

The Evidences of Authentic Christianity

1 Peter 1:13-21

Introduction: In 1981 Old Testament scholar Walt Kaiser published his superb work entitled *Toward An Exegetical Theology*. It is a book on the basics of Bible interpretation and preaching, and it has remained a standard in the field for decades. However, what interest me most is how Kaiser anticipated what can rightly be called “the idolatry of casual, comfortable and convenient Christianity” that looks nothing like the genuine and vibrant faith we find in the New Testament. One cannot help but wonder if the apostles would recognize so much of what parades about in our day as “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Kaiser pinpoints the problem when he says, “The church and the Scripture stand or fall together. Either the church will be nourished and strengthened by the bold proclamation of her Biblical texts or her health will be severely impaired.” Kaiser then provides his diagnosis of the modern church in America and around the world. His words are sobering and we desperately need ears to hear the verdict he renders:

“It is no secret that Christ’s Church is not at all in good health in many places of the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, “junk food”; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural

substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and Biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their bodies. Simultaneously a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publications of the Word of God (Amos 8:11) continues to run wild and almost unabated in most quarters of the Church.” (pgs. 7-8).

“Christianity lite” is nothing more than a sham, a false Christianity. It is certainly not the kind of Christianity that can endure “the fiery trials” of opposition, persecution and suffering (4:12-19). Without being grounded and rooted in the rock solid foundation of biblical truth, we will be like the fool who built his house on the sand (Matt. 7:24-27). Difficulties and hard times will destroy and expose a faith that was never genuine to begin with.

Peter knows our faith needs solid foundations. He also knows there is no better place to lay that foundation than in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verses 13-21 Peter peppers us with three imperatives: 1) Be hopeful, 2) Be holy and 3) Be fearful. With these 3 commands he puts before us three essential ingredients of a healthy spiritual diet that is certain to produce healthy Christians who will be ready (cf. 3:15) for the battles we will face. Each gives proof our faith is real and our Christian confession is authentic.

I. You must be hopeful

1:13-14

The word “therefore” begins verse 13. It looks back to vs. 1-12, which tell us that we have a sure and secure inheritance in Christ that is incorruptible, undefiled, and reserved in heaven (v. 4). This salvation was made possible by the work of our Triune God (v. 2). It is a salvation that captivated the minds of the prophets (v. 10) and amazes the hearts of angels (v. 12). Because we have such an awesome salvation, we also have an appropriate responsibility. Peter says set your hope fully on God’s coming grace by (1) preparing your minds and (2) being self-controlled.

1) Prepare your mind

1:13

Peter tells us to prepare our minds and be sober-minded. The phrase “preparing your minds for action” is literally “girding up the loins of your mind.” (see the *KJV*). It is the picture of a man who tucks in his long flowing robe in order to run or do strenuous work. Schreiner believes there may be an allusion to the Exodus where Israel was getting ready to leave Egypt.” (Schreiner, 78). Today we might say “let’s roll up our sleeves and get to work.” The importance of the mind in our Christian life cannot be too strongly emphasized.

Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (*NASB*).

Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (*CSB*).

Philippians 2:3, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (*ESV*).

C.E.B. Cranfield is right when he says: “Strenuous thinking...can seldom have been more urgently needed than today. ...It is a pathetic feature of contemporary church life that there are still plenty in the pews who clamor for shorter and lighter sermons and bright and easy services, and not a few in the pulpits are prepared to pander to popular taste. ... Peter’s slogan is a call ... for sermons that teach, not merely entertain, and for church members who will not shirk the discipline of intellectual effort, a call to the strenuous but exhilarating adventure of trying to understand ever more and more deeply the gospel.” CEB Cranfield (quoted in Vaughn and Lea, 33).

Complementing the call to prepare the mind, Peter adds we must be “sober-minded.” We must be self-controlled, balanced in our thinking. Calvin calls it “spiritual sobriety, when all our thoughts and affections are so kept as not to be inebriated with the allurements of this world...when one plunges himself into these, he must necessarily become sleepy and stupid, and he forgets God and the things of God (*The First Epistle of Peter*, XXII, 44).

A prepared mind, immersed in the Word of God and the things of God, is absolutely essential to genuine and authentic Christianity.

2) Move on from your former life

1:14

Verse 14 contains the first imperative in our passage and the main charge of verses 13-14. “Set your hope fully (lit. “perfectly” or “completely”) on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (See v. 7 for the exact same phrase). A prepared and controlled mind will focus on the future coming of Christ. It will be heavenly-minded so that it may be of earthly good! (see Col. 3:1-4). Future grace and future hope flows naturally from a transformed mind. Further, it is this hope in the 2nd coming of Christ that enables us, “as obedient children to not be confirmed to the passions of our former ignorance.” Peter’s argument is clear and direct. In your “B.C. life,” before Christ, you very much lived like an animal. Before Christ, you lived foolishly and in bondage to mere passions and desires, captive to your fallen and sinful nature. As a lost person, you lived like a lost person. We might say we slumped around in the spiritual ghetto of sin. But, that was the old you. You are now a new you through the 2nd birth (1:3). As 1 Peter 2:9 proclaims, you have been “called out of darkness into his wonderful light.” So, live up to who you are, not down to where you used to be. Keep your

focus on the truth. Jesus is coming again! It will keep you away from the gutter of a life you have left behind.

II. You must be holy

1:15-16

We are to be obedient children (v. 14). Such a challenge implies something about our Father. Children long to be like their fathers. It is their nature to do so. Our Father (v. 17) longs for us to be like Him too. What is our Father like? In a word: He is holy. Indeed, the pattern for our holiness is the holy God Himself.

1) Holiness is the essence of God's character

1:15-16

The word holy dominates verses 15-16 appearing four times. We are commanded to be holy (2nd imperative in our passage) for one basic reason. We have been “called” (5 times in 1 Peter) to be holy because our God is holy. The word “holy” (Gr. *hagios*) means to separate or be set apart. David Peterson in his superb article on “Holiness” in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* says: “Throughout Scripture, holiness is preeminently a characteristic of God himself. The terminology is used to signify that God is wholly other, distinct and separate from everything that he has made, and different from the gods of human imagination. As the Holy One, he acts in judgment against human sin and its consequences. Remarkably, however, he

also chooses to dwell amongst those whom he has redeemed. They are ‘sanctified’ or made holy by God’s manifesting himself to them, drawing them into a special relationship with himself and making provision for their sinfulness. The holy people of God are then called to live in a way that demonstrates the reality of their relationship with God and with one another. A pattern of sanctification is established for Israel under the Mosaic covenant that foreshadows the definitive work of Jesus Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit for believers under the new covenant. Indeed, the notion of a holy God among a holy people in a holy place is ‘the enduring eschatological hope of the Scriptures’. God’s holiness is particularly associated with his majesty, sovereignty and awesome power (e.g. Ex. 15:11-12; 19:10-25; Is. 6:1-4; cf. Rev. 4:8-11). As the one who is supreme over all, he is transcendent, exalted and different from everything he has made. He cannot be compared with the gods of the nations or be judged by human standards. God alone is holy in himself.” (pgs. 544-45).

God and God alone is unfathomably glorious, pure and radically set apart from His creation. He is holy. He is holy in His person. He is holy in His providence. He is holy in His purposes. He is holy in all His plans and actions. Psalm 29:2 instructs us as to our proper response to our Holy God,

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name, worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”

2) Holiness is the expectation of God’s children 1:15-16

The very essence of our heavenly Father is holiness. It is natural that his children, who have his nature via the new birth (v. 3), will grow to look like Him. Thus, Peter calls us “to be holy in all our conduct” (v. 15). Holiness is to characterize how we think, talk and act. Peter grounds this command in Old Testament scripture. “Be holy because I am holy” appears in Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; and 20:7, 26. Paul also addresses the theme of our holiness in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, “For God has not called us to impurity, but to live in holiness.” Jesus would add in Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” So, what is the heart and soul of this divine call to holiness? I think the wonderful theologian J.I. Packer helps us at this point: “The point I am trying to drive home is that holiness is the healthy growth of morally misshapen humans toward the moral image of Jesus Christ, the perfect man. Their growth is supernatural. It takes the sanctifying work of the indwelling Holy Spirit” (*Rediscovering Holiness*, p. 182 (?)). Hope for the future leads to holiness in the present. Our pattern is Christ. Now we will see, the work of Christ provides an additional and powerful motivation to live a life of holiness for the glory of God.

III. You must be fearful

1:17-21

The third imperative in our passage appears in v. 17, “conduct yourselves in fear.” This sounds strange to our modern, tamed ears. We will unwrap this idea shortly. Two themes orbit about his command: 1) the impartial judgment of our heavenly Father (v. 17) and 2) the atoning work of Jesus Christ (vv. 18-21). Both serve as motivation for a holy life.

1) God is an impartial Father

1:17

We call on God as Father because we are his children (v. 14) through the new birth (1:3). Our Father is perfect in his holiness. One aspect of his holiness is that he is a fair and impartial judge, judging each person “according to each ones deeds.” Schreiner notes, “The relationship we have with God is both tender and awesome...God is an “impartial” judge who does not reward people as one who plays favorites (cf. Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25)” (p. 83). Such a reality should rightly strike “fear” in the hearts of every person, and it should inspire the children of God to live good, faithful and impartial lives themselves. In a word, it should motivate us to be holy “throughout the time of our exile” in this life on this earth. We do not fit well in this world with its behaviors, priorities, and values. We are truly strangers and should be

recognized as such because this world is not our home. Again, we are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) where our true Father and Savior await our soon arrival.

2) Christ is an incorruptible Redeemer

1:18-21

Peter returns to the doctrine of salvation giving special attention to the atoning work of Jesus Christ. These are four of the most precious verses in the Bible (see also 2:21-25). Peter draws two striking contrasts for our careful meditation: 1) who we were in our lostness and who we are now in salvation; 2) what God did not ransom us with and what He did ransom us with.

Why should we live in reverent fear before a holy God who is an impartial judge? Because there is something you know from the moment of your conversion until now and you will know for all of eternity. The cost! The cost of your redemption! You know “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (vv. 18-19a). There is a long line of sinners going back to Adam and Eve and the Fall in Genesis 3. Sin passes down generation to generation. It is a life of utter and complete futility (*CSB*, “empty way of life”). You worshiped the wrong gods, lived for the wrong goals and priorities, and were controlled by the base desires and passions of the flesh. Simply put, you were a lost mess. But God! In great mercy! (v. 3). Intervened and ransomed (*CSB*,

“redeemed”) you! “Redemption” is one of the most important theological terms in the Bible. Schreiner is again our helper when he writes: “The term “redeem” (*lutroo*) recalls Israel’s liberation from Egypt (Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 15:15; 24:18). The term is also applied to the liberation of individuals (Ps. 25:22; 26:11; 31:5; 32:7), and in Isaiah the return from exile is portrayed as a second exodus (Isa. 41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:22-24; 51:11; 52:3; 62:12; 63:9). In the Greco-Roman world those captured in war could be redeemed and slaves were often manumitted, meaning that their freedom was purchased. Peter derives his conception from the Old Testament” (p. 84).

Our sin was great and so the payment must be great. Our sin was great and so the Savior must be great! Slaves were set free by perishable silver and gold. Sinners are set free by the perfect Son of God and the blood of the Lamb.

“Lamb without blemishes or spot” looks back to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, perhaps specifically to the Passover of Exodus 12 (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). The theme of God’s Lamb runs all the way from Genesis to Revelation. It is rich and reaches its climax in the shed blood and sacrifice of the Son of God.

Genesis 22 – God provides the lamb. (The story of Abraham & Isaac)

Exodus 12 – The Lamb is to be without spot or blemish. (Passover)

Isaiah 53 – The Lamb is to be slaughtered. (The suffering servant of the Lord)

John 1:29 – The Lamb will take away the sins of the world. (Jesus)

Revelation 5 – The Warrior Lamb is now on the throne in heaven. (The exalted Lord)

The Lamb: it is the Christ (v. 19), the Lamb is Jesus.

Peter expands further on the perfect atoning work accomplished with the precious shedding of the blood of Christ and his death on the cross.

Verse 20 informs us that the cross was not a disappointing accident, it was a divine appointment even before God spoke creation into existence. In eternity past, before He made Adam and Eve and before they sinned, God had planned the redemption of sinners by the perfect sacrifice of His Son. It “was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was manifest in the last times for the sake of you,” for us (v. 20).

It was planned in eternity but revealed in history. It occurred “in the last times,” the time of Messiah Jesus between His 1st and 2nd comings. And, it was for our sake, on our behalf. It is for us that He came and died a bloody death on a Roman cross.

Verse 21 addresses the conclusion of the matter. Through our faith and trust in the accomplished work of Christ we are “believers in God,” the God “who raised [Jesus] from the dead and gave Him glory.” Resurrection and glorification once

again are brought together (1:11). Therefore, we rightly place our “faith and hope” in this God, the God who raised His Son from the dead and glorified Him in the most exalted manner” (Phil. 2:9-11).

So, be fearful in light of the impartial Father we have and the precious atoning blood sacrifice of His Son. To fail to do so is indeed dangerous. It should strike fear in your heart and soul. John Piper sums it up well: “Therefore, if in our conduct we are tempted to act as though the preciousness and the permanence of the blood of Jesus were impotent to hold us back from sin, then we should fear. Because if our lives bear constant witness to the powerlessness of the blood of Jesus, then Jesus is not really our hope and joy. And we do not belong to him. And that is a fearful prospect.

The sum of the matter is this; hope in the grace of God! And fear not hoping in the grace of God! Fear the behavior that would show you don’t trust in the all-satisfying preciousness of the love of Jesus.” (“A Sojourn on Earth in Confident Fear,” 12-12-93).

Conclusion: Blaise Pascal in *Pensées* 352 reminds us, “Wretchedness induces despair. Pride induces presumption. The Incarnation shows man the greatness of his wretchedness ... through the greatness of the remedy required.”

A hopeful life, a holy life, a fearful life, they all go together. A hopeful life, a holy life, a fearful life, will avoid the vanity of a counterfeit Christianity. Such a life is the proper response, the only response, to the precious, spotless Son of God who bought us out of the slave market of sin by His precious blood.

“What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Meditate on this and go and live a genuine and authentic Christian life.