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A Glorious Salvation, Part 4

Cystic Fibrosis; it is an awful disease! According to the Mayo Clinic:

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited disorder that causes severe damage to the lungs, digestive system and other organs in the body. Cystic fibrosis affects the cells that produce mucus, sweat and digestive juices. These secreted fluids are normally thin and slippery. But in people with cystic fibrosis, a defective gene causes the secretions to become sticky and thick. Instead of acting as a lubricant, the secretions plug up tubes,

ducts and passageways, especially in the lungs and pancreas. (Mayo Clinic Diseases & Conditions 2019)

What this means is that as the disease progresses into its advance stage, the person suffering from Cystic Fibrosis will spend their dying days gasping for air as they literally die of suffocation.

Can you imagine if Christ came to the bedside of a person in the latter stages of the disease and healed them with a touch? Imagine what that first, deep breath might feel like? Exhilarating!

It most certainly is exhilarating when things function accord with their purpose. However, we must all see that nothing in our lives on this earth functions according to its original purpose on account of sin! This world and everything in it are fallen (Romans 8:20-21). Restoration to full purpose will only occur in the New Heavens and Earth... there we truly will "...gain new strength; [we] will mount up *with* wings like eagles... run and not get tired... walk and not become weary" (Isaiah 40:31).

Yet with Christ's redemption, spiritually we have been restored to our original holiness, knowledge, and righteousness (cf. Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:24)! As such, *TODAY* spiritually we can begin tasting of the full purpose for which we have been saved! And that purpose is glorifying and enjoying the Lord!

It is in light of this truth that Peter exhorted his fellow, persecuted believers to set their focus on *Embodying/Becoming* that which God has made them to be in Christ: Holy!

God's aim when it comes to our maturation in Christ is 100% obedience! It is as the words of John:

1 John 2:1a, "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin..."¹

With that as our objective as Christians — being "Children of obedience" (v. 14)- how do we go about securing sinless living in our lives (an objective we'll never reach in this age, cf. 1 John 1:8, 10)? Peter gives us a twofold answer that our holy living involves having our focus, gaze, and preoccupation on Christ — loving Him, praising Him, serving Him, knowing, and so enjoying Him, v. 14a. The key to holiness of thought and life is also twofold:

- He who would seek to save his life must lose it (Luke 9:23-25).
- He who would be first must be last (Mark 10:43b-45).

Holiness in the life of the child of God is secured NOT by focusing on not sinning, BUT by growing in your love, knowledge, devotion, and passion for Christ. How does it work?

We were created with a massive need — an addiction really. That need is to exalt, love, and so enjoy God. There is nothing in this life more glorious, exhilarating, or sustaining for the child of God! In fact, this need is more powerful and overwhelming than any lust with which our

flesh could be occupied. Because this is the case, understand the cost that accompanies any and every sin: it limits our ability as well as our capacity to enjoy Christ! Remember:

- It is the “pure in heart” that “see God” (Matthew 5:8).
- It is those whose passion is Christ that “purify themselves just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2)! It is those who love Christ that “keep His commandments” (John 14:15)!

Yet there is a second prerequisite, our mind must be given to and so governed by God and His word — rather than the intoxicating influence of any and all worldly desire, v. 14b.

1 Peter 1:14b, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance.”

If you are mindful of the context, this exhortation corresponds to what Peter just said in v. 13 about “being sober” — and so not intoxicated by any thought, desire, fear, or concern outside of Christ. In this regard, look at the structure of Peter’s exhortation.

- In v. 14a, Peter transitioned into a call for holiness with, “As obedient children...” Obedient to what? To what Peter just said in v. 13c, “...fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” From this we saw that if you want to grow in holiness, it will NOT come as we look inward, BUT as we look to Christ and so enjoy Him!
- Next in v. 14b, Peter said, “...do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance.” This clearly corresponds to v. 13b and the exhortation to “keep sober in spirit.” The word for “sober” in the Bible literally refers to NOT being under the influence of a foreign/alien substance like alcohol or drugs. *Figuratively*, it references being under the influence of any thought, motive, or worldview outside of Christ and His word. When we are driven in life by something other than the Lord, we literally are spiritually intoxicated... living under the influence! That is the idea when it comes to NOT “being conformed to the former lusts which were ours in our ignorance” (v. 14b).

“Do not be conformed” συσχηματίζω (*suschēmatizō*); the word for conform” means “to pattern one’s life or actions after” and is determined by that to which we give our minds- which is why Paul wrote this:

Romans 12:2a, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

Accordingly (as we saw in v. 13), if we allow the things of this world— our fleshly lusts, our worldly desires, the pride and glory of life (cf. 1 John 2:16) —to be that which influences us, the mind we have in Christ will be as if it were intoxicated and so unable to think properly. In this regard, what specifically are we NOT to give our minds to?

1 Peter 1:14, “do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance.”

Peter has in mind here the “lusts” which characterize the “former life”— such things like sinful desires, evil longings, sensual impulses, and all the other unrighteous motivations and urges that drive the unregenerate.² These are the things which characterize non-believers on account of “their ignorance.” Accordingly, for them, sin is natural! BUT it ought not to be for the child of God! As we gaze upon the Lord and so fellowship with Him, we taste the goodness of God which overwhelms us. Thus to engage in sin after this is to diminish greatly the “joy of our salvation” (Psalms 51:12) — which, for the child of God who has “tasted and seen that the Lord is good” (Psalms 34:8), will be like withdrawal (a very unpleasant place to be [cf. Psalms 32])!

Secondly, if we want to grow in our walks with Christ, we must endeavor “NOT to be conformed to our former lusts” for they will war against our soul and deprive us of our greatest good and glory: Jesus Christ!

In this regard, consider the logic behind Peter’s exhortation in v. 14. If indeed our need to love, know, and enjoy Christ is more powerful and overwhelming than any lust with which our flesh could be occupied, then why would there be a need for any other exhortation than, “Give yourself to your chief end!”? Because there is one thing that can de-rail any passion for Christ; and it is happening all the time in the lives of God’s people (much less the unbeliever): Delusion!

- Satan knows that there is no more glorious, lasting, or thrilling activity for the child of God than enjoying Christ! No fleshly lust can compete with Him!
- Accordingly, before we can be tempted by sin, we must first be allured by it! What does this mean? It means that our minds must first become intoxicated/under the influence of a foreign thought/desire/goal. We see it in...

James 1:14-15, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust [this is spiritual intoxication]. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

Do you see the process? When our minds are intoxicated by our lusts, our reasoning is thrown out the door such that now evil looks good and serving God looks like a burden.

Accordingly, Peter’s exhortation involves a very important element of faith! We must say “No!” to “the former lusts which were ours in our ignorance.” Yet the only way to do that is to live by faith — trusting God that by saying no to sin *today*, my ability to enjoy Christ will be deeper *tomorrow*!³ John Piper put it this way:

With all eternity hanging in the balance, we fight the fight of faith. Our chief enemy is the lie that says sin will make our future happier. Our chief weapon is the truth that

says God will make our future happier... [And so] I wield the sword of the Spirit against the sin of lust by believing the promise of God more than I believe in the promise of lust. My faith is not only a backward-looking belief in the death of Jesus, but a forward-looking belief in the promises of Jesus. It's not only being sure of what he did do, but also being satisfied with what he will do. (Piper 2005, 336)

These are the two necessary prerequisites to the call of holiness. Our focus, gaze, and preoccupation must be Christ — loving Him, praising Him, serving Him, knowing, and so enjoying Him! Our mind must be given to and so governed by God in His word — rather than the intoxicating influence of any and all worldly motive, thought, or desire.

With these two prefatory elements in place, we can set our focus on striving for holiness and becoming that for which God made us in Christ — which brings us to the pattern of holiness.

1 Peter 1:15a, “But like the Holy One who called you...”

On the surface this is an overwhelming statement! The Standard referenced here for holiness is the character of a Being who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable!! “Like the Holy One who called [me]” I am “to be holy as He is holy?” This is impossible! In this life and in the next I will never “be holy as He is holy” for I will never be infinite, eternal and unchangeable!

It is no wonder that this verse, though poetically beautiful, nevertheless is practically impractical! It is why most in the church today view this verse as a great saying to be placed on inspirational posters, but of very little practical encouragement or use!

Yet how sad, for if there was any book in the Bible written to be practical it is 1 Peter! The recipients of this letter were NOT “balcony dwellers” (to use the words of J. I. Packer), BUT pilgrims struggling to keep afloat in a world that would overwhelm them. Accordingly of all the epistles, 1 Peter is incredibly practical as it is aimed at those living as “aliens and strangers” (exiles) in a strange land (1 Peter 1:1).

So, what do we make of this statement, “Just as the Holy One who called [us is holy], so be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior”?

Let me give you a rule of interpretation that might help. Almost always in the Bible when God is said to be the ethical standard for man/humanity, that which is in mind is the fleshing out of God’s divinity in the humanity of Christ! See, NOT ONLY did the Second Person of the Godhead become one of us that He might “redeem those under the law” (Galatians 4:4-5), BUT His incarnation was intended to set the standard/the pace for what it means to be a man/an image bearer! Paul wrote this:

Romans 8:29a, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son...”

The word for “conformed” is σύμμορφος (*summorphos*) conveys the idea of “taking” or “assuming the essential form of someone or something.”⁴ That which we are commanded to assume is “the image of His Son.” The word for “image” is εἰκών (*eikōn*) which denotes “likeness” or “appearance.” In the Greek, it was used of the pattern, standard, or mold of forged metal! Accordingly, we learn from Romans 8:29 that God intended Christ to be the mold, pattern, and so the standard for mankind. As such, He is that which humanity was created to be! And so, we read this also:

1 Peter 2:21b: “...Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow...”

Philippians 2:5, “Have this [mind] in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Hebrews 12:3, “For consider Him [follow Him, do what He did- when He] ...endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

1 John 3:2b, “...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him...”

And so, in His first advent God assumed the form of the perfect man, and as such — as a man — He is the pattern/form/mold to which we must actively labor if we are to be fully human.

With this in mind, we understand what Peter is saying when he wrote, “But like the Holy One who called you...” This is a reference to the standard that Christ in His humanity was and is when it comes to man. As He was and is Holy, so we likewise are to be holy!

Chuck Swindoll wrote of this verse,

“This is why I begin virtually every morning by saying, ‘Lord, I set apart my mind for you today. I set apart my passion, my eyes, my ears, my lips I set apart my motivations, my attitudes, my disciplines. I set apart all these things to you.’ This kind of simple reminder has kept me moving toward that goal of holiness Peter mentions in verses 15–16. I would urge you to do the same.” (Swindol 2014, 156)

In this regard, how did Christ’s “holiness” manifest itself in when He walked the earth? As you know, “holiness” has a twofold connotation in the Bible. It primarily means “to be set apart,” and so when used of Christ it speaks of His perfect alignment with God’s purpose and plan! In His life He was set-apart to God and so lived accordingly. Matthew records the words of a perfect man with His back to a wall, facing a weight/burden so great He sweat drops of blood (I love this because any one can *act* like the perfect man when things are easy; but what about those times when things aren’t easy?)

Matthew 26:36-39, “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to

them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'"

This is what it means to be a "saint" in the Bible! It is NOT someone whom the church canonizes, BUT someone who has been set apart by the Lord for the Lord's purpose, and so says to the Lord, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt!" In this regard, to "be holy as God is holy" is to submit ourselves to being that which God has set us apart for.⁵ John Miller wrote:

Mary (John 12:3) anoints Jesus, who responds by saying these remarkable words: 'She has done a beautiful thing to me.'... Here he is telling his disciples- and us- what it is that counts most in life. The principle the disciples are working with is what you give away you lose. That might have some truth to it in some situations, but not here for Mary. The reason Jesus calls what she did beautiful is because she gave all of herself to him. Every area of your life ought to involve a giving of yourself to Christ. As you do that, God will bless you and bless you and bless you. (Miller 2014, 139)

Secondly, and flowing from this, when it came to Christ's holiness we think of His moral purity. As the perfect man, Christ NOT ONLY lived unto the purpose/plan of God, BUT in His conduct, attitude, and volition He conformed perfectly to the Lord's character.

Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin."

Accordingly, Peter exhorted us:

2 Peter 3:14-15a, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless..."

This is the twofold pattern we observe in the Holiness of Christ!⁶ So, when it comes to holiness, our Pattern or Standard is none-other than God as manifested in Christ! If you want to know what it looks like to be a perfect and so a holy individual, look at Christ in His humanity! How encouraging this must have been for the believers who initially received this epistle. In their sufferings and trials, they had a Pattern after which to conform — Jesus Christ who suffered just as they, yet without sin! Peter will return to this again in.

1 Peter 2:20-23, "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously."

Lastly, this brings us to the Importance of this command. Why is the command of holiness so important? Peter answers that.

1 Peter 1:16, "Because it is written [a quote taken from Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26. With this notice the priority of God's word when it comes to that which by which we must live... 'every word that proceeds from His mouth' (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3)], 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

Notice the point of the Levitical call to be holy on account of God's holiness. This all boils down to this: If you want a relationship with God, you must go where He is!

For those of you who saw the movie version of *Anne of Green Gables* you will recall Anne's first morning at Green Gables, when she came downstairs to eat breakfast and asked, "Where is Matthew?" (Matthew had befriended her, and so Anne really liked him.) Marilla answered, "Matthew has been out in the fields for hours. If you want to eat breakfast with him, you are going to have to get up a lot earlier than you did this morning."

Interesting! Had Anne gotten up early to enjoy breakfast with Matthew, her early rise would NOT have earned her the right/merit to sit with Matthew. RATHER, it simply would have opened the door and so provided the opportunity. And so, it is with holiness when it comes to God. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). If you want to fellowship with the Lord, then you must "go to where He is."⁷ So why are we to be holy? Because that is His nature and the nature of His Kingdom. It is the pure in heart who see God (Matthew 5:8). Yet this is NOT by way of merit, BUT consequence!

Hebrews 12:14, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

Again, if you are going to "see God" in your life today, that is, enjoy a deep and abiding walk with God- you must say no to the passing pleasure of sin, trusting that your walk with God will be deeper tomorrow as a result! That in a nutshell is the point behind Peter's reference here. Why be holy? Because of what God is: NOT only is He our Father whom we love, BUT He is holy and so "dwells on a high and holy place" (Isaiah 57:15b). Accordingly, to fellowship with Him we must "take off our shoes" (Exodus 3:5)! In the words of David:

Psalms 24:3-4a, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? [Who alone is free to draw near to God?] He who has clean hands and a pure heart."

Once again what a wonderful way to close this section. To a people who might think that playing it safe, retaining their wealth, or avoiding persecution might be the most important thing they could do, Peter reminds them:

- NOT to be intoxicated by worldly wants, desires, or needs.

- AND SO that if they are going to indulge in their greatest and most glorious desire-seeing God- they must be holy.

Because that is the case, anything and everything forfeited in order that they might enjoy the Lord in this life is worth it!

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End Note(s)

¹ I love the comment Jerry Bridges made in response to this passage. Looking at this text years ago, Bridges said, "I realized that my personal life's objective regarding holiness was less than that of John's. He was saying, in effect, 'Make it your aim not to sin.' As I thought about this, I realized that deep within my heart my real aim was not to sin very much." (*The Pursuit of Holiness*, p. 96).

² cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Galatians 5:19–24; Ephesians 5:3–5; 1 Thessalonians 4:4–5.

³ It is as Peter wrote, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. [Where our minds are void of this knowledge on account of intoxication, we will NOT enjoy the 'divine power of God' that meets all our needs! With this, Peter continued...] For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them [living by them in faith] you might become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." (2 Peter 1:3-4)

⁴ It comes from two Greek words, σύν (sun) meaning "with" and μορφή (morphē) meaning "form" or "appearance."

⁵ Accordingly, Paul exhorted in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." - if we are to be holy as Christ is holy, we must ever and always look to submit our wants, desires, and needs to God's wants, desires, and needs. That means we stop kicking against the goads but learn to accept everything as coming from the hands of a good and glorious Lord- just as Christ did!

⁶ In fact, the two ethical callings flowing from The Pattern that God has Given for our Holiness, is beautifully reflected in Paul's exhortation to the Romans, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship [this is talking about moral purity in thought, word, and deed]. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [this is talking about submission to the plan of God for our lives]." (Romans 12:1-2)

We see the same two-fold pattern once again in 1 Peter 2:21b-23, "...Christ also suffered for you,

leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

⁷ Why must you get wet to take a shower? Because that is the nature of taking a shower!