

Personal Holiness??

Answers from 1 Peter 1:13-16

1 Peter 1:13-16, Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance but, as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life because it is written, "Be ye holy; for I am holy". KJV

Introduction

We react at times to certain passages of Scripture with incredulity because the message is so inconsistent with our own experience and with the world as we know it that we may tend to dismiss it outright. After Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler the disciples were incredulous that Jesus indicated he was not in the kingdom and Mark 10:26 says "they were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?". When Mary was told by the angel that she was to have a baby who would be the Messiah her response in Luke 1:34 was "How can this be since I am a virgin?".

The passage we are studying may result in a similar response from us regarding the topic of personal holiness and so we approach it as a platitude, a religious phrase that we repeat so frequently that it becomes rote, and we don't seriously consider it as relevant to real life. There are several key words in the passage which, if understood, will help us understand what the Holy Spirit through Peter is saying to us about this issue.

I. The dilemma

The Bible says, as Christians, we are "new creations" (2 Cor. 5:17) and yet we still sin as we did before coming to Christ; and the key word that helps us begin to understand this is **IGNORANCE**. This word is not referring to lack of intelligence or lack of information.

Key word **IGNORANCE**: the Greek word is **AGNOIA**, a want (*lack*) of perception, it is also used in Ephesians 4:18 and includes the idea of willful blindness (Romans 1:28, not the ignorance which mitigates guilt). Bullinger and Vines

Romans 1:18-25 says that before coming to Christ, I knew about God, but I suppressed the truth about God and chose to not honor Him as God or give thanks but became futile in my speculations and I exchanged the truth of God for a (the) lie and I chose to worship what was created (me) rather than the Creator. This is the original lie to which Adam and Eve succumbed (Genesis 3:1-6)

So this word ignorance speaks of an intentional, incorrect perception regarding life, ie. "worldview", and David Wells explains in Above All Earthly Powers, this is the predominant worldview of post modern western man and "sets them up autonomously as the acknowledged legislators of the world and they claim an essentially divine prerogative to conceptualize reality and shape the nature of life as they please". Scott Oliphint in Covenantal Apologetics explains "There are two worlds colliding in every unbelieving position, therefore. There is the world the unbeliever is attempting to build, a world that is illusory. And there is the real world, the world where the triune God reigns..."

Psalms 73 speaks of this worldview of the unbeliever, and in the New Living Translation in verse 20 it says, "Their present life is only a dream that is gone when they awake."

The sad reality is that, although the Christian **IS** a new creation through faith in Christ, that "intentional, incorrect worldview" remains as an influence in one's life. In Romans 7:22-23 the Holy Spirit through Paul says, "...I joyfully concur with the Law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind..." and in Galatians 5:17 "...the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please..."

II. The difference

1 Cor. 6:9-11 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?...And such were some of you; **but** you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." Something very real and very profound happens when one repents, puts one's faith in Christ, and is converted. "The old things passed away; behold new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Peter refers to what Paul was writing to the church at Corinth when he refers to our calling; "as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life". Understanding our calling helps us to understand this passage and how it **IS** relevant to our everyday lives.

Throughout the New Testament our calling is referred to repeatedly and is explained as having three aspects. Our calling involves an event that happened in time and space in the PAST when we received forgiveness of our sins, when we put our faith in Christ, understanding that His death on the cross paid our PENALTY for our sin for us. John 5:24 says, "...he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but HAS PASSED out of death into life". 1 Peter 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy HAS CAUSED us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Peter goes on in 1:4-5 and says, "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time". And in John 14:2-3 Jesus says, "for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am there you may be also." So, another aspect of our calling is a PROMISE for the future when we will be in the PRESENCE of Christ and free from the presence of sin.

And then Peter says in 1 Peter 1:6-7, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though NOW for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ", and so here Peter refers to the third aspect of our calling that is in the here and now, the PRESENT.

Paul deals with this aspect of our calling in Romans 5 and 6. In Romans 5:21 he personifies sin as a reigning monarch over the unbeliever, those who are spiritually dead; and that changes at conversion "so **grace might reign** through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". Paul continues in Romans 6:6 saying "our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin (*the former monarch*) might be made powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" and in Romans 6:12-14 saying, "Therefore, do not let sin (*the former reigning monarch*) reign...but present yourselves to God (*your new King*) as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God". So this third aspect of our calling is occurring in the PRESENT and is characterized by freedom from the POWER of sin over our lives. We are not free from its presence because that is the promise for the future, but what IS different is that we now have the CAPACITY to say "no" to temptation and "yes" to obedience because of His grace that is available to us because of His presence in our lives. Titus 2:11-14 says "For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this PRESENT age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us...and purify for Himself a people zealous for good deeds". So another characteristic of this third aspect of our calling is that He changes our desires.

An additional characteristic of this third aspect of our calling is found in Titus 3:5 where Paul writes, "He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration (*conversion*) and renewing by the Holy Spirit" The Greek word for renewing means "renovating" like one renovates an old house and it communicates that this is a process that begins at conversion and continues until we go to be with the Lord. The importance of this is understood when we look at the next key word, in verse 15, the verb "BE", and is the Greek word, GINOMAI, which has the meaning of "becoming"; so Peter is saying they were to see to it that their inward holiness, by virtue of the

residence in them of the Holy Spirit, was to find outward expression in their lives. He was not speaking of a “finished product”, but a work that was to be in progress.

We have looked at the three aspects of our calling:

Justification An event in the PAST Freeing us from the PENALTY of sin

Glorification A PROMISE for the future Freeing us from the PRESENCE of sin

Sanctification An ongoing PROCESS of renewal in the PRESENT

That frees us from the POWER of sin

That begins at conversion and continues until we go to be with the Lord

That includes Christ giving us new desires to obey Him

That includes Christ empowering us to say no to temptation and yes to obedience by His grace (2Cor. 9:8)

That is a struggle and is not automatic and does include the reality of failures and the blessing of His mercy and forgiveness (James 1:2-4, James 4:7, Gal. 5:16-17, Ps 130:3-4, Ps. 103:8, 11-14, 1 Jn. 1:9)

That results in our growing in Christ-likeness as we yield to the influence of the Holy Spirit on a moment to moment basis every day (2 Cor. 3:18)

III. The decisions

We make many decisions every day regarding the issue of yielding to Christ as Lord or following the influence of our former “intentional, incorrect worldview”, and in this passage Peter gives us three broad areas of life in which practical applications can be made. Understanding these areas can help us put into practice the message in our passage.

A. “gird up the loins of your mind”

1. MIND Greek word is DIANOIA and it means the reflective exercise of the heart, it is the faculty of knowing, understanding, or moral reflection that is renewed by the Holy Spirit.

So this is deeper than cognition. For those who may be majoring in Psychology this is not talking about “Cognitive Therapy”, changing someone’s thought processes. This is referring to the heart, and the Bible says a lot about the heart and also uses the words soul and mind when speaking of this. In Matthew 22:36-37 Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your HEART, and with all your SOUL, and with all your MIND.

Paul Tripp explains that the Scriptures speak of the heart as the seat of our emotions, motivation, will, thought, and desire. In other words, the heart is the causal center of your personhood. It is the “inner man”.

2. gird up the loins this expression means to gird round the loins for conflict or service and it refers to the long flowing robes of the Orientals which were girded up (gathered up and secured) while engaged in any business.

The ESV translates this as, “Therefore, preparing your minds (*heart*) for action...” and the same term is used by Paul in Ephesians 6:14 when he speaks of that first piece of armor we are to put on in order to be able to stand in the spiritual battle in which we are engaged every day, “Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth”.

So in this initial phrase, Peter is saying we are to prepare our hearts (*for the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged- 1 Peter 5:8-9*) and Paul makes that very clear in Ephesians 6:10-18 in the passage dealing with the same issue by stating directly that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (ESV). Any conflict involves OFFENSE and DEFENSE.

Our “offense” is found in 1 Peter 3:15, “but sanctify (*set Christ apart as Lord*) Christ as Lord in your hearts...”, in Psalms 100:3, “Acknowledge that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and we belong to Him; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” (Berkeley), and in Eph. 6 :10 “Be strong in the Lord...”

Our “defense” is to guard our hearts and is found in Proverbs 4:23 “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (NASB) and Deut. 4:9, “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children...”. There are two very practical ways we do this.

- a. Guard what we see, Matt 5:29, Ps. 119:37(NASB), Prov. 4:25-27
- b. Guard what we think, Ps. 101:3-4, 2 Cor. 10:5, Phil. 4:8

B. “be SOBER” the Greek word is NEPHO and it means to be sober-minded, watchful, circumspect. Paul uses the word “circumspectly” in Ephesians 5:15, “see, then, that you walk circumspectly” and this means “going up to the top or summit; and as this requires great pains, care, and diligence, it means accurate, exact...”

There are two very practical ways we can do this.

a. Be careful regarding where we go, Prov. 4:14-15

b Be careful with whom we go, Prov. 16:29, Prov. 13:20, Ps. 101:6

Guiding principle regarding our relationship with the opposite sex:

1 Tim 5:2 self control is exercised, and the woman is treated like a sister
in all purity

Characteristics of a godly woman:

1 Peter 3:23 quiet spirit, inner beauty, chaste, respectful

Prov.31:10-11 strength of character, more precious than jewels,
trustworthy, resourceful, wise, generous, courageous

Characteristics of the kind of woman to avoid:

Prov. 5:3 flatters with her speech

Prov. 5:6 wrong philosophy of life

Prov.6:25 flirtatious

Prov. 7:10-11 forward, rude, indiscreet and immodest in dress

Prov.7:13 emphasizes physical contact, not careful about avoiding
physical contact

C. "HOPE to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"

HOPE the Greek word is ELPISO and it is a verb that means
"resting upon" the noun form of the word has to do with
the unseen and the future as in Romans 8:24-25.

Kenneth Wuest, (Moody Bible Institute) explains, "The words 'hope to the end' do not refer to the Christian living in a state of hopefulness to the end of his life. The word 'end' ...means perfectly and completely...It is to be a hope that is complete, a perfect hope, wanting nothing, being in its character an assured expectation...It is true that our reception of this grace is yet future. But the picture in the word used is the grace being brought to us RIGHT NOW."

The practical application from this is that, **RATHER** than living under the influence of our former **INTENTIONAL, INCORRECT PERCEPTION** about life, we are to live with the eternal perspective that is true. We are to **OPERATE IN TRUTH**.

John 8:31-32, Jesus therefore was saying to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth and **the truth shall set you free.**"

2 Cor. 4:16-18, Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our **inner man** is being renewed day by day, for momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Cor. 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Eph. 5:15 (JB Phillips) Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as *those who do*.

James 1: 2-4 (JB Phillips) When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But **let the process go on** and you will find you have **become** men of mature character (Christ-likeness) with the right sort of independence.

IV. Conclusion

Heb. 4:14-16 We are to stay close to Jesus ("with confidence draw near to the throne of grace") who will meet our every need; mercy (for the times when we fail- Psalms 130:3-4) and grace (for the times when we need to obey- 2Cor. 9:8)

The following is the story of Antonio, a young man whom the Lord reached through the ministry of Jim Petersen and other Navigator missionaries in Brazil and includes a comprehensive and yet very concise illustration of this process we have been exploring.

Jim Petersen shares his and other missionaries' experience during their time in Brazil regarding understanding the importance of redemptive relationships in helping people come to know God and in getting to know Him better in a portion of his book, Church Without Walls. Below is an excerpt from the section entitled

Empowering Believers to Witness and Heal/The Dynamics of Spiritual Transformation

Antonio's spiritual birth was a long, painful affair that dragged on for almost two years. We would meet together every few days, and we would have wonderful times exploring the gospel. But he could not bring himself to submit to Jesus Christ. He had some habits he wasn't sure he could live without. He made attempt after attempt to change his behavior, but his efforts always ended in failure.

Gradually, he began to understand he was getting the cart before the horse. He was attempting to change so that he would be acceptable to God. Finally, he gave himself to Christ as he was, and asked Christ to change him. I breathed a sigh of relief, but the next eighteen months were even more difficult. Antonio's problems didn't go away. I continued to spend hours with him. I taught him everything I could find in the Bible (about his problems) and prayed for him daily. But there was no improvement. Finally, I gave up. Antonio seemed beyond my help...

I puzzled over how believers in the first century, with no "professional" training, could achieve such profound transformations among the morally sick, and how powerless my own work was by comparison. Since Antonio's problems were the rule rather than the exception among the people we were reaching, I began to wonder if our ministry even had a future.

How did they do it back then? That they did it at all is proof that it can be done, I reasoned. So I went to the Scriptures with this question: What are the essential elements of true spiritual change? What are the dynamics?

I was looking for something simple. It would have to be simple, because the first century Christians had managed profound changes without the "benefit" of modern psychology. What I learned follows.

The following six factors, essential to spiritual transformation, work together to produce inner change. These factors interrelate roughly in the sequence I describe here. The cycle needs to be continuous to accomplish permanent change. Any change, any deliverance from a particular habit or attitude, results from an ongoing interaction among these factors. There will always be areas in our lives as we progress toward the likeness of Christ that will be undergoing this process of deliverance.

Experiences of Life

Everyday life is our classroom. Experiences are at the center of all change. They can be positive experiences, or negative ones. The Apostle Paul relates, "We are under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure...But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." (1 Cor. 1:8-9) An experience led to a discovery. The result was increased capacity. We "rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance." (Rom. 5:3)

Reflect back on your own life. What major changes have you undergone? Are those changes not experience-related? Of course they are. Change does not occur in a vacuum. Godliness is not gained on a mountaintop. I will not learn to be faithful to my wife as long as she and I are marooned on a deserted island. Experiences reveal what I really am and confront me with my needs. So experiences will be at the center of any change.

We all have experiences all the time, but few of us seem to benefit or learn from them. We can either be trained by the experiences of life, or they can leave us bruised and bewildered. This brings us to the second essential element in the process of change.

The Scriptures

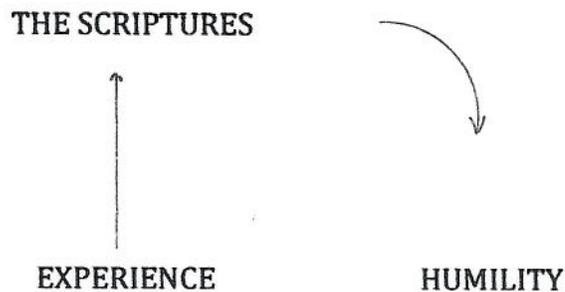
If we did not have the Scriptures, we would be unable to make sense of our experiences...The revelation of Christ, both incarnate and written, illuminates the way to truth, and to true deliverance. So the Scriptures are essential to personal transformation...

The Bible confronts us with the truth about ourselves. It is like a mirror that, like it or not, reveals us as we are. James writes, "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:25) This passage indicates that it is possible to have experiences, to understand them through the light of the Scriptures, and still make no progress. We can be the person "who looks at his face in a mirror and...goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." (James 1:23-24) Something is required of us.

Humility

Humility is foundational to the next element in spiritual transformation. In the words of James, "Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (James 1:21) There can be no deliverance without humility. That is because we cannot really be honest without it. How difficult it is to say, "I did it. I was wrong!". But these words take us out of our darkness and into the light. To say them brings us

out into the open before God and man. And once we are there, we can be healed. *Confession* and *repentance* are synonyms for what we have just described. So the process of change proceeds... God's response to people who humble themselves apparently knows no limits. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word." (Is 66:2) "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps.51:17)



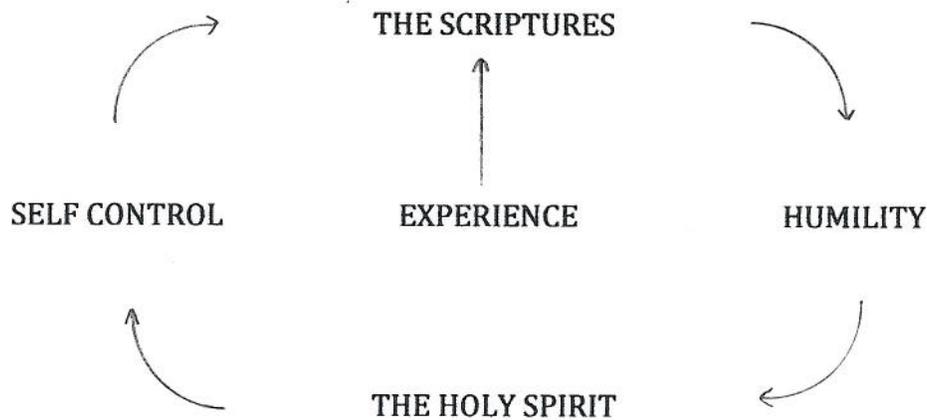
(In his book, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul Tripp explains three reasons that differentiated Adam and Eve from the rest of creation. "First, Adam and Eve were created to be *revelation receivers*. They were given communicative abilities that no other creature was given. They were created with the ability to hear, understand, and apply God's words to their lives. **These abilities were not given primarily to encourage human relationships. They were given so that we could know God and understand Him...**The second thing that distinguished Adam and Eve from the rest of creation was that they were created to be *interpreters*...We are always organizing, interpreting, and explaining what is going on inside us and around us...God gave Adam and Eve the unique ability to think, but only His words could accurately interpret their world...(then) the third thing that separates us from the rest of creation. Human beings by their very nature are *worshippers*. Worship is not just something we do; it defines who we are...Everybody worships; it's just a matter of what, or whom, we serve... Genesis 1...explains that our need for help is part of our design. It is not a result of the Fall. **Human beings need truth from outside themselves to make sense of life. We need God's perspective to interpret the facts of our existence. We were created to be worshippers.**" Pages 39-45)

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the One who divides Christ's way from all other ways. Almost any religion or philosophy will help bring order, or structure, into a person's life. But the Holy Spirit brings life itself. **Both the desire to change and the ability to do so come from Him.**

Self Control

Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." But then He added, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34,36) We are not condemned to spend our lives in a losing struggle against our old addictive behaviors. **As we gain insights into our needs through the Scripture, and as we respond in humility, the Holy Spirit empowers us to act differently the next time the old patterns come around. It is a self control born of the Spirit, "for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (2 Tim.1:7) The slavery to the old behavior is over, and we are free to make different choices. Not that these new choices are painless. Nor does a single victory mean deliverance. There will be pain and ambivalence as we give up our favorite set of chains. But freedom becomes more satisfying with every victorious choice. So we make a circle.**



(JI Packer, in his book, Knowing God, explains; "we must say that knowing God involves, first listening to God's Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second, noting God's nature and character, as His Word and works reveal it; third, accepting His invitations and doing what He commands; fourth, recognizing and rejoicing in the love He has shown in thus approaching you and drawing you into His divine fellowship." Page 37)

But our process is still incomplete. What happened to Antonio? During our last week in Brazil, Antonio took me for a long walk. More than a decade had passed since the day I had given up on him. He just wanted to tell me how he was doing. I had heard from others his life had come together for him and that he was being unusually fruitful in bringing many of his unbelieving friends to Christ. But he wanted to be sure I knew of two major victories that had him very excited. He had been faithful to his wife and honest in his business! Antonio had experienced the transformations I have just described. But I have not yet mentioned what I believe to be a major element in his transformation. I believe this next one is fundamental to the process.

One Another

As my colleagues and I struggled with this matter of inner transformation, Hebrews 3:13 appeared to offer a key to much of what we were looking for: "But encourage one another daily...so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." This verse implies an intense (daily) accepting environment, where sins could be an open topic of conversation among believers committed to one another. We went to work to translate this verse into practice. The resulting form, which we called "cell groups", became the basic unit of our ministry. They were simply a nucleus of up to 12 people-couples and singles-**who helped one another translate biblical truth into everyday living. They also proved to be an ideal environment for ongoing witness among peers. We learned that a small group will soon become unhealthily introspective if it neglects this dimension of corporate and individual witness.**

A while after I had given up on Antonio, he and his bride became a part of a cell that consisted of three other couples. All four couples were struggling as much as Antonio was, but they pulled each other out of their serious problems. I suspect their mutual weakness was part of their power. What could this little group of struggling Christians do for Antonio that I was unable to do? James 5:16 gives the answer: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." **This honesty, this mutual spiritual support, heals. It just does.** Thus for our illustration to be complete, we need to place it in a context of true community.

ONE ANOTHER



One of the great unresolved challenges facing us as God's people today is to discover how to be true community in this transient, on-the-run society of ours.