

HoliMess
“Holiness” in the HoliMess!

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

HoliMess: “Holiness” in the HoliMess!

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 1:3-2:3

Introduction

Human beings were made in the image of God, later marred that image, but are destined to have that image restored. Like an angled mirror, human beings were created to reflect back into the world the character of the one true God. When Adam failed to do that effectively, he plunged the human race into the fall where only imperfect glimmers of the image shone in the darkness. The stories of the Old Testament tell of persons like Noah who found favor in the eyes of God, a man “blameless in his generation,” someone who “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). More importantly, Noah was someone to whom God said “I will establish my covenant with you” (6:18). As evidence that Noah kept his end of the bargain, we have this testimony of the narrator: “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him” (6:22). Further, we have the testimony of God: “I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation” (7:1). In true covenant form, the Bible then reports, after the Flood: “God remembered Noah...” (8:1) and “God blessed Noah...” (9:1). True to His word, God tells Noah: “I establish my covenant with you and your offspring” (9:9, 11) and “I will remember my covenant” (9:15-16). In effect, Noah became a new Adam for the world. He and his descendents were to carry on the original creation mandate. Eventually, renewed human life would converge in Abraham and his descendents who were to bring the blessing of God to the whole world (Genesis 12:1-2). The rest is history.

When we speak about the image of God, we are talking about that which represents the essential character of God — in this case, in human form. Bearing the unique qualities of God, human beings reflect God’s *holiness*. We can scarcely talk about holiness without connecting it with that which makes God *utterly unique*. Echoes of this holiness in the Old Testament include statements like “There is none holy like the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:2). “Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?” (Psalm 77:13). The Hebrews trusted in Yahweh, the God who had no peer. “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal says the Holy One” (Isaiah 40:25). The last book of the Bible declares, “You alone are holy” (Revelation 15:4). For God to be “holy” means “the whole world is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). After Israel left Egypt, triumphant in the Exodus across the Red Sea, music filled the desert and these words rang out: “Who among the gods is like you, Yahweh? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders” (Exodus 15:11).

Yet, wonder of wonders, God did not keep His holiness to Himself. While His glory might shine throughout all of creation, in a special sense, He wanted his holiness to be seen through human beings. He wanted to “make them holy.” The Old Testament book of *Leviticus* contains several references to the statement, “I am Yahweh who makes you (or them) holy” (21:8; 22:9; 22:32; 22:32). The whole point of the rigorous regimen of instruction found in the Torah was: “...to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23; also Leviticus 10:10). Holiness would make Israel God’s distinct prototypic people: a people who belonged to Him because they looked like Him:

Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am Yahweh your God. Keep my decrees (that is, God’s words) and follow them. I am Yahweh who makes you holy. You are to be holy to me because I, Yahweh, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to me my own (Leviticus 20:7, 8, 26).

Why this insistence on holiness for Israel? Certainly holiness was not supposed to be a source of personal achievement or an occasion for pride, as if this prototype people were supposed to boast about how “holy they are.” Holiness honored God, but it also bore witness to God for the rest of the world to see. Israel’s holiness was for the glory of God, not for their own glory. In and through this unique people God wanted His holiness to be expressed. He wanted the whole world to see what He was like by shaping a people who was holy as He was holy. Thus we read in *Ezekiel*:

I will show myself holy among you in the sight of the nations” (Ezekiel 20:41).

Then the nations will know I am Yahweh, declares Lord Yahweh, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:21).

And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am Yahweh (Ezekiel 38:23).

I will make my holy name known among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I, Yahweh, am the Holy One in Israel (39:7)

Curiously, the beginning of Ezekiel’s prophecy contains a vivid vision of the glory of God, striking in its symbols of intersecting chariot wheels, multi-faced creatures, and fiery brightness, all supporting a grand throne on which sat none other than God Himself who appeared in the form of a human being (1:26-28)! For all its powerful imagery, the vision seemed to be saying that God wanted His image to be carried once more by human beings like Ezekiel himself whom God repeatedly called “son of man”!

So then, when we come to this week’s reading from 1 Peter 1:3-2:3, we should not be surprised to see an immediate burst of praise to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Any discussion of holiness must begin with praise for the unique character of God and for its unique expression in the One who most perfectly bears His image, the One who is the “image of God, the firstborn of all creation” — the quintessential human being, Jesus Christ (see Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). What an appropriate way to begin a letter intended to help a scattered but chosen people live in a messy world!

The opening word is “Blessed...” which customarily introduced a doxology — an expression of praise. Becoming holy involves knowing the holy God and worshipping the holy God. *For we become what we worship; we become what we praise.* If we wish to become holy, then worship of and consecration to the holy God must be our starting place.

An Outline

1. The Blessing (1:3-12)
 - a. The Birth of Hope (1:3-5)
 - b. The Trial of Faith (1:6-9)
 - c. The Promise of the Prophets (1:10-12)
2. The Call (1:13-2:3)
 - a. Be Holy (1:13-16)
 - b. Be Reverent (1:17-21)
 - c. Be Loving (1:22-25)
 - d. Be Growing (2:1-3)

The Blessing (1:3-12)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. ¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the

prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully,¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

One commentator on this passage refers to it as a *descant*, something more than a prayer or even more than a benediction.¹ We have chosen to follow Martin's lead and call it a "blessing." In music, the descant is a decorative musical accompaniment usually above the melody and sometimes improvised. When applied to speech, it is the discussion of a theme from various angles. Peter, in the case of 1:3-12, explores the mercy of God as the liberating force which brings salvation to the scattered people of God. What gives structure to this blessing is the three-fold nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit. We find similar treatments of such rich themes in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and Ephesians 1:3-14 which follow similar Trinitarian forms. Whether Peter or Paul, these writers take up the topic of God's work in Jesus Christ and then explore it from a variety of perspectives, shifting the camera lens here and there, picking up fresh insights and reviewing old ones. As we have shown in our outline above, the three main points of discourse are: hope, trial and promise-fulfillment.

The Birth of Hope (1:3-5)

The opening word is "Blessed" from the Greek *eulogētos* from which we derive our English term "eulogy." In Jewish literature we find this expression, for example, in the *Eighteen Benedictions*. However, there we would expect to read "Blessed be God, Creator of the Universe." Since Peter is writing to a Christian audience, he also includes the all-important expansion, "...and Father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ." This is a bold move on his part, since the idea that Jesus is Lord had implications for all other lords these Christians might be tempted to worship or serve. The problem of "God" in the first century was enormous, even for Judaism. Jesus consistently challenged his religious peers to a clearer understanding of God by appealing to God as his Father. Knowing Jesus, the Son, was the only certain way of knowing the true nature God his Father. The Son has intimate knowledge of the Father, Jesus declared, and makes it known to those willing to receive it (Matthew 11:27; John 14:7, 9).

The "Blessing" is the speaking of a favorable word (*eu+ logos*), indeed, in this case, a wonderful word that God has truly been revealed as Father through the coming of Jesus His Son — the one who is also Lord and Messiah (Christ). For Peter's audience, to be able to hear a favorable word was good news. Their situation, as we noted in our last study, placed them in an alienated relationship to their surroundings, either because exile placed them there or because their newly adopted lifestyle as Christians seemed strange to their neighbors. Under such circumstances, saying "Blessed" (*eulogētos*) was like answering the question "What's the *good word*?" and then getting the reply, "God is Father of the One we serve as Lord — Savior and King." It's a bit like seeing the ancient code word, "fish," written in the sand or scribbled on a wall in Greek: **IXTHYS: Jesus Christ God's Son, Savior.**

What then is the good word? The word is "mercy — rich mercy" (Greek: *to polu autou eleos*). What God does, He does *with mercy — much mercy — rich mercy*. The Greek uses the preposition *kata* to introduce the mercy phrase, and we might want to translate it as "*consistent with his rich mercy*." In the Graeco-Roman world where Peter's readers lived, mercy was not a great virtue, and in fact, mercy tended toward weakness in people's minds. Jesus wanted to change that allergy to mercy, reminding his listeners, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). His parables stressed this quality, especially in the story of the Pharisee and Tax Collector, climaxing with the latter's plea, "God be merciful to me a sinner..." It is likely that the Greek instances of *eleos*, "mercy," translate the Hebrew word *raḥam* which refers to compassionate love for the helpless and the needy. The word for "womb" in Hebrew is *reḥem*, that place where the unborn finds protection, nurture, and maternal warmth.

¹ Martin H. Scharlemann, "An Apostolic Descant (An Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 1:3-12)," *Concordia Journal* 2 no. 1 Jan (9-17): 9-17.

The mercy of God appears in the Old Testament when God explains His dealings with His people, such as in the following passage on the occasion of the new tablets of the Torah:

⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." ⁸ Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. ⁹ "O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance" (Exodus 34:5-9)

Such texts were in the background of Peter's words of blessing, reminding his troubled readers how Yahweh took care of His covenant people in the past, but now will do so even more richly in mercy through Jesus Christ.

What was the most recent "mercy" which God brought to the world? This *new mercy* starts with the "resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (Greek: *anastaseōs Iēsous Christou ek nekron*). God's Son went to the cross, passed all the way into death and then came out on the other side alive forevermore. God showed mercy to Jesus by raising him from the dead. In so doing, he also showed mercy to Israel and the world. The resurrection of Jesus, a genuine historical event attested by "many convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3), is not merely an artifact of history, however. God's intention was not simply for people to admire and wonder at the majesty of this event. God raised Jesus from the dead for a specific purpose which Peter emphasizes: *eis elpida zōsan*, that is, to achieve a "living hope." The preposition *eis* indicates the trajectory or destination of Jesus' resurrection. Yes, it had to do with Jesus' own destiny, but the implication of his resurrection reaches into the future — our future, declaring that we actually *have a future once again*. There are all kinds of hope — some of them simply wishful thinking or even wistful thinking, a kind of longing that a new state of affairs would finally arrive and we would all be better off. When Jesus rose from the dead, he brought the future back into the present — he did in the *middle of time* what most Jewish people thought would only happen at the *end of time*. His resurrection re-ordered time and put human hope on a solid footing. We have a *reason for hope*. This reminds us of Jeremiah:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11)

Strongly attached to the trajectory of hope is yet another one: an *inheritance*, or as Peter phrased it in the Greek, *eis klēronomian*. This introduces irony into the story-line for Peter's audience. Remember, they are resident aliens *without roots* in a strange land and a hostile culture. One could hardly talk about inheritance with persons who have no legal standing within their present home-away-from-home. They were pilgrims and strangers, having no lasting real estate to call their own. Yet, here is Peter telling them that the merciful God, having raised Jesus their Lord from the dead has given hope new life and this includes an inheritance which his readers may joyfully claim. What sort of inheritance is this? Peter uses three adjectives to describe the inheritance:

1. "Imperishable" (*aphthartos*: incorruptible; incapable of decay).
2. " undefiled" (*amiantos*: free from defect, pure, unsoiled).
3. "Unfading" (*amarantos*: like a perennial plant, unailing).

The sound of these Greek words creates assonance² and injects a pleasant melodic tone to the passage.

Taken together, this three-fold description of the new inheritance hammers home the theme that it is an *eternal* possession. Living in an uncertain world, the Christians of Asia Minor can take heart in knowing that they have a legal claim on something which is untouched by death, unstained by evil and unimpaired by time — a thing of immortality, purity and beauty.³ This echoes the teaching of Jesus:

¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves

² The term "assonance" has to do with similar sounding words due to the repetition of vowel sounds. Remember •"It beats as it sweeps as it cleans," the old slogan for Hoover vacuum cleaners?

³ F.W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*. 3rd edition revised (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 83-84.

do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21; also, Luke 12:33).

Jewish members in Peter's audience knew only too well the fleeting nature of having land for an inheritance, since their own "promised land" had undergone all sorts of ravages at the hands of successive invaders, climaxing with the Roman occupation. Those who found themselves in Asia Minor probably didn't want to be there, but Roman policy led to their migration.

The theme of *permanence* finds its way into the text as Peter writes about this inheritance being "kept in the heavens for you" (*tetērēmenēn en ouranois eis humas*). The verb "kept" is a perfect passive participle in Greek, and implies a settled and persistent condition secured by someone else. The perfect tense in Greek suggests action completed in the past with continuing results in the present. We might say that when Jesus rose from the dead, the inheritance of his followers was secured and will remain secure forever.

What Peter intends is not that going to heaven when a person dies is the inheritance, but that heaven — the realm of God — is the guarantor of the inheritance, the place where it is in safekeeping until God's people one day will claim it at the time of their own resurrection. It's like saying, "John, I have put ten thousand dollars on deposit for five years in the bank for you. After that time, it's yours." Would John think that in five years he would need to go and live at the bank in order to receive his money? No, he would simply be assured that during the five years until he could withdraw the money, it's quite safe and sound — secure for him in the meantime. God's economy insures all His funds until His people arrive in His presence, when the inheritance will be faithfully given. Paul told the readers of 2 Corinthians 5:1,

For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

He goes on to explain that one day his readers will be able to put on their resurrection bodies and not be left naked in death. From other Scriptures, we know that the place where that new body will take up its residence is the restored New Heaven and New Earth, a fully embodied universe where God makes all things new. Peter isn't encouraging his readers to escape to some other-worldly place in order to assuage the messiness of the world in which they find themselves. Rather, he assures them that what God intends to do with their future lives is going to be permanent and everlasting, kept safely for them until the time comes for them to claim their inheritance.

Would it make any sense to secure the Christian's future *inheritance* if God wasn't actively guarding *the people* who would one day claim it? Of course not! In 1:5 Peter reinforces the confidence of his readers by appealing to the "power of God" (*dunamei theou*) which even now, in their present situation, is guarding them. Peter changes the verb which he used in 1:4 (*tēreō*, keep or guard) and uses a much more military term which includes the idea of "be on guard, stand watch" (*phroupreō*). He also puts it in the present participial form, suggesting that Christians are under the constant guard of the power of God. The phrase *dia pisteōs*, usually translated "through faith," emphasizes what the Christians must do: trust in the power of God to protect them against all threats originating from their scattered situation and their alien status. Faith is *trust* in God, the confidence that He reliably stands watch over our lives.

Faith must look faithfully toward the future. Why? Peter tells the readers that their trust in God orients them toward a yet-to-come salvation. He describes this salvation with the Greek phrase *eis sōtērian hetoimēn apokalupthēnai en kairō eschatō*. Salvation is a progressive experience for the followers of Christ. In broadly general terms we might say that we are saved from sin in the *past*, are being saved from sin in the *present*, and will be saved from sin in the *future*. Or, another way of conceptualizing this: saved from the *penalty* of sin, the *power* of sin, and the *presence* of sin. Further, we speak theologically about *justification*, *sanctification* and *glorification*. Each *dimension of salvation* contributes an element or phase to the process of "full salvation." In this case, Peter orients his readers to the day when God will restore them as whole persons through the resurrection — their inheritance.

Notice the language of the *future* in Peter's words "to be revealed in the last time." The word for "reveal" shares a Greek root with the idea of *apocalypse* — the final unveiling of God's purposes when God's Son appears in his Second Coming. A fine thin veil separates space-time from the realm of God. Indeed, we must think about God's world as including this world, yet concealed from our view until the time appointed for His revelation. Heaven, the word commonly used to reference God's dwelling-place, is not located in a "galaxy far, far away," as it has sometimes been explained. Rather, the term functions as a short-hand way of speaking about God's hidden realm. Scripture speaks about a "day" when all things hidden will be made known (Mark 4:22; Matthew 10:26; Luke 8:17; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 3:3). Or, as Paul phrased it in 1 Corinthians 13:12), "We now see through a mirror darkly; then we shall see face to face..."

Peter uses the familiar phrase "last time," based on the Greek word *eschatos*="last", from which we derived the term "eschatology" or simply "eschaton;" and, on the Greek word *kairos* which has to do with the "season" or epoch when all of this takes place. Recall that *chronos* has to do with the *quantity* of time, whereas, *kairos* refers to the *quality* or special nature of the time in question. We often read about "the last days" in the New Testament. The early Christians saw the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as inaugurating "the last days" (see Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2). There are also instances where the phrase has to do with times of severe difficulty when an era of time reaches its climax or conclusion (2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3). Peter, by using the singular form of *kairos*, seems to be looking at the ultimate time when God will finally complete His purposes for the world. In this case, the resident alien pilgrim people of God will at last receive their promised eternal inheritance. Jesus envisioned such a time when "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

The Trial of Faith (1:6-9)

Throughout his letter, Peter makes clear that the *present* is a time of suffering and trial, but also of mercy and mission for the world. We see this in 1:6 where he tells his readers to allow their "rejoicing" in hope to sustain them for "a little while" (Greek: *oligon*) in the present when they experience "grieving" (Greek: *lupēthentes*). This parallels Paul's language in Romans 8 which speaks about the "groaning" of creation and the Spirit, sharing in our own pain until the day of resurrection (8:22, 23, 26). Jewish thinkers had a similar concept when they wrote about the "Messianic woes," a period of time before the coming of Messiah when Israel would suffer intensely.⁴ The Christian fulfillment of the Messianic woes originates with Christ's own suffering on the cross (see Isaiah 53) but then continues in the suffering of his followers until the time of the Second Coming (see Colossians 1:24 where Paul speaks about his own sufferings as continuing the suffering of Christ on behalf of his people). Peter uses the Greek word *peirasmos* which suggests a "period or process of testing, trial, test." Later in 4:12 this becomes the "fiery trial"⁵ which "comes on you." The imagery is from metallurgy in which precious metals pass through a heated furnace where the "dross" or imperfections are removed by fire.

According to 1:7, the goal⁶ of the "test" is the *dokimos* of Christian faith. This Greek word has to do with the condition of the metal after the smelting process is completed: it is approved, having passed the quality assurance test. The crucible of faith is far superior, Peter tells them, to the purification of gold — since literal gold eventually perishes (*apollumi*) even though it has passed through its own crucible. The choice of the testing metaphor here is appropriate. In Peter's audience were probably both the rich and poor for whom *gold* had vastly different significance in each case. Rich Christians (and there were some) *had gold* and probably feared losing it through social ostracism and exclusion from the economies of Asia Minor. Poor Christians despaired of ever having gold, in light of their disenfranchised status. To both groups, Peter minimizes the value of gold in light of a greater wealth, a greater value — something, he says, that is "more valuable, costly,

⁴ J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 440-450.

⁵ The "fire" which tests human beings appears throughout the Old Testament: Psalm 66:10; Proverbs 17:3; 27:21; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:3).

⁶ The writer introduces 1:7 with the subordinating conjunction *hina* which is attached to the verb *heuriskō* used in the subjunctive mood. This combination emphasizes the result, goal and purpose.

or precious” (Greek: *polutimoterōn*). Would rich Christians *share their gold with others and become public benefactors*? Would poor Christians find ways to exhibit the true wealth of their faith instead?

Hardship would test both groups. The writer is confident about the results of the present trial, particularly in its impact on Christian faith. He uses the word “found” from the Greek *heuriskō*. This verb has an aorist subjunctive form, implying that *as a result* of its testing, faith will one day in the future be decisively seen in transformed ways. The word has a range of meanings, including “find, find out, discover, devise, invent, gain, procure, fetch.” Used in the context of metallurgy, the term comes close to our English concept of a metal “foundry,” where metal is actually procured or invented. *Faith, Peter tells his audience, gets a fresh rendering or version as a result of the painful trial of the present*, which is the force of the verb in this case. Christians undergo an “extreme faith makeover” as a result of trial. Though they are aliens and strangers among the cities of Asia Minor, the followers of Jesus are becoming better persons as a consequence of their sufferings, just as precious metals improve as a result of the metallurgist’s furnace.

One writer reminds us: “1. Trouble is something we should take for granted; 2. Trouble is something that does not last; 3. Trouble is something that should not be wasted.”⁷

Peter has his own three-fold outcome for the Christian trial of faith. He introduces these results with the Greek preposition of purpose, *eis*, followed by three nouns:

1. “Praise” (*epainos*): “praise, approval, commendation.”
2. “Glory” (*doxa*): “expectation, opinion, judgment, estimation, reputation, credit, glory.”
3. “Honor” (*timē*): “token paid for worth or value, worship, esteem, honor, dignity, office, valuation, assessment.”

Again, Peter chooses the three-part structure to communicate a full and complete idea. The close connection to the Trinitarian prescript also suggests these are qualities which belong to God Himself, and they are ascribed to the Triune God because the Christ followers, tested like precious metals processed in the fire, have been found approved. The credit belongs to God for the accreditation of His people. The surrounding culture may not give to the Christians praise, glory and honor, but at the Second Coming, Christ will reveal the true nature of their work and honor them accordingly. Paul uses similar language:

¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw- ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

The trial of faith involves the ways faith shows itself genuine through what it does — its *works*. On “the Day” (compare Peter’s “last time”) the quality of faith-works “becomes manifest...revealed by fire” (compare Peter’s “at the revelation of Jesus Christ”). Again, Paul writes:

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

The theme of “the trial of faith” runs throughout Scripture, starting with the command for Abraham to offer up Isaac (Genesis 22), known as the *akedah*. Faith holds on to God, trusting Him while passing through adversity. That is what faith is for. That is why we value faith as an essential dimension of our relationship with God in the midst of trouble. Indeed, the existence of “the trial of faith” identifies the true follower of Jesus Christ. We are known by our holding on when all else slips away. Peter, in 1:8-9, illuminates one distinct aspect of faith operating under these circumstances: we *believe*, though we do not “see.” Twice, using both past and present tenses, we read about believing in the absence of *vision*. More specifically, this “faith” appears as “love” — that special form of *knowing* whereby we grasp God even when we do not see him with our eyes. The verb

⁷ Rees, p. 29.

structure of 1:8-9 involves two main verbs: *agapaō* (“love”) and *agalliaō* (“rejoice”). The verbs for *seeing*, *believing*, and receiving are participles which surround the main verbs, providing both the circumstances and the results which come from the main verbs.

In the Bible, what is seen and what is unseen often stand in stark contrast. Jesus challenged Thomas when he commended his faith in the resurrection — a faith based on what he had *seen*. But he added, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29). From Paul we hear: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). According to Hebrews 11:7, Noah’s faith operated *without full vision*: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” All of which echoes a much-loved Psalm in ancient Israel which reminded God’s people of the Exodus: “Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen” (77:19). Moses, on Mount Sinai, appealed to God that he might see Him, but was told instead, “Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen” (Exodus 33:23). This too is part of “the trial of faith.”

Yet, Peter assures his readers, the absence of vision does not handicap their love for God or their joy at the prospect of their future together with Him. Indeed, the sort of “joy” to which he refers is “unspeakable and full of glory” (Greek: *aneklalētos kai dedoxasmenē*). The word “unspeakable” is one of those compounded words, combining the verb “to speak” with two prepositions, placed back-to-back: *ek* and *ana*, and creating a meaning which comes close to our “far and away.” Speech alone is unable to capture the meaning of the joy experienced by those whose trial of faith has at last reached its goal. The words “full of glory” translate a single verb form, the perfect passive participle of the verb *doxazō*, “to glorify.” In this joy, “glory” has reached its climax. As noted above, *glory* refers to the proper estimate or judgment of something, defining its authentic reputation. This is not *vain-glory*, empty of true worth, but genuine glory, expressing the character of a person. As we noted in last week’s study (2:12), Christians often fell victim to slander and a bad reputation, living as aliens in a hostile culture. By contrast, Peter describes a reputation (*doxa*) which comes from God.

The phrase “salvation of your souls” in 1:9 refers to the final deliverance of the Christ followers. The Greek word *psuchē*, usually translated “soul,” does not refer only to the non-physical “part” of human beings which survives death. It might have had that meaning for pagan Greek thought, but that would have been foreign to the Jewish-Christian world in which Peter wrote. As we have noted in other discussions, *psuchē* has to do with the whole human being: we do not *have* souls; we *are* souls. Genesis 2:7 tells us that “the human *became* a living soul.” God intends to restore the whole human person in the future through resurrection of bodies as well as spirits. When that happens, Peter tells his audience, faith will have finally reached its goal (*telos*) — that toward which God has destined His people, the glory of resurrection life.

The Promise of the Prophets (1:10-12)

Among the methods used by the early Christians to persuade their audiences to accept Jesus Christ was the evidence of fulfilled Scriptural prophecy. Repeatedly the New Testament writers quoted Old Testament texts which foreshadowed his coming, often using the formula, “which fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet...” (see Matthew 2:17; 4:14; 27:9; John 12:38 and elsewhere). For Peter’s audience, this promise-fulfillment connection had special meaning: what was happening to them belonged to the larger narrative of fulfilled prophecy. Their little narratives of trouble, suffering and trial were not disconnected from God’s big picture story — what scholars call the *meta-narrative*. In 1:10-12 Peter tells his readers that the Holy Spirit guided the ancient prophets to speak, write and understand God’s long-term purposes. Those purposes reached complete fulfillment, not in the lifetimes of the prophets themselves, but in the lives of Christians like those in Asia Minor. “Not about themselves, but about you...” were powerful words for Peter’s readers to hear. *They were special* in God’s eyes. *They were part of the biblical story which the preachers of the Gospel brought to them.* The Spirit was, after all, the Spirit of Christ because he brought the message of Christ to both the biblical writers and to the Gospel preachers. The same Spirit spoke the word *then and now*.

Finding roots is important to a displaced people. For the Christians living in Asia Minor, those roots did not belong to the shared history of Asiatic culture but to the history of Israel, God's chosen people. Though most of them were Gentiles, they were now included in a story much older than the shared history of Greece or Rome. The mere thought that *ancient prophets* searched (*ekzēteō*, "seek out, demand an account of something") and inquired (*exeraunaō*, "search, look for") with respect to matters affecting Peter's audience would have filled them with wonder and gratitude. Add to this Peter's assertion that *angels* were equally interested in how things would turn out for them. The verb applied to the angels is *parakuptō* which means "to stoop, bend over" in order "to look into." For us to know such things is a "reach;" for angels it is a "bend." The writer to the Hebrews saw special roles for angels in the implementation of salvation:

13 And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:13-14)?

Notice how angels are called "ministering (i.e. "serving") spirits" to those who "inherit" salvation — incorporating themes we have already encountered in *1 Peter*.

How magnificent for the Asiatic Christians to hear that the prophets and the angels were "serving them" and "not themselves" when they received the revelation of God's future salvation! How special it made them feel to know that God's plan of salvation *included them and had them as its goal*. Of course, the application reaches to us as well. Scripture has the New Testament people of God in view when it prophecies the coming of Jesus "and the subsequent glories." The suffering of Jesus, his death and resurrection belong to the central theme of Scripture. As Luke reminds us in his Gospel when he records the words of the risen Jesus speaking to the two on the road to Emmaus:

²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

Peter extends that promise even further when he refers to the "glories" (in the plural) which follow the sufferings of Jesus. By using the plural, he refers both to the resurrection of Jesus — his glory — *and to the glory which surrounds the followers of Jesus* — their glory. Taken together, the glory of Jesus and the glory of his followers constitute the "glories" which follow.

§

This, then, is the Blessing which introduces Peter's letter (1:3-12), gathering together the themes of Hope, Faith and Promise. Woven into this fabric is the three-fold character of God, Father, Son and Spirit, as introduced in the prescript (1:2). The triune God is the living God of Israel's past and present, and the living God of our shared future. Though beset by trouble, the followers of Jesus discover their unique identities within the new birth which opens up a fresh future for them. New birth means an inheritance not bound to the exigencies of this world or to its circumstances, but grounded instead in the hope of the risen Jesus whose story brings the ancient story of Israel to its climax. The Blessing, ultimately, is the blessing of Abraham fulfilled in Jesus; ancient Scripture at last explained by the Holy Spirit through the risen Jesus. The readers of *1 Peter* are told from the outset how they can find their compass as resident aliens within a pagan culture — in the blessing of God.

The Call (1:13-2:3)

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. ²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of

grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. ^{2:1} So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation- ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

In the Blessing section (1:3-12), we observed how the new birth anchored Peter's audience in the renewed purposes of God for His people. Human beings are given a fresh start and a new beginning. As we ended our last section we suggested that the blessings for God's restored people find their counterpart in God's ancient promises made to Abraham. If we examine more closely Genesis 12 which records those promises, we see how Abraham started his faith journey relying on those promises, leaving behind his old home and family and moving to a new and strange land where the promises would eventually find fulfillment. Ironically, in this "promised land" Abraham was *a stranger and an alien*, much as Peter's readers were resident aliens in Asia Minor. One day his descendants would claim the land, after generations of suffering and trial, including slavery in Egypt.

But the promise to Abraham was not just about *blessing*, it was also by *calling*. God asked Abraham to *do something as evidence of his faith and in gratitude for the blessing*. Peter follows that pattern in what follows in 1:13-2:3. Living under the Blessing requires living in obedience. Because God's Blessing is over us — as seen in His mercy to us — we are *called to live like His children, reflecting His character, and bearing His image*. In this section, Peter underscores the *calling* in four key areas. Christians are called to ...

1. Be Holy (1:13-16)
2. Be Reverent (1:17-21)
3. Be Loving (1:22-25)
4. Be Growing (2:1-3)

Each calling is a development of the new birth. Taken together they define our vocation — our calling as the children of God, born with a view to a "living hope." At the head of the first vocation is the simple instruction, "Be Holy," the ancient calling of Israel among the nations of the world. Issuing from holiness like streams from their fountainhead, are the calls to revere God, love each other, and grow together in both. Holiness involves a decisive starting point: a crisis which jump-starts a process. Reverence, love and growth follow from *the call to holiness*.

Be Holy (1:13-16)

In last week's study we broached the subject of *holiness* in our discussion of *sanctification*.⁸ You will recall how both words share the idea of *hagios*, the Greek adjective for "holy" and *qadōsh*, the corresponding Hebrew term. The "idea of the holy" includes the utter uniqueness of God and His separateness from the world. In the Old Testament we find "high" and "holy" spoken in the same breath (Isaiah 57:15), reinforcing the notion of God's transcendence. At the same time, the holiness of God is a shared quality: God wants His creation to participate in His holiness and become like Him. Isaiah hears the chief angels crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory"(Isaiah 6:3). Transcendent? Yes, be still filling the whole earth!

When human beings share in God's holiness, they separate themselves from things *common* and devote themselves to things *sacred*. Yet, they are called upon to do this while still in the midst of the world. Their devotion to God's purposes is supposed to enhance the world around them. Holiness is not isolation from the world, though it does involve separateness from worldly values. More essentially, holiness means separation from sin and from the sin *nature* we all share as descendants of Adam. The heart-cry of Romans 12:1-2 is one of full devotion to the will of God, described as "holy and acceptable to God." It entails not being conformed to

⁸ *Background Notes*, April 17/18, 2010, pp. 13-15.

this world but transformed by the renewal of the inner self (literally, “mind”). The holy life is the transformed life of devotion to the purposes of God.

Peter develops this theme in 1:13-16, beginning with the conjunction *dio* which means “therefore, for this reason, on this account.” Everything contained within the *blessing* of 1:3-12 becomes the foundation for the *behaviors* in this section. A series of instructions comprise the call to be holy which Peter issues in 1:15-16 at the end of the section. These instructions climax in the call to be holy.

Central to the call to be holy is the preparation of the “mind,” or as the Greek expresses it, the *dianoia* which includes “mind, understanding, intention, purpose, thought, or attitude.” The key idea is the orientation of the whole person, not just the possession of thoughts or ideas in the mind. The full range of emotion, intellect and will is in view. Using the participial form of the Greek verb *anazōnnumi*, Peter wants his readers to prepare themselves for what lies ahead. This verb is a metaphor derived from the practice of persons, who in order to be unimpeded in their movements, were accustomed when about to start on a journey or engage in any work, to bind their long and flowing garments closely around their bodies and fasten them with a leather belt. Closely associated with this action is *self-control* (Greek: *nēphō*, literally, “drink no wine, be sober”). The total effect of Peter’s instructions is to instill the value of a *disciplined life* where nothing is left to chance and everything is brought under the control of reasonable choice. To this discipline the text adds *focus* through the words “fully fix hope on the grace to be given at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” The Greek for “fully” is *teleiōs*, a word usually associated with reaching the *goal* or reaching the target. We might say, “Keep your eyes on the prize.”

The holy life, then, requires making up one’s mind, staying centered on the goal, and bringing under control those things which might impede progress. Similar language appears in the book of *Hebrews*:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).

In this case, attention falls on “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” Everything distracting is laid aside, especially the “sin which clings so closely.”

In 1:14, the imagery shifts to the Christian’s status as “obedient children.” This language harks back to the new birth: first, we are born into a living hope; then, we are to become obedient children of our heavenly Father in whose likeness we have been begotten. Peter underscores the dramatic change which has occurred as a result of our new birth, as he writes about life *before* the birth and then life *afterwards*.

1. Before the birth from above (*proteron*, “previously”), life was *organized* (from the Greek *syschēmatizomenoi*) and controlled by *ignorant desire*. The sort of ignorance in view here is not mere stupidity or absence of intelligence, but rather the kind attributed to the “fool” in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Who is the fool? The *Psalms* define the fool as one who denies the existence of God “in his heart,” as a matter of deliberate choice (see Psalm 14:1; 53:1). Paul offers his own version of this in Romans 1: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (1:21-22). That is the sort of *ignorance* which Peter has in mind when he tells his readers to turn away from their former ignorant desires. Desire (*epithumia*), as we have noted in previous studies,⁹ refers to those impulsive, unbridled emotions which guide human conduct. Rather than “being led by the Spirit of God,” and thereby showing ourselves to truly be the “sons of God” (Romans 8:14), in our former life we were led by the desires which spring from a godless frame of reference.
2. After the birth from above, 1:15 tells us, a new orientation directs our lives: the “call to holiness,” which follows our sanctification and informs every action we contemplate. Peter uses the phrase *pasē anastrophē* to express the idea of one’s *whole way of life*, literally, that around which everything else *turns*. This call is as ancient as the Old Testament vocation of Israel. The writer cites the Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7

⁹ *Background Notes*, January 23/24, 2010, pp. 8-10.

which ties our holiness to the holiness of God Himself: “Be holy because I am holy.” If we truly are God’s children (1:14), then we ought to look like our Father, informed by His wisdom and committed to His will.

Live like the children of God. This is the call to be holy. God’s children reflect His holiness back into the world where its light brings order and makes sense out of the messiness it finds there.

Be Reverent (1:17-21)

The phrase “reverent fear” appears in 1:17b, from the Greek *en phobō*. The concept of “fear” is a tricky one throughout Scripture. When the Bible uses the word in a positive sense, it refers to the reverent awe we experience before God. The statement, “fear the Lord,” isn’t an invitation to run away from God because His greatness overwhelms us. Instead, “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” according to several passages in the Old Testament (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Isaiah 33:6; Micah 6:9). Persons who “fear God” exhibit a deep respect for Who He is — a respect which impacts and shapes their lives in profound ways. Within “fear” of this kind is a seriousness of purpose that does not take for granted the mercy of God but recognizes with gratitude the necessity of God’s help in everything a person does. To “live in the fear of the Lord” means “in all your ways acknowledge him” so that as a result “he will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). As this Proverb indicates, at the foundation of such fear is a confident “trust in the Lord with all your heart” — one who “does not lean on its own understanding.” Among the earliest instruction of children, the Psalmist reminds us, is to learn “the fear of the Lord” (Psalm 34:11). Concerning this fear we are told:

1. Fear of the Lord teaches the hatred of evil (Proverbs 8:13).
2. Fear of the Lord prolongs life (Proverbs 10:27).
3. Fear of the Lord instills confidence (Proverbs 14:26)
4. Fear of the Lord gives life (Proverbs 14:27)
5. In such fear of the Lord we ought to persist (Proverbs 23:17)

The New Testament portrays the early church “walking in the fear of the Lord and in the counsel of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:21). Knowing that we will all give an account to God for our actions, Paul finds real motivation in the fear of the Lord for his witnessing efforts (2 Corinthians 5:11). Like these writers, Peter issues his Call to Reverence for God — that respectful awe which comes from acknowledging the wisdom of God. *God must always have the last word in our lives, and we demonstrate this by placing unconditional trust in Him.*

Peter proceeds to explain how we find the fear of the Lord inside the Christian Gospel. Is not the Gospel the wisdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:20ff)? According to 1:17, as God’s children, we live under the righteous leadership of a Father who treats us fairly. Through the Gospel, God deals fairly with His creatures, not by requiring a monetary price for their salvation — something not everyone could pay — but by offering the “precious blood” of His Son, the spotless lamb of God, whose death for sin was God’s plan all along. In the preaching of the Gospel, this just plan of God to save the world, has been proclaimed “at the last time” (we might say, “at last”) for the benefit of people like the Asiatic Christians who receive Peter’s letter. This is the essential message of 1:17-20. The mere contemplation of God’s salvation plan, rooted in the work of Jesus on the cross, is a source of awe and, yes, of reverence — the fear of the Lord.

Living the holy life requires a healthy sense of awe at the purposes of God for us. The holy life is nurtured by the “fear of the Lord,” acknowledging our need of God in all that we do, in all that we undertake. Peter summarizes this truth in 1:21 by reminding his readers that reverence for God anchors their “faith in God,” especially when that reverence is fastened to the hope that God raised Jesus from the dead. How awesome is that?! Paul never ceased to marvel at the wonder of God’s plan and the mystery of His ways:

³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:32-36)

So that God's righteous judgments might be impartial — He doesn't play favorites! — God declares all human beings to be sinners so that He might deal with them in mercy on level ground at the foot of the cross. Probing the depth of the wisdom which produced the plan of salvation is cause for awe, wonder and "the fear of the Lord."

Parenthesis: A Few Words about the Structure of 1:22-2:3

While chapter 1 ends with verse 25, the thought of the entire section which begins with 1:13 does not end there. 2:1 begins with "therefore" (Greek: *oun*) which connects 2:1-3 with the previous material, adding a fresh emphasis on the growth of the new born children of God — the offshoot of the holy life. We are treating this additional material as part of the discussion on the holiness of God's newborn children. Joel Green offers a helpful graphic of this material:¹⁰

1:22a You have consecrated yourselves for the purpose of familial love

↘

1:22b So love one another!

↗

1:23 God has given you new birth

1:24-25 The potency of the word of God

2:1 You have set aside the toxic behaviors of your past life

↘

2:2 So yearn for the pure milk of the word!

↗

2:3 You have tasted the kindness of the Lord

What do we learn from this representation of the material? 1) The new birth has expansive implications for the Christian; being a Christian doesn't stop with a single event but progressively moves forward into deeper commitments and wider transformations. 2) The word of God is the potent means for accomplishing the continuing purposes of God for our conduct. We sometimes use the word "conversion" to refer to what happens when a person first becomes a Christian: they are "converted," we say. But recent studies of the idea of conversion in the ancient world reveal that the term is both an event and a process in which the convert undergoes degrees of change.¹¹ Holiness and the event we call "sanctification" are both a crisis and a process. Similarly, we observe the importance of *consecration* as initiating the experience of the holy life. Following this, a constant love for one another and a desire to grow are signs that the new birth is genuine and yielding fresh results in the Christian life. The past and its sinfulness yield to the present and God's holiness.

Be Loving (1:22-25)

Holiness is not a private affair between one Christian and God. Perhaps this is a common distortion of biblical holiness. Ancient Israel was told *collectively* "be holy, as I am holy." Holiness has both vertical (God-to-human) and horizontal (human-to-human) components. A third dimension of the holy life is stated in 1:22 where Christians are told to "love one another earnestly." This sort of love is, of course, *agapē*, as expressed in the verb form of the noun root (*agapaō*). Peter uses the imperative to communicate a command or instruction, and he also uses the aorist tense which emphasizes the decisive nature of the action. Love is a decision not merely a feeling; an action not only an intention.¹² The adverb, translated here as "earnestly" is *ektenōs* which

¹⁰ Green, p. 49.

¹¹ Kilbourne Brock, "Paradigm conflict, types of conversion, and conversion theories," *Sociological Analysis* 50 no. 1 (1989): 1-20; Bill J. Leonard, "Getting saved in America : conversion event in a pluralistic culture," *Review & Expositor* 82 no. 1 (1985): 111-127.

¹² Refer to our discussion of *love* in the *Background Notes* for March 20/21, 2010 from our study "Jesus As Love Redefined."

means “constantly.” We find this word in Acts 12:5 where it describes how the church prayed for Peter when he was in prison. The LXX¹³ version of the Old Testament applies the term in similar ways (Jonah 3:8). The root stem is from *teinō* which means “to stretch” (compare our “tension”) and is prefixed with the preposition *ek*, resulting in the idea of “stretch out,” similar to the English notion, “extend.” This love “stretches us” and it requires us “to stretch.”

Such love, Peter informs his readers, is *ek kardias* — “from [the] heart.” Some early manuscripts of *1 Peter* include an additional word to explain the condition of the heart when it has this kind of constant love, namely, *katharas*, which means “pure” or “clean.” Sometimes the translators will incorporate this extra term by translating the text as “love one another constantly from the heart sincerely...” Our understanding of holiness is often expressed as “heart holiness” and this heart experiences “perfect love.” Peter is saying at least that much about the connection between the holy life and the sort of love he describes in this section. We need to be reminded here that the word “heart” has to do with the center of personality and human life. From the heart, life streams forth (Proverbs 4:23). As we have explained in another study:

The heart (Greek: *kardia*; Hebrew: *leb*) consists of four elements: emotion (John 14: 1, Matthew 5: 28), will or volition (Exodus 35: 5), the intellect (John 12: 40, Romans 1: 21), and the conscience (Acts 2: 37). Each is essential. Man is to "obey from the heart ..." (Romans 6: 17). Obedience from the heart involves will and emotion and to obey requires the intellect to understand and determine. [Note: the world of Jesus' time did not think the "brain" was very important as an organ of thought or feeling. Instead, the "head" was viewed as a "source" of life for the body in some unknown way. The heart functioned as we now know the brain does. The Bible simply follows common usage so as to be understood by its readers.]¹⁴

Modifying the main verb for love, are a series of phrases which introduce 1:22.

1. “Having purified your souls.” Based on the Greek verb *hagnizō*, “to cleanse, purify,” this word emphasizes the act of consecration: separation from sin and devotion to God. The Old Testament regularly uses this word in the LXX to express the idea of “make holy,” especially through ceremonial religious rituals which voluntarily dedicate persons to God (Exodus 19:10; Numbers 6:3; Joshua 3:5; 1 Chronicles 15:12; 2 Chronicles 30:17; John 11:55; Acts 21:24, 26; 24:18). New Testament writers apply the term to an intentional and voluntary change of heart (James 4:8; 1 John 3:3).¹⁵
2. “Through obedience to the truth.” What accomplishes cleansing and purification of the Christian’s heart? The answer lies in the Greek word *alētheia* — truth. In his prayer to the Father before his betrayal in Gethsemane, Jesus asked that God would “sanctify (“make holy”) them [the disciples] in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Peter is specific, however, in the way he sees truth: not merely a hearing or knowing of the truth but obedience to truth (Greek: *en tē hupakoē tēs alētheias*). The word for obedience is a compound which starts with “hearing” (*akouō*) but doesn’t stop there; it must bring the hearer “under” (*hupo*) the direction and authority of what is heard. The best statement of this is in James: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22-25). Later, in James 4:8, he appeals for his readers to “cleanse your hands...purify your hearts” — actions consistent with consecration of the heart to God and cleansing of the heart by the word of God.
3. “For a sincere brotherly love.” Although the sort of love Peter wants is *agapē*-style love, he doesn’t hesitate to remind his readers that they are part of a family, and that God’s kind of love transforms all other expressions of love, including *philadelphia* — “family love, brotherly love, sisterly love.” He also uses the adjective *anupokriton* to modify familial love, a Greek term which means “without hypocrisy.” Mention of familial love is relevant to the situation of Peter’s audience: they are an alienated people within a pagan culture, living as resident aliens in a foreign land. Holiness requires the practical application of divine love to human relationships. Christians belong to a new family as the result of their new birth. One way holiness

¹³ Remember that the abbreviation LXX refers to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, commonly used by Greek-speaking Jews in the Diaspora and perhaps in the more Gentile areas of Israel, such as Galilee. We commonly call this version, the *Septuagint*.

¹⁴ *Background Notes*, November 17/18, 2007.

¹⁵ *Jobs*, p. 124.

works itself out is in the strengthening of those familial bonds which unite one Christ follower to another. To persons living an uprooted existence, having permanent human relationships is absolutely vital. Fragmented social existence is overcome by fraternal spiritual experience. Once again, we see how the messy world of shattered relationships finds healing through transforming love — love from the heart — which takes shape in real communities — the holy nation which God is raising up in the world.

Why does Peter emphasize that this brotherly love is “without hypocrisy”? Perhaps the critics of the Christian way of life questioned the genuineness of family relationships not based on flesh and blood. They may have doubted whether persons who lacked pedigree or aristocratic status could truly have an authentic family life together. All of this could well have seemed forced and artificial to the surrounding culture. Peter challenges his readers to show to the world a genuine and sincere form of human relationship that did not depend on external factors (race, economics, etc.) but on a deeper and richer experience as part of God’s family. If the new birth means anything at all, it must result in a new way of being family, community, society and culture. The Christian family belongs to the *polis* (city) of God, where holiness is the true mark of pedigree.

At this point in his ethical instructions, Peter returns to the theme he introduced at the start of his blessing in 1:3: Christians are persons who have been *born again*. He emphasizes in this case that the new birth is a *permanent* birth which yields *lasting results*. Just as he told them earlier that tested faith results in something durable, here, he connects the *source of the new birth* — imperishable seed — with the *results of the new birth* — the life of constant and consistent love. Once more, he reminds his readers that the “seed” which engenders the new birth existence is none other than the “word of God.” To drive this point home, Peter cites Isaiah 40:6, 8, a passage which talks about ancient Israel finally restored, having been brought back from Babylonian exile. How fitting! The Asiatic Christ followers, resident aliens themselves, are asked to consider the words of Isaiah as he comforts the exiled people of God who still live in Babylon, letting them know that one day soon they would hear the voice of God announcing the coming of God to restore His people. It is of interest that Peter, in 5:13, will make the connection between the church-in-exile and Babylon. Like Israel in exile, the New Testament people of God are “as grass” subject to the “withering” heart, delicate flowers vulnerable to fading. But that is not their true nature, their *new nature*. They are, instead, offspring of the new birth through the “word of God which remains forever.” If their progenitor is the permanent word of God, what does that make them, if not the people with lasting roots in God’s hopeful future. Did not Peter begin his letter with the helpful reminder that his readers had been “born again into a living hope” (1:3)?

Hanson writes:

When one realizes that this speech was addressed to a people that had experienced the loss of nearly all of those structures and institutions which give identity to a community, it assumes a poignancy especially for readers who face their own personal or corporate existence with apprehension or dread.¹⁶

Peter seems to be saying that the kind of permanence and reliability we are accustomed to finding in family life are also present in the family of God. Sustained by the word of God, the family of God finds blessing in the “tie that binds our hearts in Christian love, the fellowship of kindred minds, like to that above.”¹⁷ And why is it “like to that above”? Is it not because the new birth endows the children of God with the likeness of God through the word of God? Does not the family of God, living in brotherly love, express the character of God in the world — the expression of His holiness?

Be Growing (2:1-3)

“Put away!” That’s how Peter begins this concluding paragraph of his discussion of holiness as the result of the new birth. The Greek has *apothemenoi*, from *apothēmi* which means “take off, throw off, be done with.”

¹⁶ P. D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 13-14.

¹⁷ From the lyrics of John Fawcett (ca. 1782), “Blest Be the Tie That Binds.”

Classical writers used the word of both *arms* and *clothes*. In Hebrews 12:1 the writer uses the same word to describe what a runner does before beginning the race: takes off all clothes which encumber his start and successful winning of the competition in the Games:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Of special interest to both Peter and the writer to the Hebrews, is the laying aside of “clinging sins.” This reference emphasizes the decisive aspect of sanctification — that which initiates the life-long process of Christian growth. Peter is quite specific in what we are to “lay aside.” He offers the reader a list of “vices” which stand opposed to the “virtues.” At one time, life in the surrounding pagan culture had left its stain on the hearts of Peter’s readers. All of that starts to change with the new birth and will reach a critical point when the act of moral transformation, known as sanctification, finally reaches the heart. The “laying aside” aspect of this experience corresponds to “separation from” in preparation for “separation to” the life of holiness and the subsequent growth. What should we lay aside?

Peter is selective, much as Paul was in his letters (Romans 13:13; Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:8). These are vices which destroy community and which are countered by the sort of familial love Peter has already announced in 1:22-25. Taken together, these vices are *kakia* — evil, the classic opposite of *aretē* — virtue. Growth in Christ brings virtue, and the determination to grow requires a commitment to “put away childish things” — that is, selfish things (see 1 Corinthians 13:11). Several terms factor into this discussion.

1. “Deceit.” From the Greek *dolos* which basically meant “a bait for fish,” and then came to mean any cunning contrivance for deceiving or catching. It was used of the Trojan horse in classical times. Some cultures actually saw deceit as a skill and something worthy of praise. Plato wrote about the “noble lie” in politics. By contrast, Peter advocates a Christian society in which *dolos* is a vice, not a virtue, an infantile practice to be laid aside.
2. “Hypocrisy.” From *hupocrisis*, the technical term of play-acting or the delivery of a speech. Negatively, it meant playing a part in the sense that we mean to be something we are not. Actors wore masks in the Greek plays, and this was distinctively part of the drama. Metaphorically, persons who disguise their true character through appearing to be a wholly different person are considered hypocrites. Jesus especially addressed this vice within the Jewish leadership — particularly the Pharisees. Matthew’s Gospel devotes considerable space to emphasizing Jesus’ teaching on hypocrisy (see Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13-29). The holy life within the community of brotherly love rejects play-acting as an appropriate virtue for building trust.
3. “Envy.” From *phthonos* a common term for envy or jealousy. The central idea is not just the *feeling* but a deep sense of *ill-will* toward other people. Ironically, the pagan gods were frequently described as suffering from this attitude, as seen in the writings of Sophocles.
4. “Slander.” From *katalalia*, literally, someone who “speaks against” another, so as to undermine.

Surprisingly, #3-4 were associated with religious competitiveness inside of Second Temple Judaism. Paul witnessed this firsthand, as did Jesus, when people responded to the Good News and provoked envy from the leadership (see also Philippians 1:15). Fueled by envy, they were led to attack Jesus and his followers. In Matthew 27:18, we are reminded, “Out of envy they delivered him [Jesus] up” (also, Mark 15:10). As Jesus diagnoses the true source of spiritual sickness, he includes envy and slander in his list of vices, placed in the same sequence as 1 Peter 2:1 places them (see Mark 7:22). After laying out distinctively Gentile sins, Paul cleverly climaxes one list of vices with those sins found among his Jewish colleagues, including envy (Romans 1:29). Hotly contested doctrinal debates often resulted in “quarrels about words” which led to the vices Peter mentions (1 Timothy 6:4). These also belong to Paul’s “works of the flesh” list found in Galatians 5:21, and are countered by the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22-23).

The deliberate choice to “lay aside” sin corresponds to Paul’s instructions in Romans 13:12 to “cast off the works of darkness” in preparation to “put on the armor of light.” Elsewhere we are told to “put off the old self

which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through evil desires” (Ephesians 4:22; compare Colossians 3:9). Paul uses the same Greek word as Peter does in 2:1 (*apotithēmi*). So does James in this passage:

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21).

Peter now turns to what James affirms: Christians must receive “the implanted word” as the continuing source for the holy life. Only in Peter’s case, the imagery shifts from the planting of a seed to the nourishment of milk. As a metaphor, “the milk of the word” functions in different ways throughout the New Testament, depending on the context. For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12-13, “the milk of the word” refers to very basic spiritual teaching which has occupied certain Christians far too long. “Milk is fine for babies, but you are no longer babies,” seems to be the emphasis of those passages. However, when Peter uses the imagery in 2:2, he doesn’t have the stages of development in mind, but rather the “craving” (Greek: *epipotheō*) which healthy, growing infants ought to have for their mother’s milk. It’s a good thing for a baby to want milk at its mother’s breast. In the same way, Peter argues, Christians, regardless of their age or maturity, should crave the word of God so that they might grow by it.

An adjective appears with “milk,” usually translated as “spiritual.” In reality, the Greek word is *logikos* which means “reasonable” or perhaps “logical” — that is, the next reasonable step in the Christian experience; what we would expect should *follow* the new birth. Paul uses the same terminology in Romans 12:1 where the offering of our bodies to God as a “living sacrifice” is referred to as a *logikē latreia* — the kind of “worship” which should follow from our experience of full salvation as described in Romans 1-11. What Peter is saying parallels this use of *logikos*, and it is in this way that he uses the phrase *to logikon adolon gala*. Notice how the word is described as “sincere,” based on the negative form of *dolon* (*a + dolon*), “not deceitful.” You will recall that *dolon* appeared in 2:1 in reference to deceit as something the Christian must lay aside. What better way to acquire the habit of holiness than to allow the non-deceitful word of God to inform our thinking and direct our choices! The world lives by *dolon* while the word guides by *adolon*.

The Greek uses a result clause, introduced by *hina* and followed by *en autō auxēthēte eis sōtērian*. This *growth into salvation* shows how dynamic and progressive the Christian life actually is. Salvation is a broadly construed term throughout Scripture. We have already noted this in our discussion of 1:5 above. In general terms, God delivers His people and this creates enormous opportunity for them to grow. This looks like Yahweh’s defeat of the Canaanites before the armies of Israel during the conquest which then gave the victors an opportunity to positively develop and cultivate the land of Canaan for God’s holy purposes. Our salvation — deliverance from sin — opens up the future to us where we may grow and be fruitful in building up the kingdom of God. Growing into salvation finds a Pauline counterpart in this text:

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain (Philippians 2:12b-16)

Notice how Paul’s language agrees with Peter’s ideas thus far in his letter. Salvation is something we “work out” (but not work *for*); we are God’s children who must live godly lives within a “crooked and twisted” culture where the holiness we reflect shines like a light; the word of life is essential as we “run” or “labor.”

For Peter, the motivation for growth “into salvation” is inspired by an Old Testament text from Psalm 34:8a,
Oh, taste and see that Yahweh is good!

That verse lies at the center of a psalm which celebrates many of the same themes we find in *1 Peter*. In fact, an argument could be made that Peter had been reading and meditating on Psalm 34 in conjunction with his writing of *1 Peter*.¹⁸ Here are a few fascinating parallels:

1. The psalm begins with a “blessing”: “I will bless Yahweh at all times...” (34:1-3).
2. Yahweh saves His people “from all trouble” (34:6, 17, 19, 22) and His angel delivers them (34:7).
3. God’s people “fear Him” (34:7, 9).
4. God’s people are His “children” whom He invites to receive His instruction (34:11).
5. God’s people turn away from evil and deceit (34:13).
6. God is near to the brokenhearted, the crushed in spirit (34:18).
7. In the LXX of 34:4, the word usually translated “fears” is actually the Greek word *paroikiōn*, which means “sojournings.” This would correspond to Peter’s view of his audience as resident aliens (2:11).

And so when Peter cites 34:8a, he is likely drawing his readers to the whole psalm where they will discover many of his key themes already present in the life of David. This is often how New Testament writers handle the Old Testament: they will cite a single verse or statement from a larger passage and then expect the readers to examine the passage in its entirety. In effect, the quotation is the “hook” or “key” for unlocking the text, a sort of “indexing” device intended to involve the reader in the wider context.

What Peter wants to encourage by way of the holy life is a deeper appreciation for *the person of God* in the lives of his readers. “Taste and see” applies to God, even though the Word seems to be the means for making that possible. God’s holiness, love, mercy and grace are the real objects of “taste and see,” while the Word acts as the agent for making them known. Jesus Christ reveals the character of God, and by feeding on him, we discover that “the Lord is good.” Holiness is to be enjoyed, not endured; tasted, not tolerated. The word “holy” should not conjure up the somber and the colorless, but rather the special and the challenging. Salvation is something we grow up into. Michaels helps us here: “Salvation is seen not as a last-minute rescue operation from the outside but as the fitting consummation of a process already at work in and among Christian believers.”¹⁹

This lesson on spiritual growth is also helpful advice for spiritual health. Physical health is maintained by avoiding what is harmful and assimilating what is useful.²⁰ The call to “lay aside” parallels good, sound practices of washing hands, brushing teeth, and using clean eating utensils. That doesn’t mean germs won’t invade our bodies. But applying the positive practices for good health, we strengthen our bodies to resist and forestall illness. In effect, things like evil, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander are the enemies of the soul’s health and especially that of the community, and the sanctifying power of God’s word helps to ward them off. On the other side, proper diet — in this case a robust appetite for the word of God — aids the process of growth.

Holiness is honored by what it achieves not only by how it begins in our lives. In our theological tradition, we stress the distinction between sanctification as a decisive event and growth which is the sequel and consequence. Peter incorporates both crisis and process into his teaching, as 1:13-2:3 clearly shows.

Concluding Thoughts

The Blessing and The Call composed this week’s study. We begin with a proper act of worship, honoring the God who has become our Father through the new birth. We bless the God who blesses us, and who graciously rescues us and firmly sets the future before us. When we leave the place of blessing, it is because God has called us to become His dear children in the reality of the world around us. That is no easy task, but He equips us to achieve it. His holiness sets Him apart; it also sets us apart as His distinct people. We identify with the

¹⁸ Michael J. Gilmour, “Crass casualty or purposeful pain? Psalm 34’s influence on Peter’s first letter,” *Word & World* 24 no. 4 (2004): 404-411.

¹⁹ Michaels, p. 91.

²⁰ Rees, p. 48.

audience of Peter's letter: we too are resident aliens in this world, called to reflect the image of God through living holy lives.

Untidy though the world is, our calling is to partner with God in sorting it all out, at times becoming His hands and feet in especially confused places which are strewn with the wreckage of human lives. As we learn the habits of love, revealed through the crucified and risen Jesus, a new family appears amidst the mess, and the work of making the world a home begins in earnest.

In his book, *The Contemplative Pastor*,²¹ Eugene Peterson places the *mysteries of God* and the *messy human condition* side-by-side, reminding Christian leaders of the patience required to deal with both. At the center is holiness, and a "faithful endurance that is respectful of living a moral, spiritual, and liturgical (worshipping) life before the mysteries of God in the mess of history."

And now for a completely relevant digression:

One of my clients, a CFO for a manufacturing company, is a gifted skier. He once told me that when you're learning to ski, one of the most difficult lessons is learning to lean down the slope. Everything in you cries out to lean up the slope instead, away from the drop. But that doesn't work: when your weight is mostly on the lower ski, you can't control your turn. But when you lean down the slope, with your weight on the upper ski, you can push the turn all the way round and stay in control. Your natural reaction is to pull away from the slope, but the right way is to head straight into what looks like your doom.

It's the same with sin. When we become aware of our sin — the big mess we're in — our natural tendency is to run away from God; but what we need to do is "lean down the slope" — run to God. Only He can deal with our sin. The great paradox of holiness is that the only way we can attain it is by running to The Holy One. The God who hates sin with an implacable hatred is the One who has made a way for us to cast that sin aside and be free of it forever.

We can see this in the Bible. Isaiah, who was acutely aware of his sinfulness, is symbolically cleansed by a coal from the altar — that is, by God Himself (Isaiah 6). Similarly, King David — in the deepest depths of his despair, having committed adultery, then covered it up with a murder — prays "Cleanse me [...] and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." (Psalms 51:7)

Let us not forget that the mess we find in this world was once the chaos before creation. Then, as now, the "formless and empty" material yielded to the creative word of the God who said, "Let there be...and there was..." (Genesis 1). When we surrender ourselves to the holy purpose of God, He speaks the Good News to us and our mess yields to his grace and New Creation happens.

Peterson helps us here in his *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*: "I can never be involved in creativity except by entering the mess. In any creative enterprise there are risks, mistakes, false starts, failures, frustrations, embarrassments, but out of this mess — when we stay with it long enough, enter into it deeply enough — there slowly emerges beauty or peace."²² To this we add, humbly, holiness involves us in the risky business of leaning down the slope — and finding the mercy of the holy God there to meet us.

Glory to God! Amen.

²¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, p. 47ff.

²² Peterson, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, p. 163-164.

Resources: Brief Bibliography

A number of fine commentaries provide more in-depth discussions of the topics we will discuss in these studies of *1 Peter*. The following list is selective. When referenced throughout these *Notes*, the author's name will appear in the footnotes. Consult this bibliography for full information on the sources.

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Digger Deeper: *HoliMess: “Holiness” in the HoliMess!*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *HoliMess: “Holiness” in the HoliMess!*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. This week’s reading is 1 Peter 1:3-2:3. Prayerfully read through it several times, noting its main themes. What recurring words do you discover, and how do they shape the direction of the passage?
2. Where does “holiness” appear in the text? What specific features of holiness does Peter emphasize in this passage?
3. Outline the reading, using the following section units: 1:3-12 and 1:13-2:3. See if you can break the outline down further, labeling these smaller units 1:3-5; 1:6-9; 1:10-12; 1:13-16; 1:17-21; 1:22-25; 2:1-3.
4. In what sense is 1:3-12 a “blessing”? What does it mean to “bless God”? How does our blessing God relate to His blessings on us? Use the material of this section to support your answer.
5. Where do hope, trial, and Scripture promises fit into the blessing of God in this section?
6. According to 1:13, we are to “prepare our minds for action.” What specific actions does Peter identify in 1:13-2:3?
7. What important command sets the tone for this section (1:15)? Review the key Old Testament passages which relate to the theme of holiness (Isaiah 6:3; 57:10; Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7).
8. Explain the use of the word “fear” as it is used in 1:17-21. What possible meanings does the word have, and which meaning best applies in this case? Consult these other passages as you think through this idea: Psalm 34:11; 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:33; 23:17; Isaiah 33:6; Micah 6:9. What relationship does “the fear of the Lord” have to the holy life?
9. How does holiness have a horizontal dimension, according to 1:22-25? What sort of “love” does Peter envision for his audience? Note the key characteristics he mentions.
10. What does it mean to “purify the soul”? What role does truth have in this process? Compare John 17:17; James 1:22-25.
11. What important mark of holiness does Peter emphasize in 2:1-3? What negative and positive actions does he mention in this respect? Compare Hebrews 12:1. What are we supposed to “lay aside”?
12. Discuss the list of “vices” listed in this section, and then compare them with these other passages: Romans 13:13; Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:8. How do they impact on living in Christian community? How is our personal growth tied to the life of the church?
13. In what sense is salvation a process? How is holiness both a crisis and a process? Compare Philippians 2:12-16 and Romans 12:1-2.
14. What does it mean to “taste and see” as the phrase appears in 2:3? This is part of an Old Testament quotation from Psalm 34. Prayerfully read that psalm and note any connections to our study of *1 Peter* so far.