

Transformed, Not Conformed – 1 Peter 1:14-16

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had an older person in your life – a parent perhaps, or a mentor – whom you knew cared about you as a person and wanted the best for you? A person who listened well to you, who took the time to get to know you and spend time with you, and who offered good, godly wisdom that you knew came from their sincere desire to see you grow and thrive in life? Well, if you've had a person like this in your life, how did they affect you? What impact did they have on your life? Did you want to be like them? Did you try to pattern your life after them? Did you try to do what they told you to do? And can you see their fingerprints on your life right now?

My guess is “yes” to each of these questions for any of you who've had a person like this in your life. That's not to say that we always accepted everything they said and never decided to try the opposite for a while to see if they were really right. That's not to say that we didn't fail at times to actually do what they told us to do, or to live the way they suggested. But the fact is, when we know a person loves us and wants what's best for us and are themselves godly and actually living the way they're telling us to live, we at a minimum want to be like them and to follow their advice. We want to obey a good and loving parent or mentor, though our sin nature and our selfish desires often lead us off track from actually doing it.

But oh the beauty of an obedient child, a willing pupil...one who rejects those rebellious urges, that need to try the hard way first, and simply trusts and follows the godly wisdom of a loving parent or mentor and patterns their life after them. Or even better, one who relates to our perfect Father God in this way...as an obedient child who trusts the most loving Father in existence, the One who knows us inside and out, who always desires our good, who wants to keep us from harm, and who alone knows how to navigate the world he created and avoid the traps of the one who's trying to wreck his world and destroy the people in it.

As Peter says in our passage today, verses 14 to 16 of 1 Peter 1:

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN

As obedient children... This is how we're to relate to our good, good Father, full of abundant mercy, who has gone to the greatest lengths possible to adopt us as his own children and bring us into the great salvation and grace so many throughout the ages have longed for. If you want a picture of how to walk with God and into his good purposes for your life, this is it. Relate to him as *an obedient child* would to his or her loving father.

What are the characteristics of a child who's obedient to his or her dad? Most foundational is simple, childlike trust that dad loves them and has their best interests at heart. If that's there, obedience is easy. If we're convinced that dad really does know best, and that he sincerely wants what's good for us, we will want to do what he says. If, on the contrary, we think we know best and that dad's stupid and we suspect he's trying to cheat us out of all the fun in life, or just on a power trip, or just trying to make things convenient for himself; then we will not want to obey him or do what he says. Obedience flows out of simple trust in a loving Father. Do you trust God the Father today?

And how do you feel about the idea of obedience? The word obedience has fallen on hard times these days. How do you feel when someone tells you to obey them? It sounds un-American, doesn't it? After all this is a "free" country. I don't have to obey anybody. How dare you try to tell me what to do? Who do you think you are? I think even we as Christians have been affected more than we know by this attitude. And even we tend to react against the idea of obeying someone. It sounds so un-free and slave-like. After all, we're independent eastern Oregonians. We do as we please!

But, my friends, as followers of Christ we need to cozy up to the concept of obedience again...to the practice of setting aside ourselves and what we think we should do, to trust someone else and do what they've commanded us to do.

Fortunately, the One we're called to obey is completely trustworthy and good and always has our best interests in mind; but still we are called to OBEY him...to do what he says to do, no matter how un-American that may feel. According to 1 Peter 1, verse 2, what have we been chosen for? We've been chosen for *obedience* to Jesus Christ by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. And now in verse 14, we're told to function as *obedient* children... children who obey God the Father...the One who called us according to his abundant mercy and caused us to be born again to a living hope.

Obedience is and always has been God's expectation of those who walk with him. **"...to OBEY is better than sacrifice..."** Remember that one from 1 Samuel. The concept has been around for a little while! And if we want to walk with God and into his purposes for our lives, we need to embrace obedience and get excited about it! Because it's the path to the abundant, transformed life God has for us. Are you ready and willing to obey God and his Word?

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THE IGNORANT LIFE

So what does God have in mind for us as we obey him? Look again at verses 14 and 15, where Peter sets up a contrast between the ignorant life of the world and the holy life God has in mind for his obedient children. Let's begin with the negative side of the contrast – what NOT to do. Look at verse 14: ***As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance...*** In other words: as you function as obedient children of God, *do not be conformed to the ignorant life.*

What is the ignorant life? It's the life that we all lived before coming to Christ. A life that flows out of a lack of knowledge about ourselves and what's really true about this world we live in and its Creator. The Greek word translated, "ignorance," literally means: "want of knowledge or perception" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). It speaks of blindness to what's really true. It's like living your whole life by principles that turn out to be false.

And this is where all the world lives apart from God and his Word...they live in ignorance no matter how wise and smart they may claim to be or how much brainpower they possess. Remember from Proverbs, ***"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*** So, if

the fear of the one true God and any knowledge of him is omitted from any theory about humanity and earth and the universe and how we got here, wisdom and knowledge and trustworthy truth are simply not possible. There's absolutely no way to get there when God is removed from the picture, no matter how many "scientific" processes are used, no matter how many intelligent minds are put to the task. Claiming to be wise, even the smartest of people become fools when their foundational assumption is untrue...the assumption that God does not exist and did not create this world.

And this ignorant life that leaves God out of the picture or paints him as something other than he is, leaves people to be led only by their passions, their desires, their lusts. Ourselves and our human desires are all that's left to live for and guide us if we don't believe in God or don't have an accurate picture of who he really is and how his world works. Peter in verse 18, describes the ignorant life as *the life of futility inherited from our forefathers*...the life of pursuing things you can never quite grab a hold of...the life of trying to hold on to the wind as it continually slips through your fingers. Paul describes it in Ephesians 4 as living in the futility of their minds. They've put their own created minds in a position above God their Creator and denied any knowledge of him. And they're stuck there...trapped in a life of futility. Paul says:

18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

What a terrible place to be stuck. Alienated from the life of God and living by a worldview that's totally false.

Imagine trying to construct a Millennium Falcon Lego set with the instruction manual and pieces for a Jurassic Park jeep. That's kind of what the ignorant life is like. No matter how carefully you follow the instruction manual, you'll never get the Millennium Falcon. You don't have the right pieces and your manual is fundamentally flawed. Yet this is the kind of situation we were all stuck in apart from Christ, in a life of futility governed and guided by the instruction manual of our own passions, desires and lusts, instead of the wisdom of God. The ignorant life of futility.

But guess what? Those passions, desires and lusts don't just disappear in an instant when we accept Christ as our Savior. They've become so ingrained that we haven't even been looking at the manual for years. We've just been doing what feels right and what seems to work best in any given situation. But lo and behold, God's calling us to a radical break with our old ways. He's given us a new manual that he expects us to use and follow, one that actually works. Whereas before we let our desires and passions lead us...following our nose wherever it goes... following our heart above all...Whereas before we lived our lives by so-called "worldly wisdom"...by what works and best gets us what we want; God calls us now to be conformed to these ways no longer. He says: *Don't allow yourself to revert back to that life of futility.*

He's given us a new worldview and through his Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can finally know what's true about ourselves, about our God and about his universe. Now he guides us, instead of our desires and passions. Instead of just always falling in line with our lusts and what feels good, we step out of line with anything that's contrary to God and his character. This requires a Spirit-empowered choice each time to evaluate what we're feeling and what we want, and then to say no to those things that are ungodly or out of step with where God is leading us. Do not be conformed to the way you lived your life for yourself and your passions in your former ignorance. It's time for change. It's time for you to put on your new self and begin looking and acting different than you have before. It's time to rearrange your life to walk with Jesus to learn from him how to be like him.

And, my friends, to begin doing this you need the mind preparation and transformation we looked at last week...daily preparing your mind for action through prayerful study of God's Word; keeping yourself alert and aware and sensitive to God's leading at all times; and putting all the eggs of your hope in one basket, setting it fully down in one place: in the grace to be brought to you at the return of Christ. When this is where all your hope is and you're filling your mind with God's truth and listening to and following him, you'll be able to easily recognize those evil desires of your former life and reject them to go in the opposite direction. You'll be well equipped to make better choices about how to spend your time and what to get excited about.

BUT BE TRANSFORMED TO THE HOLY LIFE

Because instead of being conformed to the ignorant life, we are to be transformed to the holy life God has for us. *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the ignorant life, but be transformed to the holy life.* Look at verse 15 now:

***¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”***

*Transformed, not conformed...*that’s what the One who called us, our merciful Father, has in mind for each of his children...that we would love him and become like him in our daily lives and so be prepared to live with him and delight in him and reign with him for all eternity. And notice that this becoming like him involves our actions, our conduct, our behavior...not just learning about him, but also learning to act like him in everything we do: ***you also be holy in ALL your conduct.*** In other words, this holiness is holiness of words and action and attitude and is meant to affect ALL of it. At your work, at play, on vacation, at church, in volunteer activities, in your home, on the phone, in your car, while hunting, riding horses, listening to music, watching movies, surfing the internet...Well, you get the idea. *ALL your conduct.*

The common notion that being a Christian is about going to church once a week, doing a Bible study, and volunteering in a ministry, but then the rest of our lives are outside of that and lived by whatever principles are common in our culture and work best to get us what we want and achieve our goals, is completely anti-Christian. Instead, our great salvation leads us to walk with God everywhere and learn to act like him and be about his purposes all the time, even when it costs us greatly in a worldly sense...even when to do so seems foolish to those around us, which it will! Because God’s ways always seem foolish to those who have rejected the knowledge of him.

But God has a transformed and radically different life in mind for his children. Look again at verses 15 and 16:

***¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”***

Notice in verse 16: **“since it is written.”** This is referencing an Old Testament passage from Leviticus 11:44, where God first said to his people: **“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”** And the reason God gave them at that time for being holy as he is holy is similar to the one given in 1 Peter. He said you are to do this because **“...I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God.”** In other words, he is the one true God who personally rescued them from the life of futility – the slavery and godlessness of the Egyptians – so they could live with him and walk with him. They of all people were chosen to be the people of God’s presence, under his personal care and leadership, and revealing him to all the world. His grace, his undeserved favor and his power working on their behalf, had been lavished upon them, and the expectation was that they would be transformed through that grace and love him back, becoming like the holy One they loved. As a son loves a good dad and longs to be like him, so God’s people are expected to do the same.

Well, so far we’ve been talking about holiness as if it’s something we all completely understand. But to be honest, holiness is one of those words we use a lot in Christian talk but often struggle to define. But define it and understand it we should, especially since the word holy is used 4 times in just 2 verses here. We probably should know what it means to be holy as God is holy, don’t you think? *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* tells us that the Greek word translated holy is *hagios* and “fundamentally signifies ‘separated’ ...[and] in Scripture...[speaks of being] separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God...” *Set apart for God and his purposes* is a common phrase used to describe the concept of holiness in people. *Vine’s* goes on to say that it’s used “of God...as the absolutely ‘Holy’ One, in his purity, majesty and glory...[and] it is used of [people] and things...in so far as they are devoted to God.” And this devotion to God, this being set apart for him, involves the conduct, the actions, the behavior of those so devoted.

G. B. Stevens sums up the essence of *hagios* this way: “It is characteristically godlikeness” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary* referencing *Hastings’ Bible Dictionary*)...exhibiting the character of God in our conduct, in our actions, in our words...becoming like the Holy One we love. It’s what happens only through discipleship with Jesus...walking with him to learn from him how to be like him...breaking the ingrained habits of sin and evil desires and walking into the good and right ways of our Savior...set apart for God and his purposes in everything we do and revealing his glory to others as we trust him and follow him.

That's what it means to be holy in our lives today. Previously in our former ignorance we were devoted to self and whatever we wanted; now in our born-again life of living hope, of powerful grace, we are devoted to God and his good purposes wherever we go and whatever we do. That's being holy as God is holy.

CONCLUSION

My friends, are you taking holiness seriously? Do you think it's important that you are becoming more and more like Christ everyday in your attitude, your words and your actions? Do you concern yourself with doing that at home, at your job, and everywhere you go? What do you make of this verse from Hebrews 12:14?

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Without holiness no one will see the Lord. Clearly there's an expectation that true followers of Christ will make progress in growing holiness, growing Christlikeness, during our life on this earth. This does not mean that we will ever become perfectly like Christ in this life or that we won't be saved if we don't. Scripture is abundantly clear that we are saved by grace through faith apart from works or any of kind of earning it on our part. But Scripture is also abundantly clear that truly saved children of God, saints, set apart ones, holy ones, will take seriously the call to grow in holiness, in Christlikeness, and will begin exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits of saving faith, the works that show our faith, during this life on earth.

Remember, God chose us to live here as pilgrims just passing through a foreign country on a mission from him. And his will for us in this foreign country is sanctification, growing in Christlikeness, by the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Let's take it seriously and heed the warnings given over and over again, especially in the book of Hebrews, to not neglect or squander or fall away from the great salvation we've been given according to the abundant mercy of God and through the precious blood of our Savior. In our next message we'll see Peter reminding us again of these truths.

Well, how do we make progress in growing holiness in our daily lives? It starts with being a true disciple of Jesus...someone who's daily spending time with him

in God's Word and prayer, learning to think like him as we believe what he says and act on what he teaches us. It continues as we live sober-minded, alert, aware, awake, listening and following the Spirit and taking the opportunities he gives us to accomplish God's will. It really takes off when we put all the eggs of our hope in the basket of our future inheritance in heaven and of the grace that will be brought to us at Christ's return. Only then will we be ready to hold loosely to the things of this world and to be at peace with what it will cost us in a worldly sense to live life God's way at all times, to set ourselves aside for God's purposes and to reveal his glory to others.

These 3 elements which we looked at last week are the foundation for a life of holiness. They are what will give us the worldview and the truth we need to begin transforming our attitudes, our words and our actions to be like God's. We'll be able to recognize those evil and selfish desires that try to rise up and run our lives, and with belief in what God says is true and the power of the Spirit he's given us, we'll be able to choose a different path. We'll be able to reject those natural human desires, reactions and responses, to choose God's ways instead. Paul describes this in Romans as ***"by the Spirit putting to death the misdeeds of the body."***

To picture what this looks like and how it works in our daily lives, I love the *New English Translation* of verse 14: ***Do not comply with the evil urges you used to follow in your ignorance...*** The evil urges are still there and still try to rise up. But DO NOT COMPLY with them. Sin no longer is your master. Take a breath, pray, remind yourself of what's really true and of who you now are in Christ, and then head off in the opposite direction. Don't sit there and think about it and dream about it and argue with yourself about it. Move out and do something different. Leave the scene before the crime is committed and put your mind on something else. DO NOT COMPLY. By the Spirit, by the word of God, put to death your old ways...the futile ways of a world living in ignorance.

Let me close with a familiar verse that sums up so beautifully the path to the holy life God has for us. Romans 12, verses 1 and 2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

With your hope set fully on God and your future reigning with him in heaven, give your bodies to him in worship and let him do his work to transform you into his likeness and prepare for what you'll be doing with him for eternity. DO NOT COMPLY with anything that leads you off this path, but be transformed to holiness, to Christlikeness, as your mind is daily renewed with God's truth and as you remain alert and awake and in constant communication with him. *Great salvation calls for great transformation of minds, hope and behavior.* As obedient children, let's become like the One we love!

For Additional Study and Application

What characteristics of a person would make you willing to take their advice and do what they tell you to do? Describe someone in your life who possessed these characteristics and how they impacted your life.

In 1 Peter 1:14, Peter instructs us to relate to God the Father *as obedient children*. What does this mean for your life today?

Why do both Peter and Paul describe life apart from Christ as the life of ignorance and futility (see 1 Peter 1:14; Ephesians 4:17-19)? What guides those living the ignorant life?

How can we grow in our ability to not comply with the passions of our former ignorance? Refer to 1 Peter 1:13-14; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:20-24.

Peter instructs us to be holy in all our conduct. Define what it means to be holy in your own words. Why is being a disciple of Christ essential to our growing holiness?