

- **\*READ I Peter 1:3-9\*** It becomes evident very early on in the letter that there are difficulties being faced by those who Peter identifies as *“exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”* (I Peter 1:1) In these verses that we just read together, Peter seeks to encourage these brethren by reminding them of the great inheritance that awaits for them in heaven if they would only hold on for a little while through various sufferings, griefs, and trials. He commends them for their love and belief in Jesus even though they had not seen Him, and he again encourages them to be joyous because their efforts are leading them towards the goal of their faiths, the salvation of their souls.
- Peter goes on from here in **vv.13-16** to remind them specifically of what it is that God has called them to strive for, holiness. *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, **Be holy, because I am holy.**”* (I Peter 1:14-16) Just as we discussed a couple of weeks ago in our congregational focus lesson on living in the light in a dark world, it is imperative that we recognize this as being God’s call for us. He has called us out of an unholy world to live holy lives before Him in every respect. This must be our understanding of what God desires for us.
- However, recognizing this as God’s desire is only part of the struggle because the evil one is also aware of this being God’s desire for us, and he will do whatever he can do in order to cause us to fall short of achieving this desire of God within our lives. This must also be understood as true simply based upon the fact that this letter is even being written by Peter. The Apostle recognized that there were great challenges being faced by those who have been called to be holy, and it is his great desire to encourage them to remember their calling and strive for it all the more.
- As we look through this letter of **I Peter** this morning, I want to identify some of the challenges that come up against us as we seek to achieve our calling for holiness in Christ. There are at least five challenges that can be found within **I Peter** that continue to seek to hinder us from being strong servants of Christ who are dedicated to holy and righteous living before God. Let’s consider these challenges, how they are seen in our lives, and then we will consider the key to being able to overcome any challenge that we might face as we strive to live up to God’s holy calling for us.

### What Challenges Our Calling To Be Holy?

#### **I. Present Life (I Peter 1:17-19)**

- A. One of the themes that we can read of throughout **I Peter** is the idea of disciples of Jesus be strangers and exiles in this world and in this life. The driving force behind this idea is for the Christian to recognize that this world is simply not our lasting home. We are here for but a little while and then we will leave this life and pass into eternity. The ability that we have to move on from this life into eternal life and glory with God is based upon the fact that Jesus was willing to give His precious blood for us as the unblemished and spotless lamb. Every single ounce of gold and silver in this world would have been useless in redeeming us, but Jesus gave His very life so that we might be called out of sin into a holy life that will eventually lead to eternal bliss.
- B. The goal of eternal life with God is simple enough, but we recognize that what goes into making that a reality is much more difficult. In the big picture it is a holy life that will achieve this, but in these verses Peter specifically points out the need for reverence in this life before God which is a big change from the empty way of living that we previously engaged in as those who were outside and opposed to God through our sinful way of life. Whereas we lived only for the here and now, God has called us to fear Him as the one who will judge us, but also give Him worthy respect as the one who has the ability to save us. As we talk about it here in this assembly, it is easy to remember as important, but what about from day to day?

C. I would suggest to you that keeping this proper day in and day out reverence for God can be difficult because of all of the different aspects of this life that are pulling at us from every direction. Our families, our jobs, our hobbies, politics, and the like are fine in and of themselves, but it is so easy for these things to overwhelm us to the point that we lose focus on what is most important...living holy before God in reverence and remembering that this life is only temporary and there is something far greater waiting for us in eternity if we are committed to striving for it. Friends, love your families. Work hard at your jobs whatever they might be. Enjoy your hobbies, even watch some of the political circus that is constantly available on the TV, but please don't allow these things to be something that hinders you from holy and reverent living. We must remember that these things are truly empty in the end. They are blessings from God, yes, but they are not eternal in nature. Therefore, may we keep God and His calling as our priority, and overcome the challenge of this present world as we strive to live holy and reverent before God.

## II. Worldly Culture (I Peter 2:9)

A. As we move on through the text, we are reminded by Peter of exactly who it is that we are in the eyes of God. ***"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."*** (I Peter 2:9) Peter then speaks to us having not been a true people in the past, but now we are the people of God having received mercy from Him. We must recognize the enormous significance of what it means to be God's people.

1. First, we are ***"a chosen race."*** This designation hearkens back to **Deuteronomy 7:6** when God speaks of Israel as His chosen people. They were nothing special in and of themselves, but God had called them by His grace and mercy to be special and beloved in His eyes. They had no room to boast and we too have no room to boast before God.
2. We are also described as ***"a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession."*** **Exodus 19:5,6** describes Israel in these same terms. They were to be special and set apart from the world. They were to be separate from the sin that was pervasive in the world around them so they could truly be a people in the possession of God. He desired to bless them abundantly, and they could enjoy those blessings through keeping the commands of God, and in doing so they would fulfill the words of **Isaiah 42:12 & 43:21** in being a people who proclaim the praises of God through the lives they lived.

B. Again, this sounds simply enough until we remember the fact that though we have been called out of this dark world into the marvelous light of God...we are still present in this world and constantly being bombarded with the negative influences that are all around us. These constantly negative influences can definitely hinder us from living up to God's calling. Instead of humbly rejoicing in God's mercy and grace upon us...how easy could it be for us to allow the arrogance of the world to influence us to become prideful and arrogant towards God when we make sacrifices and then still endure hardships?

C. Or how easy could it be for the negative influences to chip away at our moral fortitude and holy standard of living to the point when we are unrecognizable in the world? I'm not saying that the world has become more holy, but we have become less holy and distinct from the dark sinful nature of this world. These dangers are extremely real, and we must remember the honor that it is to be referred to in such glowing terms by God through Peter in order to not allow ourselves to shrink back into darkness, but instead continue to stand out for the Lord.

### III. Selfish Desires (I Peter 2:16,17)

- A. Just a few verses later, Peter reminds these Christians that their freedom in Christ from sin wasn't to be used *"as a cover-up for evil, but as slaves for God."* This line of think seems similar to what Paul had to address in **Romans 5 & 6** concerning having a license to sin because God's grace overcoming our sin brings Him glory. It is true that God is glorified when sin is overcome, but we must remember that as God's slaves we are to live by His standard which is that of holy conduct before Him in all things. We are required by God to humble ourselves to His will and push far away from us our own selfish desires.
- B. In fact, this is true in all respects of life according to Peter. We are to be a people who are known for our humility before other people. In this text, Peter specifically instructs disciples to be people who *"Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor."* We are to humbly submit to others in whatever respect that demands. We give honor to all people as fellow image bearers of God. We love our brothers and sisters as we all strive to serve the Lord. The Lord Himself is He whom we truly fear, and we are even exhorted to give honor to those who rule over us.
- C. I particularly find that last sentence to be a challenge for so many in our world today, and I believe it goes back to our own selfish desires being a challenge to our calling for holy living. I believe we have been somewhat spoiled by the blessing of being able to live in a country where we enjoy such great freedoms. I am abundantly thankful for us to be able to meet in peace as we are right now. I appreciate so much the ability to live in relative peace without fear of outside harm upon me or my family. I appreciate the ability to preach and teach God's Word without much fear at all of being censored or reprimanded. It is easy to honor those who allow these things to be so.
- D. But what would I do if these things were not so? Would I devote all of my attention to fighting for these freedoms as if they are some God-guaranteed right that we must have in order to serve Him as His called out people and neglect in actually living as someone called out of darkness into the light of God? Brethren, let's remember that our brothers and sisters in the first century were dying for the cause of Christ at the hands of Nero! How selfish of us to think that we deserve better than they! And therein lies the challenge of selfish desires. We can become so fixated on the freedoms that we forget that we already have the ultimate freedom from sin and that truly is enough for us because we can serve God no matter what the circumstances around us might be. May we remember to keep that freedom as our focus come what may from the world around us. Our call is to holiness whether we have religious freedom or not.

### IV. Intimidations & Accusations (I Peter 3:13-17)

- A. There may very well come a time when those who are opposed to God might seek to intimidate us or accuse us of wrong in order to cause us to denounce our faiths. Peter encourages the disciples of His day by reminding them that they are blessed if they suffer for righteousness. If there are intimidations that are thrown our way then we are to make sure that our hearts are prepared to endure such difficulties.
- B. Peter states that we can be able to do so by preparing our hearts with Christ being regarded as Lord and holy. If these things are truly believed then we will have put in the work to be able to respond to those who try to intimidate or accuse us of wrongdoing. Yet, even in these moments when we are accused of being religious fanatics, puritans, or self-righteous...we are demanded by Jesus to respond with gentleness and respect in order to keep our consciences clear.
- C. Again, it is so easy for our pride to get in the way of a beneficial response to such things. We might be tempted to think *"How dare they..."*, but our willingness to remain calm and our holy

way of living will help for us to be shown as good in our conduct which will leave the accusers ashamed. And even if they are not ashamed in this life, they certainly will feel shame in the next life when they have to give answers for their mistreatment of God's people. Our concern should only be for holy and righteous living before God and not earthly peace and comfort. Sure, it is a challenge to face intimidations and accusations by those who hate us for our righteous lives, but we can overcome because we have God supporting us!

#### V. Righteous Sufferings (I Peter 4:12-19)

- A. This is true even if things progress past intimidations and accusations and into actual sufferings on our part. In fact, Peter's language in these verses seems to indicate that we ought to simply expect such a thing to be real within our lives! *"Don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you."* Again, let me state that I believe us to be at least a tad bit spoiled in this country because history tells us that Christians have suffered for their faith from the very beginnings of the Way and sufferings for Christ came even before.
- B. This is pointed out by Peter when he speaks of our need to rejoice in such times before it is at those times that we are able to *"share in the sufferings of Christ."* Jesus was the first to suffer for His commitment to doing the will of the Father, and we should be able to count it as a true joy to suffer just as He did. I realize this is so completely opposite of the way that we think but Peter says that those who suffer in this way are truly blessed and able to find joy in such sufferings because the Spirit of God has opportunity to do what He does in lifting us up. Through our struggles He renews us, refreshes us, and helps us to grow even stronger which reminds us of the words of Paul in **Romans 5:3-5** & James in **James 1:2-4**.
- C. The only time we ought to feel true shame and disappointment are in those moments when we suffer for doing what is wrong. Peter gives the examples of a murderer, thief, evildoer, or meddler. If we suffer for doing these wrong things then that is simply what we deserve, but when we suffer for the name of Christ then we ought to glorify God for having such an opportunity. In fact, these sufferings could be viewed as judgments that are allowing the impurities in God's household to be brought to the surface so they can be taken away. If even we as God's people are being judged in this way, then what will be the end of those who are living in the darkness and sin? We are purified by such judgment as we entrust ourselves to God, but surely they will only be destroyed. Yes, suffering for righteousness sake is a challenge, but we must look to the end result of our faith to recognize just how worthwhile it is to suffer in such a manner.

Throughout our considerations of these text, there has been something that is constantly present and that would be God, His grace, and the hope that we have of eternity with Him. There is redemption from this empty world, the ability to proclaim His praises, freedom from sin, a clear conscience, and the ability to have great joy even when suffering for the sake of righteousness. It truly is this living hope given to us by God that will help us to overcome every single challenge that we face in this life whether it is on this list or not.

Therefore, let us all follow the instructions of the Apostle Peter and have our minds ready for action, be sober-minded, and set that hope completely on the grace of God so that we might overcome every challenge and be ready for the revelation and appearing of Jesus Christ. The challenges are present and real, but so is our God and He is ready to strengthen us to overcome the challenges and achieve His goal of us being called out of darkness and living holy lives in His great light. May all honor and glory be to Him as we overcome the challenges that are set before us.