

## Holy Love

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 Peter 1:13-25 | February 14, 2016

We're working through 1 Peter so that we can cultivate hope no matter how hard or dark the times. This morning, Peter slowly turns his attention from what God has done for us to how we are to live in exile. We must have three things: hope, holiness, and love.

### Hope

This week scientists announced what is being called one of the greatest moments in the history of physics—the detection of gravitational waves. The early collision of two black holes resulted in ripples in space and time, and despite the fact that this event was millions of years ago, their effect is still being heard, audibly captured with a chirp at the LIGO observatory. When Peter says, *therefore* he's calling attention to the gravitational waves of God's *new* creation event in the salvation epic of Jesus death and resurrection. This has rippled out, not with a chirp but a chorus of praise as the lost are rescued, the unloved are loved, sinners forgiven. That's a *past* grace. Then, he tells us to hope in a *future* grace: [On the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ](#). What's the grace? It is something brought to us "*at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" The word revelation means revealing or appearing, *so there is a future grace coming in the return of the risen Christ to finish what he began*. In which Jesus will push resurrection back through everything. No more disaster, war, sin or sorrow. So, to live in exile is to live between two graces, to live confidently forgiven in past grace with your hope set fully on future grace. So how do that? *Hope works backwards*. Hope looks toward all this and works in reverse. Let me explain **works**. Hope is modified by two participles, [preparing your mind and being self controlled](#). Preparing your mind literally reads, "gird up the loins of your mind." When ancient people ran, or got serious about something, they pulled up their flowing robes and stuffed them in their belt or sash and took off. When he says gird up your mind, he's saying harness your thoughts, submit your plans, dedicate mind to the hope of Christ. Not just a corner of your mind, the whole mind, which means coming a couple Sundays a month is not enough to soak your hope in the glory of Christ. It's a daily necessity. This requires **self-control**, discipline, that's word sober-minded. We are discipline ourselves for physical fitness, career advance, healthy diet, but do you discipline yourself to hope in future grace? The point is hope works, intellectually and physically, back from this grand vision of Christ. It sees the dazzling glory of Jesus and works in reverse to bring it in the present: meditation, prayer, Bible study, theology *and* service, sacrifice, holiness and love. There are no exceptions for personality types. Anyone serious about their faith will put significant effort into it. And Peter is saying non-serious, flippant hope isn't an option. Real hope takes in new creation and works backwards into life. CSL: "[If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.](#)" Those who do the most for the present world thought most of the world to come, leading to compassionate evangelism, culture building, and justice. Where is your hope, look at your life. Now, sometimes we hear appeals to hope, and respond oppositely, by

“being conformed to the passions of our former ignorance.” This means there are pre-Christ ways of thinking that interrupt our hoping. One is **disillusionment**. You look backwards you compare the past to the present and think things will never measure up to the past. The friendships I had in college, man nothing compares. Or looking back a few years, you might say my spouse has changed so much. He or she is not nearly as fun and carefree as they used to be. You mourn the loss of flexibility and freedom and it breeds selfishness and contempt. You are formed, shaped by hope in the past. **Your hope doesn't work backwards; it is backwards!** You're an *bitter orphan* to future grace. Or you may respond to hope in **presumption**. One German writer said, “*Presumption is the fraudulent imitation of hope.*” It insists on the joys and comforts of heaven now. You have no room for hope because your life is stuffed with a passion for convenience. How do you know if you've got presumption? Suffering takes you by surprise, puts you in a tailspin. Service and holiness are utterly unappealing to you. Your hope is so fraudulent and over realized you can't fathom a God who loves you enough to put you through the refiners fire or call you to gird up the loins of your mind. You don't act like an orphan but a king, who gets everything *now*. Either way, disillusionment or presumption, orphan or king, you miss out on the promise of hope. Peter says hope works backwards not among orphans or kings but among children: **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” (14-16).**

## Holy

What does dedicating not just a corner but your all produce? Holiness. “Be holy *for* I am holy.” To understand holiness, then, we have to understand how God is holy. What does it mean for God to be holy? One preacher put it like this. We think of holiness as a scale, with God at the top. Then we rank ourselves somewhere on that scale. But God isn't at the top; he's *off* the scale. That's what holiness means. Wholly and totally other. Transcendent, incomparable. This means that holy is not one attribute among others, love, omnipotence, wisdom. It means that all his attributes are off the scale in their purity: holy love, holy power, holy wisdom, all beyond scrutiny. He is a perfect God and therefore a perfect judge of what's imperfect, unholy. This should generate fear, awe, reverence for God: “**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.** Does this mean that holiness is beyond us, unachievable? If that was the case he wouldn't tell us to be holy for he is holy. He is the example of holiness. **Holiness, for us, isn't just getting away from sin but getting close to God.** To the one who's off the scale. But that's impossible. Exactly. Which is why Peter says *holiness becomes a spotless Lamb*, slain to get us close to God (18-19). We are ransomed by a spotless lamb who soaks up our spots, to pay our debts, and spring us from the prison of the past. Orphans and presumptuous kings become children of God (1 Jn 3:1). This mixture of God being wholly other and completely loving, off the scale and slain like an animal, should inspire holiness. A few weeks ago my wife said to me, “You are great at serving our family, *as long as its convenient.*” I wanted to resist it, and made an excuse, but I said I would pray about it. Reading John 12, I came across Jesus saying, “Truly, truly I say unto you unless a kernel of wheat dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit.” Here was his answer. Die. Be holy. Be like me. If you don't, you'll be alone in this marriage, in community, but if you die to self and inconvenience, you'll bear fruit. I was

forced to my knees in tearful repentance. My unholy self face to face with his holiness. I begged for his forgiveness, not because you have to beg but because I got a glimpse of the disparity between me and God. Then, he lifted me up in love as he drew my attention to the phrase before, “Now is the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified (speaking of his death).” What God requires he provides. I can die because he died first. And his death didn’t end in death but glory. That same resurrection glory is mine; its yours, when you hope in future grace, when you set your hope, harness your mind, on future grace. What a mixture, total holiness and death to self. Glimpsing that revelation of Jesus, we’re free to confess our sin, enjoy forgiveness, and serve when its not convenient. Holiness is getting closer to God. Holiness is a spotless Lamb, dead & alive. Holiness is *proof* your hope works backwards.

## Love

Setting our hope on the revelation of Jesus also produces *love*. Peter says it like this, “[Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.](#)” This can sound like self-purification but this idea of obedience to the truth is used elsewhere to talk about conversion, our response to the truth which floods the heart with that purifying love of God, and spills out in **brotherly Love**. Brotherly love is the love of family. Family loves even when you don’t like each other. Love is not equal liking. We like certain people more than others, like we like particular foods more than others. It’s a preference but it shouldn’t be construed as love. Love is not an emotion or a liking. *Love is commitment, service, sacrifice, putting others first, whether you like them or not.* **If we like someone, we will find it much easier to love them, but it will also be harder to grow in your love.** This is why we flirt with the idea of resetting our spouses or friends or community groups back to a time when we liked them. What we mean by this is, back to a time before we knew parts we don’t like about them, which is to say we love an idea of them, a fragment of them but not the whole them, not the true them, not all of them. In other words, *liking has limits, restrictions, and boundaries.* Liking is not love. Liking is self-referential, acceptance based on *you* like. **It is possible to like someone so much that you don’t actually love them.** What do I mean? Peter prescribes **sincere** love. Sincere love is truthful not just tolerant. My wife likes me *and* she loves me. How do I know? She loved me enough to not just tolerate my love of convenience but to tell me the truth about it. When we see someone living in a way that is harmful we tell them. But sometimes we chicken out saying we don’t want to hurt others. We don’t want to risk being misunderstood or rejected. My wife had to push through just liking, knowing that when she confronted me, it could jeopardize my liking her in the moment. She braced herself for temporary rejection in order to love me sincerely, to tell me the truth. Let me apply this to church family. CGs versus FCs. In city groups, God picks your community but in Fight Clubs you pick your friends. Community is non-elective but friendship is based on choice. Here’s the deal. If you limit your community to your friends (like) you will slow your growth, and your capacity to love will remain in miniature. This why the church is often called a family but not a circle of friends. We are united in love not in likes. What we receive from God, sincere familial love, we display to others. Now, I do not mean to pit one against the other, community against friendship. In fact, I have found over the years that, in the church, I have obeyed my way from community into friendship with people I would never have liked. These bonds are stronger, deeper, and truer than many of my earlier friendships. But it requires love, sincere, and **earnest**. The word is strain, to be stretched. You love at the



expense of self. You die and only then do you bear much fruit. Now our CG leaders are a great example of this. They are not paid by the church; they have busy lives like anyone else, but they choose to slow down, lead, and care for groups of people, many of whom they may not like. They don't connect. That's okay because the church is built on love not likes. And their love is stretched, as they prepare each week, as they pray, as an issue comes up and they provide counsel, tell the truth not just tolerate, often they are the first to meet a need, and they can feel very alone. This shouldn't be. Why? *Brotherly* love. Familial love. Sincere love. A *family* that is stretched. You have a wonderful example of all this in your CG leader. What a blessing. Now, Peter says, imitate it. How? With hope that works backwards from God's perfect, sacrificial, pure, resurrection love in Jesus. By living with hope in future grace to be revealed in Jesus. God has planted a resurrection seed in our hearts, a seed imperishable, that will flower in love because it comes from the epicenter of holy love in Jesus Christ. It will ripple out into our relationships, sometimes slowly, but closer we are to this love, the more we enjoy the Holy one, the more pure-hearted our love will be for one another. Hope will work backwards into holy love.