the wrath that the impartial judge would otherwise lay against all of creation (Rom. 9:22-24).

Study Questions**Day One**

1. Read 1 Peter 1:14. What are believers described as in this verse? What command are we given?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:15. What is the command in this passage? What does the word conduct mean? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Two

1. Read 1 Peter 1:16. What passage is being quoted here, and what is the context of the original passage? (Hint: See above notes) Why is the context significant to Peter’s argument?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:17. What does it mean that God is, “an impartial judge?” What does it mean to, “conduct yourselves with fear?” What is the passage NOT saying? (Hint: See above notes)
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Day Three

1. Read 1 Peter 1:18. What was inherited from our forefathers? What has God done with our futile ways?
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2. Read 1 Peter 1:19. What does God purchase our redemption with? What is Jesus compared to in this verse?
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Day Four

1. Read 1 Peter 1:20. Who was foreknown before the foundation of the world? What does it mean that Jesus was, “made manifest in the last times?” (Hint: See above notes)
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2. Read 1 Peter 1:21. What do we gain through Christ?
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Week 6 Discussion: The Pursuit of Holiness

If you were to define the quality and characteristics of both God and His people in an overgeneralized manner, you could simply say: “Holy.” God is holy because He is God, and we are holy because God has *made us* holy. In light of that reality, the New Testament responds: “Now go act like it” (that’s a rough paraphrase). In a grace-driven understanding of salvation, it’s difficult to emphasize the need to live a life set apart without sounding law-driven, and yet the Scripture continuously calls us to holiness, not to earn God’s love but in response to it. Talk as a group about how you can practically do this, what it entails, and what it does not entail.

1. Icebreaker: What does the word *holy* make you think of? Is it a positive or negative word?
2. What does it mean to be set apart in 2021?
3. How does the work of God in your life interact with our obedience to Him?
4. Do actions produce holiness? In other words, by living out what we think is holiness, does that make us holy? Why or why not?
5. Is holiness a message that the world *primarily* needs to hear, or do they need to hear something else? If something else, what and why?
6. How can the church inspire holiness in the lives of individual believers? Practically, how can you help a friend pursue holiness?

Takeaways:

1. Obedience to God entails not being conformed to our fleshly desires, but instead to how God has instructed us to live.
2. The payment for our sin that declares us holy was paid in the heart of God before the foundation of the world.

PRAYER REQUESTS: