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Wholly Holy

1 Peter 1:14-16

Series: ***True Grace - 1 Peter***

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter chapter 1. So, we get to celebrate one of my favorite holidays this week – Thanksgiving! I have so many terrific memories of driving 2 hours on a blistery MN morning up to my grandparent's house where too many of us would happily squeeze into their old farmhouse and give thanks to God around their cozy wood fireplace. It is really a great day for relaxing with family and reflecting on the goodness of God. But for many – Thanksgiving has simply become the doorway to the Christmas season. We now scarf down the turkey and mashed potatoes so that we have enough energy to go on our all-night shopping spree in preparation for Christmas. The day of Thanksgiving is the hinge which opens the door to the festivities of the Christmas season for many.

Well, last week we began our study of verse 13 which similarly acts like a hinge between the doxology and worship of verses 3-12 and the commands and directions of the rest of the letter. Last week we were able to look at the meat of verse 13 – the command to set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. We need hope, and we always will set our hope on something. But usually our hope is set on things which in the end can only give short-term hope. And short-term hope is not really much hope at all. And so we found out last week that fullness of hope can only be found in future grace. We saw that this future grace is the glorious promise of the return of Jesus Christ. His return will bring to us the full experience of God's unmerited favor – sin will be vanquished, evil will be conquered, the curse will be reversed, the creation will be re-created, the believing sinner will be transformed, and God will dwell with men for eternity in total peace. This is the future grace that we are to set our hope fully upon, and it is only this future grace which gives us the fullness of hope.

We also saw that this future grace is based upon a sure salvation. So, the first word of verse 13 displays the undeniable connection between the grace of being born again and the command to set our hope fully in the grace which will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The command in verse 13, and all the ones to follow, all come after the therefore, not before it. We don't obey the command to earn the grace, but rather, because we have been given the grace, we can now obey the command. We can fully hope in future grace because our Savior has done a finished work in the past through his death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. We have a hope because He secured that hope through His redemption. This is the Gospel Beloved – and this Gospel has more in the future for us than in the present. The present joy and forgiveness and

peace with God and grace from His hand are all down payments of the glorious eternal fullness of those things yet to come. At the revelation of Jesus Christ we will know the fullness of forgiveness, the completion of redemption, the everlasting and unending joy – all because of the sure salvation which Jesus has secured for us.

I want to read verses 13-16 as we push this door open a bit further this morning – turning from the worship of verses 3-12 to the work of obedience of the redeemed in verses 13 and following. Verse 13 says this . . .

Hope in future grace is coupled with a pursuit of holiness in these verses. And together they form an inseparable bond – hope and holiness. Hope set fully in future grace opens the door to the pursuit of holiness in the heart of the Christian. Let's finish talking a bit about hope before we get on to holiness though.

I. **Hope has a Present Practice – 13b**
   a. Last week we saw that fullness of hope can only be found in future grace, and that this future grace is based upon a sure salvation. We also see in verse 13 that hope in future grace persists by present practice. There are two participial phrases in the verse which modify the main verb of setting our hope fully on this future grace. So, we set our hope fully on future grace by preparing our minds for action and by being sober-minded. In other words, if we are to have our hope fully set on future grace it will require prepared minds and sober minds, and this is an ever present practice we must pursue. We must always be prepared and sober in our thinking so that we are setting our hope fully on future grace.
   b. Prepared Minds
      i. The first phrase can literally be translated as "girding up the loins of your mind." This phrase draws our attention to the people of Israel in Exodus chapter 12. They were in bondage to the Egyptians under severe conditions. The Lord had brought 9 plagues upon the people and the land of Egypt, but Pharaoh had hardened his heart all the more to the authority of God, and he refused to release the Israelites. But God was about to bring his final and most severe plague of all – the death of the firstborn in every house and in every stall. This final plague would catapult the people of Israel out of the land as the Egyptians would beg them to leave so that death would not fall on them again.
      ii. And so, you'll remember, that God required the children of Israel to kill a Passover lamb and with a bunch of hyssop they were to spread its blood on the lintel and the two doorposts of their homes. This was a sign of their obedient faith in the Lord, and the death angel would pass over their home and not slay the firstborn. And you'll also remember that they were to eat the meal – not in the usual relaxed and casual manner, but rather, they were to eat it with their sandals on and with their clothes bound up

tightly around their waste so that they could leave in a moment's notice. They were to gird up to their loins their long flowing robes so that their legs would not be restricted in fleeing quickly from the land of Egypt. And by the way – this is exactly what happened. After the death angel passed over the land at midnight and killed the firstborn, then Pharaoh expelled them from the land effective immediately. All the Egyptians rose up and cried out to the Israelites to leave their land immediately – in the early morning hours. And so, God in His infinite wisdom had commanded the people of Israel to be ready for the moment of their release from captivity by having their sandals on and their garments gird up, ready for quick departure.

iii. Do you see the parallel here? They were to live and act that night with a sense of urgency about their soon to be coming release. They were to take it by faith that God would do what He said he was going to do, and they were to live now in light of what he was going to do then – which meant they were to be prepared to leave immediately.

iv. Peter likens our situation to theirs and tells us that we should be mentally girded up. We need to have our mental sandals on and our mental belts tightly fastened. This is not the day of mental rest and leisure where we get to mindlessly saunter through life. No, now is the day of serious and sober preparation. Now is the time to have full hope in God's keeping His promises at the soon coming of Jesus Christ.

c. Sober Minds

i. This is coupled with the command to have a sober mind. Only Peter and Paul use this Greek word in the NT, and they use it to call us to be situationally aware and mentally alert. We are to be serious about our standing in this world and our future hope in Christ. We are to be sober-minded for the sake of praying – Peter will say in chapter 4. And he will tell us in chapter 5 to be sober-minded about the enemy who is prowling about looking for some unsuspecting soul to devour. This is a call to a calm and steady and dispassionate worldview. One that is not easily tossed to and fro by the happenings of this world because it is settled on that which is coming at the return of Christ. This sober-mind does not get overly unsettled by news of North Korea increasing its nuclear bomb capabilities. This sober mind does not allow itself to be intoxicated with the needless fluff of entertainment and mindless pursuits. This sober mind is not easily shaken by a diagnosis of a long-term illness. This sober mind is not willing to let besetting sins control thoughts and behavior. This sober mind is not lax about its responsibilities before God and men. This sober mind is not constantly preoccupied with things that don't ultimately matter. This sober mind doesn't worry long over financial

stresses or job losses or poor harvests. Instead of being intoxicated with the fleeting realities of life in this broken world, the sober mind is constantly setting its hope on something greater that is yet to come. That doesn't mean that the here and now stuff don't matter, but rather it means that the here and now stuff actually and really matter as I bring the full reality of hope in future grace to bear upon the current situation. In all of these here and now struggles or pleasures or temptations, the sober minded believer in future grace is thinking about how should I think and live here in light of the soon return of Jesus? This is not living in some fantasy world, but rather, this is living in true reality because this is going to happen – Jesus is going to return for His own and bring the fullness of grace with Him.

ii. So, you will never live with your hope fully set upon the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ if you are not sober minded and if you are not girding up the loins of your mind. But how would you know if you are doing that? How would it be obvious in your life if you were living with your hope fully set upon this future grace as you sought to be prepared and sober in your thinking?

iii. Well, I have told you a few times already that this verse is the hinge which allows the door to swing from doxology to duty. And it is a hinge in this way. If you are full of confident and faith-filled worship like what is delineated in verses 3-12 then you will be setting your hope fully on this future grace which Christ is bringing. And this will show itself in your life as you obey the commands given over the next many verses. So, in verse 15 we are called to be holy like God is holy. In verse 17 we are commanded to conduct our lives in fear before God as we walk through this spiritual exile. And in verse 22 we are to love one another with a sincere brotherly love, and in chapter 2 verse 2 we are to long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word so that we grow up into salvation. The frame of mind that is necessary for the pursuit of this kind of life – one that his holy, walking in the fear of the Lord, loving others, and longing for the Word – these will only happen if we are prepared for action and sober minded so that we are setting our hope fully on the grace to come. Those four marks are completely counter-cultural even in a normal Churchianity context. Most people are not consumed with a pursuit of holiness and a godly fear and a sincere love for others and an insatiable hunger for the pure spiritual milk of the Word. And this is true because most of us are not presently setting our hope fully on future grace. And this hope will only persist we are presently and constantly practicing a prepared mind and a sober mind.

II. Holiness has a Partner (vs. 13-14)

a. This hope in future grace will produce the longing for holiness which is described in verses 14-16. The same sober mindedness and preparedness described in verse 13 will propel us to holy living as we set our hope fully on the grace to come. Another way to say this is to say that holiness has a partner. Hope and Holiness are inseparable friends. One encourages and progresses the other.
b. So, just think of all of our lesser hopes. They all inform our behavior to some degree. If we hope that we will win the lottery and be financially set for life then we might spend more money on lotto tickets than we do on household essentials. Or if we hope that the next step up the corporate ladder will greatly reduce our stress and finally give meaning to our working career then we will pour ourselves into our jobs and position ourselves in every way possible to get that next promotion. Or if we hope that our kids will achieve more than we did then we will push them in school and encourage them to work hard. Hope always informs our behavior, and this is true with our own personal holiness.
c. If we have full hope in future grace because we are sober-minded about what really matters in life then we will desire to purify ourselves as God Himself is pure so as to be all the more like Him in preparation for His appearance. As we anticipate an honored houseguest we prepare our house for their arrival, and so, as we anticipate the arrival of the Son of God, we also clean house by pursuing holiness. So, 1 John 3:2-3 says it this way:
    i. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
d. So, as we take our eyes off of the short-term aspirations of lesser hopes and we place our hope fully in the future grace which will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, then we will purify ourselves in anticipation of being eternally with Him who is completely pure. To say it in the negative – if we lose sight of the future grace which is coming, then the pursuit of present holiness will go with it. And so, if we are not pursuing present holiness, then we are not setting our hope fully on future grace. Holiness has a partner, and that partner is hope.

III. Holiness has a Precondition (vs. 14)

a. Holiness also has a precondition. So the transition from calling us from hope to its partner – holiness – is found in the negative statement of verse 14. "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." Peter first assumes that their new birth by grace through faith in Christ produces obedience in them as they are now born from above as children of God's great mercy. This is an encouraging and right assumption. Children do long to obey their parents, and so part of whether or not we can know if we have been born of God is if we seek to obey our Heavenly Father. The assumption of Peter is that

these believers are obedient children. But this encouraging stance is coupled with the realism about their struggle against the passions which remain and the holiness which is yet needed.

b. This assumption by Peter of their obedience is based in grace though, not in their own effort. So, remember in verse 2 that he told us we were foreknown by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ. The grace of foreknowledge and sanctification are for the purpose of our obedience to our Lord. This same obedience is assumed again in verse 22 and it is again coupled with purity, or holiness. So, we can be holy because we have known grace, and because we have known grace, the assumption is that we will be holy in that we will be obedient to God.

c. The necessary precondition to true holiness then is the new birth to a living hope by the great mercy of God. This is the precondition of God's work in us. We who are dead in our trespasses and sins must be recipients of great grace by God who causes us to be born again. But there is also a precondition to holiness which requires our effort. Like the farmer who expects a harvest – he must drill the wheat and fertilize the soil and kill the weeds. So, too, we must not be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance. This word for conformed is used only here and in Romans 12:2 where Paul tells us to not be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The word in the original text has the idea of having a scheme pressed down upon you in order to press you into its mold. It's like those plastic molding machines that you find at national monuments or in zoos where you can pay a few bucks and watch it press the hot plastic into a mold of the monument or of some animal for you to take home. This is like the constant pressure that your former passions of past ignorance are putting on you. They are constantly pressing upon us to conform us to the thoughts and appetites and lusts and actions of our former ignorance.

d. Our former ignorance is the ignorance about Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:18 says we were darkened in our understanding and alienated from the life of God because of this ignorance. Ephesians 2:3 describes this ignorance from the behavior side and says that we all lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. And Colossians 1:21 puts those thoughts together by telling us that before Christ we were alienated and hostile in mind, and doing evil deeds. The two go together – ignorance of Christ and a reckless abandon after the passions of our fleshly lusts. Being children of the darkness and being in rebellion against our Creator and Maker we have no other way but to wander around in the darkness of our ignorance. But, when the truth of the Gospel is brought to bear upon our soul and we are born again by grace through faith in the perfect life and substitutionary death of Jesus, then we are brought from the darkness of ignorance to the light of the knowledge of the Son of God. So 1 John 5:20 says it this way:

i. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.

e. If we have been born again then we have come from ignorance and darkened understanding into the light of truth about God and His Gospel. We are not yet free from the passions of our sinful flesh which dominated us before Christ. But there is coming a day when at the return of Christ we will know the fullness of grace and all remaining sin will be rooted out through the fullness of redemption. And so, in anticipation of that day, with full hope in it, we right now are to resist the passions of our former ignorance. This is the negative precondition to holiness.

IV. **Holiness has a Pattern (vs. 15-16)**

a. Holiness also then has a pattern – and that is given in verses 15-16. This is the positive side of holiness. As he who called you holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

b. The precondition of our new birth now gives us the constant pattern of a way of life conformed to our new Father – the God of Heaven. As He is holy, so we must also be holy. The holiness of God is essentially His inherent and infinite greatness. It is the reality of His complete otherliness – the fact that He is perfectly distinct from everything else. He is above everything in all of His attributes, and He is absolutely morally separate from the sin which is found in His creation.[1]

c. Separation from sin and unto complete righteousness is perfectly true in God and should be increasingly true in the life of His children who are anticipating the day of the return of his Son. Notice that God calls us from his own holiness and He call us to that holiness. His effectual call of grace upon our lives to cause us to be born again is full of ongoing grace which is ever conforming us to be like Him as He is. He is so zealous about this that He sent Jesus to take on human flesh and live our life and die our death. This did not make God unholy or profane, but rather, this makes us holy as He is holy. The incarnation of the Son doesn't reduce God's holiness as you might expect, but rather makes the attainment of our holiness possible through redemption.

d. And this holiness has a pattern to follow that is completely outside of us – God himself! So, our standard of separation from sin and separation unto righteousness is not set by those around us. This is what we are so prone to do. We are so prone to adopt a cultural holiness which raises or lowers the bar of our standard of holiness based upon how others around us are living. So if our language or our music or our media consumption or our behavior toward others or our expressions of love – if those things are just a step above those around us, then we call it good and settle ourselves into that pattern. But the pattern we are

[1] John MacArthur & Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine,* pg. 183.

given here calls us out from the deception of a cultural holiness. No longer can we accept the common practice of those around us and baptize them with some Scripture passage and refuse to re-evaluate based upon the character and nature of the God who calls us. No, a sober-minded and full hope in future grace calls us to so much more. We make God the standard of our holiness.

i. And this keeps us from the arrogance of a "holier than thou" attitude toward others because we are not basing our holiness on others, but on God himself. And so, like Isaiah in Isaiah 6 we gaze upon the manifest holiness of God and we can't help but have a constant brokenness over our own sinfulness. In fact, this is one of the signs of an ever increasing holiness in the life of the believer – a growing awareness of sin and an increasing godly sorrow which yields repentance in their life. This is not true of a cultural holiness which looks to others to set the standard because I can always find someone else that I am supposedly more holy than, and this creates arrogance rather than humble contrition.

ii. Making God the pattern of our holiness also keeps us from the hyper-grace anti-law stance which makes little to no effort in the pursuit of holiness. This is the view which rejoices in and rests upon our standing in the Gospel of grace while refusing to push forward in the results of this grace because it would supposedly be too legalistic. But the gracious calling of God to cause us to be born again now frees us to be like Him in greater holiness in this life, and in perfect holiness in the life to come.

e. So, having God as the standard of our holiness simplifies and clarifies everything here. It keeps us from the pride inducing cultural holiness we are prone to, and it protects us from the effort killing hyper grace stance which gives us a free pass to continue in the passions of our lusts. But it also keeps us from an endless list of do's and don'ts in our pursuit of this holiness because we are not following a textbook, but we are following our Father. So, this holiness issues out of a heart of love from the child to the Father. This simplifies and clarifies everything. God is the standard and a love for God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength will push us ever further down the road of being more and more like Him in holiness.

f. This pattern of holiness is driven home in verse 16 as Peter quotes one of the key verses of the Old Covenant – Leviticus 19:2. Peter is alerting us to the great similarity between God's Old Testament people and God's New Testament people. He called the people of Israel out of Egypt and he took them to the Promised Land. And on the way he told them that they were not to think and act like the Egyptians they left, nor like the Canaanites they were going to conquer. Rather, they were to be like the God who had rescued them. And in this way, they were going to be a bright witness to the nations around them of the glory and grace of God. The key to their witness to the nations of the world was their holiness. The more they were like God the more they would brightly display the

glory of God in this world. But, the minute they began adopting the sinful practices and customs of the nations around them, they began to lose the blessing of God and the effectiveness of their witness. And the same is true for the Church. Our effectiveness as witnesses to a lost and dying world is directly linked to our holiness as it is conformed to the God who called us. Peter will tell us in chapter 2 of this letter to keep our conduct honorable before outsiders so that our deeds before them will cause them to glorify God on the day of the return of Christ. In other words, our lifestyle of holiness will not makes sense to the world now in this life, and they will mock us for it and rail against it, but when Christ returns it will make sense to them and they will see that our good deeds make sense in light of the end of the matter. This holy conduct is so important to our witness for Christ that Peter will go on to tell us how to live in relation to the government and of slaves to masters and wives to husbands and husbands to wives. In fact he will say that a godly wife – a holy wife – by her conduct can win her husband without a word. This shows you the unalterable connection between holiness and witness.

g. This separation from our sinful passions does not remove us from engagement with the world around us. We do not form a holy huddle where we are now cloistered away from the world around us. But rather, this holiness we are called to here in these verses makes us all the more prepared to engage our world with the Gospel of grace. Having been freed from the passions of our lust by grace, we now can speak lovingly and honestly to others we know who are trapped in those soul-condemning lusts and we can testify to them of the freedom we know in Christ. And our holy life, absent of walking in those unholy and ungodly passions will provide the context for these unbelievers to see that grace actually brings what if offers. The call of a holy God to become children of God by grace through faith actually does change our future and therefore, our present practice.

Conclusion: As we close, consider Peter's life as an example of this full hope in the grace which will be brought which then produces a pursuit of holy conformity to God. So, Peter writes this letter with the ever-looming possibility of his own martyrdom. The tide is turning in the Empire's capital against those who follow Christ, and his head is on the chopping block. The time for the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in John 21 is about to arrive, Peter is about to be a martyr for Christ. And this brings all things into laser-sharp focus for Peter. He daily prepares his mind and is sober about who he is, where he is, what is happening around him, and what is soon coming in the fullness of salvation in Christ. And every time he soberly assesses all of these things he cannot help but to conclude that his hope belongs fully on the grace that is coming. He leans hard upon the preserving and protecting and sustaining grace of today with absolute confidence in the grace of tomorrow. And this produces in him a constant longing to be all the more holy as the God who called him is holy. Hope set fully on future grace feeds his unceasing pursuit of a holy life as a stranger and exile who awaits the day where he will finally enter his eternal home. Beloved – we ought to be like this – sober-minded and prepared, leaning into the

present grace of today to sustain and help us with a full confidence in the grace that is to come and resisting the conforming pressure of our sinful lusts as we seek to be more and more like the God we will soon see. May God ever progress us in these ways. Let's pray.