



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Last fall there was a group of us that were interested in getting into leather working, so we organized a class, and both Patti and I took the class. We found it interesting and over the years have made various projects and found it kind of fun. But I wanted to tap into my blacksmithing hobby, combine it with the leather, and so I wanted to make myself a brand that, when I make something out of leather, I could put my brand on it—kind of like putting my mark on it to identify it. So I made the brand which was no simple task. But here's the deal: You can invest twenty to thirty hours making a leather bag, but the moment of truth is when you burn that brand on it, because there are multiple ways it can go wrong and there's no going back. You can't fix it; you can't un-brand it. You've just ruined thirty hours' worth of work. So when I get ready to put the brand on it, I am *in the zone*. I make sure I'm not tired. I clean everything up; I turn off the television; I say to Patti, "Honey, not now." (*Laughter*) I'm *in the zone* and I am dialed in because you get one chance. I refer to this as my *game face*. "I get my game face on."

Anybody that has been involved in sports understands what a game face is, but I would suggest everybody has a game face. You just have to figure out where is it for you? What is that moment when you shut out the world, when you are in the midst of intense concentration—this is the moment—you know you're *in the zone*; you have your game face on and you kind of tap into that, because the question we're wrestling with is: how do we live as hope-filled people in a culture of despair? And I would suggest to do that, you have to have a really good game face. If you have your Bible, turn to 1 Peter, Chapter 1. We started our study of 1 Peter and really verses 3-12 are the foundation of this study. If you missed last week, in order for Peter to make sense, you really have to understand what he said in the opening part of the text, which was, verses 3-12 are one long, beautiful, run-on sentence that fills our lives as believers with hope.

Verse 13 starts with the word **therefore**, and we've kind of rehearsed our little adage over the years: "Whenever you see the word *therefore*, you stop and see what it's *there for*." Whenever you see the word *therefore*, to interpret the text properly, you have to go backwards before you can go forward. You have to understand what it's referring to: *therefore...whatever*. This is a really important, theological point to understand because basically what the text is saying is a very consistent message in the New Testament—that our lives, our behaviors start with the right theology and then it moves to the right behavior. In other words our behavior—our attitudes, the way we live—flows out of right beliefs, to understand it and to believe it. At the end of the day, every person ultimately lives out your belief system. If I could trail behind you for a couple of weeks, I could determine very accurately what it is you actually believe, what you value, what matters to you, what you think is worth living for. I could assess your belief system based on your behavior, because at the end of the day, everyone lives out his or her belief system.

The **therefore** here is a reference to this magnificent truth that when I was nothing more than a sinner, misfit, and loser—for reasons only God ultimately understands—God chose me. God chose me to be a son, to be a recipient of the family fortune. We were told that *according to the mercy of God, God has caused me to be born again to a living hope in order to make me an heir to the family fortune*. It is a fortune that can never be destroyed; it can't be corrupted; it can never be diminished in any way. And because it's based on the grace and mercy of God, and not on the basis of my performance, it is so sure that it's actually reserved in Heaven for me today—and will ultimately be revealed when Jesus returns. That is, in essence, the fullness of the hope of the Gospel, made possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

The idea, then, is *if* I understand that and believe it—I posed the question at the end of our time together last week—either God is a liar—and if He's a liar, let's be done with this and walk away— or He tells the truth—and if He tells the truth, then that is true. And if it's true, it should change the way I live. Almost all of Paul's epistles are written this same way. So Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, Ephesians—they're all written front-loaded with doctrine, back-loaded with what this looks like lived out. So: we understand it and believe it and then we live like it. The problem is we want to skip the front part and just go to the back part. We want the practical: how to fix our lives, but we're not as interested in the deep, rich theology that ultimately is necessary for that to happen.

If you go to a Christian bookstore, if you go to Barnes & Noble, if you go to Amazon and you look at the Christian books, almost all of them deal with the back half of the epistles. I want to know how to fix my marriage; I want to know how to fix my kids; I want ten ways to be happy and joyful in life; I want all of that practical, fix-my-life stuff, but there aren't that many books on the front half of the epistles, which have really the deep, rich theology that makes it all possible. Churches and preachers are notorious for over-emphasizing the behavior part of our Christian life. That was kind of our problem in the fundamentalist movement. We were all about the rules and guidelines and the behaviors. It was very well intended, but, in essence, when the behavior becomes more important than the core theology, it simply results in legalism. We just, in our flesh, are trying harder, and that will never give us the joy, the peace, the hope that we long for deep in our souls.

So the **therefore** is reminding us that when we first understand and believe—and we believe it to such a degree—that then it flows out of our lives in how we live. If you have a behavior problem, it's ultimately a belief problem—and that's where it has to be corrected. So all that is part of the **therefore**: because verses 3-12 are true; therefore we should live like it.

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, (*NASB, 1Peter 1:13a)

The actual Greek there is, "*Gird up your minds.*" The translators try to find some English phrase that kind of has the same meaning. If you were to read the words "*gird up your minds,*" you'd walk away saying, "I don't know what that means." But to a first century reader it was full of meaning. The men in the first century wore robes for a variety of reasons. They were great

except when it was time for action; then they were kind of awkward and clumsy. So basically when it was time to fight, when it was time to run, when it was time for action, they would reach down, grab the bottom of the robe, pick it up, tuck it into their sash or their belt, and that was referred as to “*girding yourself for action*”. In that moment I’m ready to run; I’m ready to fight; I’m ready to move. It had this sense of urgency—“It is go-time.” When it’s translated in English, **prepare your minds for action**, to me that has a little bit of a flavor of a slow, methodical preparation: “I need to go to Sunday school; I need to go to church; I need to have a quiet time.” It’s kind of like going to college to prepare to be a doctor or engineer, or whatever. That is not the sense of the phrase. It’s not a long, slow preparation process. It’s much more of a sense of urgency. It is much more of a sense of “It is go-time”. Some translators like the idea of “roll up your sleeves”. The imagery that makes the most sense to me is if you imagine a sprinter, right before the race he or she has warm-ups on, and in that moment when they’re pulled off and it’s time to get in the blocks, that’s the sense—it is now “go-time”! There’s a sense of urgency; it’s time for the game face; the moment of truth is here. It’s kind of like a pitcher taking off the jacket and running out to the mound. It is now time for action. So that’s the first thing: **Therefore prepare your minds for action.** The idea is, that I get my game face on, and I have to remember in the most difficult, confusing, hurtful times in life, that ultimately what’s true in verses 3-12 is the basis of my hope. I have to be dialed in and *in the zone* in certain moments of life to make sure I don’t forget that.

Therefore prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, (Vs. 1b)

Sober...we tend to think of sober versus intoxication—and that’s a part of it—but it’s far more than that. When you’re intoxicated, you’re kind of distracted, confused, fuzzy, and here your thinking is just the opposite of that. There’s absolute clarity; there’s focus—no distractions that would kind of zone out everything else in the moment—game face on, ready for action. Why is that necessary?

...to fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Vs. 1c)

So when I have my game face on, what am I fixated on? The text says fixated **completely on the grace...to be revealed at the revelation of Jesus Christ**”. That’s kind of shorthand; it’s a summary of verses 3-12. It is remembering in the most painful, in the most difficult, in the most confusing, in the most hurtful moments of life, that I’m not distracted by all kinds of things that ultimately don’t matter. But with my game face on, with absolute clarity and discipline of mind, I fixate completely that ultimately *my hope is found in the grace that will be revealed to me at the return of Christ*. In other words, ultimately my hope is not based on my circumstances; my hope is not based on my money, on my job, on my physical health, on the government. It’s not based on my career or my relationships. It’s not based on my marriage or my singleness. It’s not based on the Republican Party. It’s not based on the Democratic Party. It’s not based on any of that stuff. This is a consistent message in the New Testament: that regardless of my external circumstances, my hope is found in the grace and mercy of Jesus to fulfill the promise He made to fulfill my salvation, which is the hope of the Gospel, which will happen at the return of Christ.

So in those moments in life when you are hurt, when you are confused, when you are upset, when you are discouraged, when you are in pain, when it feels like life is just so messed up—those are the moments when it's so easy to get distracted and off course and get your mind focused on a hundred things that will discourage you—that you have to put your game face on and you have to fixate completely that the basis of my hope is found in Jesus, and because it's on the basis of His grace and mercy, it can't be diminished or taken away. I remember that on my worst days as well as on my best days that my hope is secure in Christ and no matter what's happening, I have every reason for hope. That's essentially what he has said in that verse. Verse 14:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours in your ignorance*, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."(Vs. 14-16)

So now as obedient children—now we have been radically born again through the grace and mercy of God—I am now God's child and my desire is to walk in obedience. He says we should not return to our **former lusts**. The word **lusts** there doesn't necessarily have to refer to evil things. They're just simply the desires of my heart that I was seeking to satisfy through the things of this world. Before my relationship with God, I had legitimate, deep longings, deep within my soul, but I did not know how to satisfy them. I tried all kinds of things in this world to find something that would ultimately satisfy, but nothing satisfied. I lived that way because I was ignorant of what was happening. I was ignorant of what my soul was ultimately longing for. But now that I have experienced new life in Christ, now I understand why those things of the world were not satisfying, why that wasn't working. Why, now that I know the truth, would I ever go back to those things I was doing in my ignorance? So in essence that's what he is saying, "**Therefore now, as obedient children, do not be conformed...**" kind of squeezed into the mold of this world. Don't go back to those behaviors "**...to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.**" So don't do that! So what *should* you do? Well, *we should seek to be holy as God is holy*. He ends that paragraph with a quote from Leviticus, **Be holy as I am holy**.

So what exactly does that mean? If I was to say to you this morning, "Don't be conformed to your former ways of life, but instead be holy as God is holy. Have a nice day. See you next week," you're still left with the question, "I don't know what that means. What does it mean to be holy?" It's kind of that vague, religious language that sounds good, but you kind of walk away saying "I don't know what that means", and it kind of conjures up images like a halo, maybe you glow a little bit. Maybe it's full of lots of religious behavior, religious language. Maybe I say, "Everything's a blessing." You know, whatever sounds kind of holy, religious like.

When my girls were younger and living at home, they would invite their friends over and sometimes their friends were a little intimidated—"I mean it's the pastor's house"—so I used to say to them, "Just tell them your dad's like anyone else except he glows in the dark!" (*Laughter*) It's kind of the imagery of, "Is that holy? Is that?" Sometimes we also kind of get this idea that now that I have a ticket to Heaven, I'm obligated to obey the rules—so that's holy. "Here are the rules; you have to do them." There's kind of this negative tone to it. But that isn't what it's talking about at all.

The word **holy**—the root word means *to be different*, it means *to be other*. I think my favorite definition of holiness is *other than*. God is holy because He's utterly *other than* anyone else in the universe.

Cara: All right, Bryan, we got to get our game face on. Got to get serious about having our belief structure framed up properly. I think you refer to that as our core theology.

Bryan: Yes, that's right. It's absolutely critical.

Cara: In order to move forward in faith, we really need that core theology in place as our foundation.

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely true. You know, one of the ways to think of it, it's typically the front half of a lot of Paul's epistles. So the front half are loaded with doctrine - the back half with, this is what it looks like lived out in life. But our culture wants to skip the front half and spend all our time in the back half. And so that's where a lot of preachers spend their time and that's where a lot of the books are written. It's kind of the self-help or felt need. But the truth is until you have a clear understanding of the core doctrine, you're not really going to live out the life that God wants you to live.

Arnie: I like your interpretation of Peter saying, "This is go time." To me that says that the abundant life is actually a life where your faith gets challenged.

Bryan: Yeah. So let's gird our loins and get with it! It's just such a great line, isn't it?

Arnie: Yeah. I just heard that yesterday

Bryan: Right, to which everybody says, "I don't know what that means", but that is what it means is to pull up that rope, tuck it in, and it is go time [Move out]. So yeah, so it had to do with fight, battle, you know, military metaphors, probably the most common metaphor in the Christian life in the New Testament. So it's living other than the rest of the world, it's not easy. So we tuck in our rope, we gird our loins, and it's go time.

Arnie: And that's what I love about being a Christ follower. I used to think as a nonbeliever, it was going to be the worst, most boring thing I'd ever done. And it's exactly the opposite. It's the most exciting, challenging, wonderful thing I've ever, even way far better than I've ever dreamed of. Yet, it's full of challenges. But that's what makes it great.

Bryan: Yeah. That's what gives adventure to life. And it matters forever. [Yeah.] I mean it's great.

Cara: So many great surprises that God has in store for us. That's for sure. But how about someone who's feeling like they have been distracted, not focused, they're not "girding" it. How do we get back on track?

Bryan: So a couple of things. One is I think [you] need to do it in community. We've become so individualistic, and it's really hard to do all by yourself. So a lot of people, like I'm not a runner, but a lot of people have running partners, is it keeps them accountable. It's a similar dynamic. Let's do it and let's do it together. Second Timothy 2:15, **"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"**, basically means to work yourself up into an exhaustion or to a sweat. So part of it is to get back on the track. What we don't want to do is skip to the back end of the epistles and just deal with the symptoms. But dig in on the front end and understand what's true, believe what's true. And there's just no substitute for understanding and believing the core doctrines of our faith.

Arnie: So when I hear the word holy, it always gives me red flags. You know, it's this "holier than thou", the idea of being very religious, pious. Is that what people expect from you being a pastor?

Bryan: You know, I suppose it's easy for people to think pastors aren't real people. You know, I'd mentioned in the message telling my girls to tell their friends I glow in the dark. [Chuckle] But try to figure out how to break through some of those barriers: just be a normal neighbor, a normal friend, not always have to be the clergy. But frankly, a lot of pastors play into that whole clergy thing. Like they aren't like regular people and they don't have real problems and they're unwilling to be honest about real life struggles. And I think that contributes to the problem. But at the end of the day, we're real people with real problems and real struggles. That's just part of the story.

Cara: I love your story about glowing in the dark. Your description for holiness "other than", so it's God's holiness that shows through me to make me "other than".

Bryan: It is. But again, if you say that to someone, they're still left with, I don't know what that means, [Right]. Because it's confusing. It's complicated. So it comes down to choices. It doesn't just magically happen and it's a choice to be other than, as God is other than. So again, you think about -we have legitimate longings and desires and everybody's trying to figure out how to meet those. And that's in essence what defines the world system. I'm just desperately trying to figure out what satisfies, what will make me happy, what will give me joy, what will give me peace. But I'm trying to figure out how to do all that without God. So what Peter says is, now that I have found what my soul has been longing for in a relationship with Christ, why would I go back to behaviors that defined me when I was innocent of that? So it's being other than the world in terms of the path they're taking to satisfy all those things. And it's choosing that which does satisfy, which is the path of life.