

The Greatest Gift Demands a Great Response

Belcroft Bible Church

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Good morning, church. What a privilege it is to return to this pulpit so quickly, at least for me, to continue our exposition of 1 Peter. Today we will be examining verses 13 through 17, the great response that believers are called to, in light of the magnificent salvation that they have received from the Lord. In verses one through nine of this first chapter, Peter has declared the marvelous aspect of the believer's salvation from God's sovereign choice to put His saving love upon us, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the resulting obedience to Christ. This mercy-motivated heart-transformation is the greatest gift ever given, a gift that leads its recipient to a living hope, an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and a joy that is inexpressible in its glory.

Now, it has been my prayer that our time spent in the gospel of God's grace has resulted in greater appreciation for what the Lord has done in your own life, and a stronger worship and adoration of our glorious Father. Six weeks ago, we walked together through verses 11, and 12, which can best be described as Peter's exclamation point to the greatness of our salvation, that he had previously outlined. In these three verses, he provides the church with three very real and verifiable examples of a right response to this great gift of salvation, namely, the drive of the Old Testament prophets to know more about the grace that was to come, the devotion of the New Testament preachers to proclaim the grace that has come, and the desire of the holy and elect angels to understand a grace that they will never experience so that they can better glorify God.

Now, up to this point, in our study of first Peter, everything has been about God and what He has declared, what He has done and what He has promised. These are the indicatives, are statements of fact regarding the great grace of God given to the undeserving sinner. Back in May, I pointed you the reality that we were approaching a great pivot, a substantial turning on the word *therefore*, which begins verse 13. This dramatic shift will take us from the factual description of salvation to the commands given to those who

have received it. These duties of the Christian life are the obligation of the believer. These commands, given by the Author of our great salvation, are always to be approached in the very light of that salvation, and the glory of the One who orchestrates it. To put this as simply and concisely as I can, God has given the greatest gift, and that is going to require a great response on the part of the recipient. Moving beyond this pivot point through chapter one, and on into chapter two, Peter is going to outline the responsibilities of the Christian. The necessity that the believer has, to respond to salvation in ways that are specifically commanded by God. Peter will do this by first revealing the believer's right response to God Himself. He does this in verses 13 through 21 of chapter one, part of which we will unpack today.

So, with that being said, let's open our Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter one, verses 13 through 17, as I read our text for this morning: *"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. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 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"*.

Now, what we have here are three very clear commands, three specific calls for a response on the part of the believer that are contrary to the behaviors of those still walking in darkness. Three tangible recalibrations that the believer must make, maintain, and mature in their Christian walk in light of the great gift of salvation, given by God. Here are three words help us organize our time in the Word this morning, three adjusted responses believers are called to make. For one, *focus*. The believer must adjust to a new focus. We find this in verse 13. Number two is *standard*. The believer must adjust a new standard. We're going to see this in verse 16. Finally, *attitudes*. The believer must adjust to a new attitude. We see this in verse 17. Focus, standard and attitude. Thankfully, Peter, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not only tells us what our response should be, he tells us exactly how we can respond in this way and, most importantly, why these responses matter.

Let us waste no time in diving into number one, as we read the command of God, given through the inspired word of Peter, that the believer is to respond to the great gift of salvation by adjusting their focus. The action required, or “emphasis,” of the command given in verse 13 comes at the end of the verse, where it says the Christian is to “*set your hope.*” Peter is not presenting a whimsical call for an emotional response here. He is giving a direct, military-like command that calls for a specific act of will on the part of every Christian. It is our duty to set our hope, to fix our hope, anchor our hope, to intensely focus our hope, set it and live in it.

Just a few verses earlier, Peter reminds us that according to God's great mercy, we have been born again to what? A living hope. Peter tells us this to remind us that everything we have known in the world up to the point of salvation through Christ has a dead or a dying hope. Jesus Christ is our living hope, and everything else is a dead hope. Everything in this world dies, fades, fail, wears out, runs out, breaks. Rusts, dissolves, and disappoints. If we have our trust in anything other than Christ, we have a dead hope or, at best, a dying hope that will be dead when we die. He was dead and He conquered death and He was resurrected from the dead and because He did, we have a living hope.

All right. Well, we are to focus our hope and that hope is a living hope. But what is hope? We're being given a direct command to intensely focused, fix, set, live our hope, so we better work to understand what hope is, right? Hope can best be understood through its relationship to faith. Faith, in its essence, is trusting God—we know this. This trust must always begin with the truth of God's word. Without truth as our launch point, we will never arrive at a belief in the one true God, but in a god of our own making. Trusting God has to begin with what God has said. The Holy Spirit will then take the knowledge of this truth and begin to build conviction and personal significance into the heart of the believer. This is where truth becomes more than just knowing something—it becomes personal in its significance.

Something that we are told to be true becomes something that we know to be true—we are absolutely convinced that it is true. And finally, the knowledge of God's Word and conviction of its truth leads the believer to live in light of what they now know to be true. It leads to trust in the Lord; it leads to submission to Christ as Lord; and it leads to

obedience to His lordship over our lives. What once began as truth is now lived out in the life of the Christian walking in the trust of the Lord. Faith is trust in the Lord. Faith is believing God.

Hope, at its basic level, is the same—it is trusting God. It is believing God. The distinction between faith and hope really comes down to tense. Faith involves trusting God in the present, and hope involves trusting God for the future and what is yet to come. We can see this distinction clearly in Paul's letter to Titus chapter two, verse 11, and 12: *“For the grace of God has appeared,”* (this refers to the incarnate grace of God, Jesus Christ) *“bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”* Faith believes God for what He has done, and hope believes God for what He will do.

And our text tells us that we are to do this half-heartedly, partially, full of doubt, and abounding in uncertainty? No! We are to set our hope fully, fix our hope completely, focus our hope perfectly, with total finality, without any hesitation or doubt, concerning the promises of God. Paul speaks of this present and future trusting God and Colossians 1:21 through 23: *“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”*

We are to persevere in faith, in our present trusting of God, remaining stable, steadfast, not shifting, wavering. And we are to do the same in our hope, in our trusting of God for our future and all He has promised He will do. The pages of Scripture are full of examples of godly individuals who have done just this. They have set their hope, fully trusting in the future promises of God. We could turn to Hebrews 11, beginning in verse eight, about Abraham:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to

live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

God made many promises to Abraham. Abraham trusted God, believed God, had faith in God, lived according to what God said and what he was convinced to be true. God had proven himself to be a trustworthy keeper of His promises. What God said, God did. God is worthy of trust. Therefore, Abraham set his hope, fully fixed his hope, completely trusting fully in the future promises of God. Abraham knew God to be worthy of trust, and therefore he was unwavering in that trust of promises that God had made him.

So when the day came when God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering,” Abraham did not hesitate. He rose early the next morning and began the three-day journey, to sacrifice his son. Have you ever read this account and pondered the fact that it was three days to contemplate what he had been told to do? Three days-worth of opportunity to waver, waffle, wander? Yet Abraham maintained a razor-sharp focus upon the future promises of God and on his trust in that God. God promised to build an entire nation. Abraham was 100 years old; Sarah was 90. And yet God kept His promise, provided them a son in Isaac. And now he was asking Abraham to sacrifice this son. Abraham was faithful to do all that God had asked of him because he was focused, not on this circumstance, but upon the future promise of God that he trusted God would keep, even if it meant sacrificing his only son. Abraham didn’t understand this circumstance, and didn’t understand how God would keep his promise, but he *knew*, he trusted completely that God would keep his promise. Do you have that kind of hope? That level of trust in God? That degree of focus upon the future promises of God?

About 100 yards behind you is the edge of our challenge course, where we have several high elements. These elements require that participants complete certain activities at

heights that vary from 30 to 50 feet off the ground, and this can be a pretty intimidating place, especially if you are afraid of heights. These participants are called upon to swing, zip, leap, and climb and traverse all while clipped into a safety system that is facilitated by one of our staff. I tried to do the math and I figured that I personally have had the privilege of facilitating thousands of first-time participants, and I have observed a consistent thread running through all of the responses of these first timers. Those who are willing to brave the elements clearly have a base level of trust in me and in the equipment to keep them safe from falling. I always explain that this equipment “has them” and that they do not need to rely on their own strength, that we would not put them up there if their own ability to “hang on” was required. Yet every time we reach the critical action of the element—the fall, the swing, the leap—their actions prove that their trust is, in fact, in their own strength, as they reach for and grasp at their lifelines, clinging with all their might unnecessarily, proving where their real trust lies.

Sadly, this is too often an illustration of our own unfocused hope. Yes, we have been born again to a living hope, but we still tend to cling to our old hope that we had before we were transformed. We try, in fact, to cling to both. Haven't the events of the past two years helped to expose this duality of hope in our own hearts? Riots in the streets and cities burning—where is your hope? Everyone is going to get sick and die—where is your hope? Economy is crashing—where's your hope? We're out of toilet paper—where's your hope? Yes, gas is five dollars a gallon—where's your hope?

When we do set our hope completely, displaying a full trust in the promises of God, living with this as our focus while the world is falling apart around us, it brings such glory to God. To hear that God is glorified when we believe Him. God is glorified when we trust in His future promises. Abraham trusted God because He is worthy to be trusted. But hasn't God proven His worthiness to be trusted to us a thousand times over? God has kept every promise that He has ever made to us. And He is great to keep every promise still to come. And we should bring Him praise and glory by trusting Him. What praise this brings to Him when we set our hope fully upon Him. For when we do so, we, in effect, are declaring that our God is worthy of our trust, now and in the future.

This hope, which we are to set fully, is to be focused upon something very specific, something else in addition to our activity, that will bring Him glory. The text says that we are to *“Set [our] hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* What a great reminder, this reminder that drives us to gratefulness, a thankful heart-recognition that glorifies the Lord. Our salvation was all by grace, was it not? All God's grace, and nothing of us that earned it or deserved it. Our initial faith was activated entirely by God's grace. And that same faith has been sustained by God's grace, has it not? The same grace that God gave through salvation is the same grace that is holding it up. We do not deserve to remain in the faith, and we cannot sustain it ourselves.

Here, Peter is saying, “Newsflash: it's still all about grace.” You can't earn your salvation. Renewal of your spirit, that was by grace. You don't deserve to be held in faith. That is by grace. All these future promises God, God doesn't owe us one of them. You have done nothing to merit them. They are given completely and fully through the grace of God. Christ is not going to return to bring us something that we have earned, through our spirituality. No, He is coming to perfect us, to glorify us, and bring us into heaven and into His presence for all eternity—and this will be all grace. I wasn't worthy to be saved, and neither were you. We're not worthy to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit now, and we are not worthy to be with the Lord in glory for all eternity. Ephesians 2:8 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* These words of Paul are not limited to the beginning of our salvation. God's grace is preeminent in every aspect of salvation from beginning to end. From election to glorification, it is all by God's grace.

And so we set our hope fully upon the grace that is still to come. We focus upon this great grace still to be given. We live in expectant anticipation of the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ at His return, and we bring God great glory through our trusting, and through the gratefulness that comes through recognition that we do not deserve at all that which He is going to supply. So we understand the command to respond to our salvation, by focusing our hope fully upon the grace. That is, and we understand why this matters, that we can bring glory and praise to the Lord through this response.

But how? How in the world do we respond in this way? Well, before Peter ever gave us the command to do, he gave us the how-to-do. Look at what comes back at the beginning of verse 13: *“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded”*. These are two distinct participial phrases that are exhorting us the way in which we can keep this main command of setting our hope fully on the grace of God yet to come. The word *prepare* literally means to “gird up”, to tie something down in preparation for action. In Bible times, this concept would have been applied to collecting all the loose ends of robe, tying them up so could move easily. A soldier preparing to run into battle would first gird up his robe so that he could move quickly and freely without being hindered by the loose ends of his clothing. Here, in our verse, Peter is using this imagery as a metaphor for our minds. We need to pull in all the loose ends of our thinking, the lies of our heart and the world, and tie them down. We must live according to biblical priority, not those of the world. Living for God is a serious endeavor, and we must approach our Christian walk with the same seriousness that a soldier would approach battle. Make up your mind to tie down every thought, keep it captive to the reality of the grace that is to come.

We're not only to “gird up” our minds for action, but we are also to be sober-minded, which is to say we are not to lose control of our thoughts and actions, to maintain spiritual control and discipline, even when our hearts long to run after its passions and the world showcases attractive distractions to tempt us away from God. This speaks of having a well-disciplined life, spiritual steadfastness, and self-control, clarity of mind, discipline of heart, discipline of mind. These are the traits that oppose a world which is characterized as reckless, irresponsible, and self-indulgent. Yes, we are to focus our hope completely on the grace that is still to come, and we are to accomplish by tying up the loose ends of our minds with God's truth while remaining spiritually steadfast and disciplined in mind and heart. We are to bring God praise and glory through our unwavering trust in His promises and through grateful hearts that recognize the grace that has come and is still coming. But this adjustment of our focus is but the first dutiful response of the Christian.

Secondly, we, who have received salvation from the Lord, are to adjust to a new standard. Our text says, *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.”* Here, Peter opens this new command to adjust

our standard by first pointing out one of our greatest identifiable qualities as Christians, our obedient nature. Back in verse two, Peter highlighted that obedience is a result of our salvation; it is a *fact* of our salvation. We have received salvation and the ongoing sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Christ. One of the byproducts of the greatness of our salvation is that we are now marked by obedience to the Lord. This is in direct contrast to our old nature, which was marked by disobedience to God. Ephesians 2:2 says this so clearly when it refers to those who are still dead in their trespasses and sins as “*sons of disobedience*”. We were once characterized as disobedient rebels who stood opposed to God, and through the grace of God we are now characterized as His obedient children.

Does this mean we are always obedient? No. Obedience is our new pattern, but disobedience will still creep in and break that pattern, because of the presence of sin that still exists around us and the deceptiveness of our own hearts in chasing after that sin. Before Peter ever points out the new standard, he rightfully points out our new nature of obedience. He is saying that your truest self is obedient. Your new nature is that of obedience and we should strive to be consistent with that nature. He goes on to reveal the next necessary response of the believer by saying that we are to “*Be holy in all your conduct*”. Obedience is now your nature and Holiness is now your standard. Fix your hope on the grace of God and be holy in all of your behavior. Be like the one whose image you bear. Separate yourself from sin, pursue purity and righteousness. Be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ also loved you (Ephesians 5). An impossible task to fully complete, but our commanded aim, nonetheless. Obedience is to be our pattern and holiness is to be our target.

How are we to do this? Peter’s pattern of writing is so helpfully consistent. How are we to set our hope? By first cinching up all the loose ends of our mind with truth while being steadfast in our focus. How are we to “be holy”? “*Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance*”. Said another way, “don’t act like you used to”. Don’t act like your former self, your old self, when you were characterized by disobedience. Paul says the same thing in Romans 12: “*Do not be conformed to this world*”. Separate yourself completely from your former ways—make a break. If you are ever to be holy, you must

first stop acting unholy in your conduct. This is the negative aspect of the standard, the “don’t do”.

Peter goes on to give us a positive aspect of the standard when he says: *“but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct”*. God called you; God is holy—act like Him. Don’t act like your old self; act like God who is holy and who made you new. Stop doing what you used to do and start doing the things that God does. There is not a higher standard that God is conforming to and there is not a higher standard that God has created, no *God is* the standard. *He is* holy. Matthew 5:48 says, *“Therefore you must be perfect as your heavenly father is. You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* God is holy; God is perfect. God has called us to salvation; He has called us to obedience; and He has called us to be holy like Him. As believers, we have been chosen by God, chosen for salvation, chosen to be obedient, and chosen, by God, to be holy. Ephesians 1:4: *“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”* Church, we are well-versed in holiness, godliness, and Christ-likeness, so I do not feel that there is much more that needs to be said about this command to adjust to this standard.

We have looked at the command to be holy and we have addressed how we are to pursue holiness. Most importantly though, we need to take a moment to investigate why adjusting to this new standard matters. We were commanded first to set our hope on the grace still to come, not for the benefits that it brought to us, but for the glory that it brought to God. So it should not surprise you to learn that this second command to be holy in all of our conduct is also less about us and more about our Lord. Look at verse 16: *“since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”* Where is that written? We need to go way back to the book of Leviticus chapter 11. God has been giving His laws to the people and in verse 44 He says: *“I am the Lord your God. . . be holy for I am holy.”* Again in verse 45: *“I am the Lord your God. . . be holy for I am holy.”* Now, beginning in Chapter 18, and into 19 and 20 and 21 and 22, God continues to give the people His laws and why they should follow them: *“...because I am the Lord your God. . . I am the Lord your God. . . I am the Lord your God.”* And He is driving home this reality: *“I have chosen to identify with you. You will be identified with me. I am a Holy God. I am worthy of holy associates, i.e. holy children.”* Why do we strive to be holy in all our conduct? Because God is holy

and He is worthy of holy children. Through salvation, our holy God is identifying Himself with us and we should be driven to holiness because God is worthy of being identified with holy people.

Not only is God worthy of holy children, but He is also grieved deeply by our sin, sin that is against Him. Our sin is not a sin against a list. Our sin is not a sin against an expectation. Our sin is not a sin against an arbitrary standard. No, *God* is the standard, and our sin is against God. Hear the words of David in Psalm 51: *“against you, you only, have I sinned”*. Remember all that has happened to us through salvation. A holy and perfect God has chosen us, has put His saving love upon us, has adopted us as children, has purchased us with the blood of His Son. He owns us, has chosen to live within us. He has joined Himself to us and, when we sin, we join Him to that sin, we drag His name into that sin, and this is an unimaginable affront to God and grieves Him terribly. Not that we have polluted God with sin—He is holy and perfect and will remain so. But He has chosen to identify with us and we are identified as being with Him so, when we sin, He is identified with that sin. And so He commands the believer to be holy. As those who have received the great grace of God through salvation, we have the responsibility to adjust our focus to that of His grace still to come, and we are to adjust our standard to that of our Holy God.

And finally, as we wrap up, we are to adjust our attitude: *“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.”* The final duty of the Christian life listed in this section is that we are to *“conduct ourselves with fear.”* First, set your hope on the grace to come; second, be holy in all your conduct; and third, conduct yourselves with fear. This speaks directly to the attitude that we are to have toward our Father. We call him *Father* because of the close, intimate relationship that we have with Him. He is close to us, and we are close to Him, and therefore we should know that, as a part of all that He is, He is Judge, judge of us and of our deeds, deeds that he sees quite clearly because of His power and the closeness of our relationship with Him.

None of this should surprise us. He is close to us and He judges us, and He sees all of our sins and He will deal with all of our sins. This dealing with our sin can come directly from the Lord in this lifetime, as in Hebrews 12:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My Son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

For us, this is such a clear picture of the intersection between loving Father and righteous Judge. The Father who disciplines us for our unrighteousness in love and for our good. He is a Good Father, a loving Father, a faithful Father, a righteous Judge. But there is also a judgement of our deeds that will come at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as stated in 2 Corinthians 5: *“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* Therefore, we should approach the Lord with an attitude of respect and honor. We should have the highest reverence toward God, who is not only our Father, but our Judge.

Our Father has presented us, as believers, with the greatest gift ever given, the gift of salvation, our eternal rescue. This gift requires a great response from us: to live a life focused upon and trusting in His future promises of grace, to live a life in pursuit of His holy and perfect standard, and to walk through this life with an attitude of respect and awe toward our Father, who judges all our deeds.

Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Have you received the great grace of God? Do you possess the greatest gift ever given? How are you responding today? Are the eyes of your heart focused upon the eternal promises of God without doubt or hesitation? Are you living according to the holy standard of your Savior, or is the target of your life something less than holy? Are you walking with a right attitude of reverence for and awe toward the Lord, or do you seek to make Him small with your fear of lesser beings and trivial things?

Do you seek to bring Him glory and honor and praise through your faithful response to His great grace given to you?

Let's pray.

Holy Father, the more we reflect upon the magnificence of the grace that you have provided to us through salvation, the more we are driven to these responses that you have sovereignly commanded. Help us to walk through this life with a right focus upon your marvelous grace, trusting in the God who is ever worthy of our trust. Help us also to walk through this life with an aim toward your holy and perfect standard, with an understanding that you are a holy God who is ever worthy of holy children, that you are a God who has chosen to identify with and live within us, that we are joined with a holy and living God. Let us not join you to our sin, a sin that is detestable to you and yet sin that you have mercifully promised to forgive. Finally, Father, help us to live with a right attitude of reverence and awe toward you, who is our ultimate Judge. Thank you for the clarity and sufficiency of your Word and its effect upon our hearts as your Holy Spirit matures and convicts us through its power and truth! We pray all of this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.