1 Peter Lesson 2 (2023)

**LIVING A HOLY LIFE**

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Key Verse: 1:15-16

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

In the previous passage, 1:1-12, Saint Peter opens his letter by reminding his audiences of God’s great salvation plan through Christ Jesus, such as new birth, living hope, and inheritance. He said that we should greatly rejoice even during trials because God made our lives difficult so that our faith would be purified like genuine gold. The rest of the letter contains Peter’s instructions concerning how Christians should live holy lives on earth. So, what does it mean to be holy?

Before getting into the content of today’s passage, we should understand what the word **“holy”** means. When some people are surprised by something, they say, *“Holy Cow!”(Pic#A)* Have you seen a flying cow? When Peter said that we should be holy in all we do, he quoted Leviticus 11:45, which states, “Be holy, because I am holy.” According to dictionary definitions, the word ***“holy”*** has various meanings. It means *“to be separated, set apart, devoted, sacred, uncontaminated, morally pure, righteous, or divine.”* I also think that “be holy” also means *“to be perfect,”* just as Jesus said to his followers, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt. 5:48) Which definition makes more sense to you?

When I was in the Theological Seminary years ago, one of the professors said that to be holy means to be wholesome. The word wholesome comes from the Old English ***hal*** meaning “*healthy.*” When I heard it, I immediately liked it because it seemed more relevant to us. It gave me the notion that achieving the holiness of God is not something too far from our reach. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be asked to be holy. The result of our faith, which is the salvation of our souls, is to be holy, like our Heavenly Father. Saint Peter addresses three significant points to living lives in today's passage. Let’s think about how we can live a holy life on earth.

***First, we should set our hope in Christ’s Second Coming.*** (13-17) Look at verse 13. “Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.” What Peter says here is not something new. In the previous passage, especially verses 5 and 6, he already talked about how we, as God’s chosen children, have received a new birth, a living hope, and heavenly inheritance through Christ Jesus. Yet, while living in this world, we must intentionally seek God’s inheritance as our hope. Why? It’s because the hope of our glorious resurrection is the anchor of our faith, firm and secure, no matter what happens in the world (Heb. 6:19). Things of this world, people, institutions, or organizations, can never be our true hope because they will fade away someday.

Look at verse 14. “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” Putting our hope in God’s great salvation has a challenging aspect of it. We should not conform to the evil desires we had when we lived in ignorance. Evil desires Peter talks about here include all kinds of unhealthy and sinful desires, such as selfishness, pride, sexual immorality, drunkenness, addiction, etc. We, as God’s children, should live morally pure lives. Not only that, God’s chosen people should live lives as holy pilgrims.

Look at verse 17. “Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.” As God’s chosen people, we have dual citizenships, earthly and heavenly. Saint Peter urges his audience to live as foreigners in this world. It does not mean we should give up our earthly citizenship literally. It implies that we should put our hope not in this world but in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, we are holy pilgrims on the earth. Our life on earth is a journey to the kingdom of heaven. So, we should have spiritual values and spiritual life goals as holy pilgrims.

If Christians asked, “Do you believe in materialism?” most would answer, *“No, I believe in God.”* However, we cannot deny that materialism is very tempting and persuasive among Christians. Some critics say that most Christians today believe in materialism more than communists do. They think, “*The more money they have, the happier they can live.”* Most Christians pray to God earnestly for material blessings more than spiritual blessings. I don’t mean that we should become poor and depend on others for survival. What I am saying is that greed is something we should intentionally struggle to overcome. Sometimes, we are too attached to the things of the world that our journey to heaven is disturbed. Seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness should be our priority in all circumstances. We can live holy lives as God’s children as we put our hope in God’s kingdom.

In verses 18-21, Saint Peter again reiterated the greatness of God’s salvation through Christ Jesus before giving the second instruction concerning living holy lives. Look at verses 18-21. “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

Why does Peter keep reminding his audience of God’s great salvation through Christ over and over? It’s because if we are not sure that what we believe in Christ will not happen, there is no way for us to live a holy life. For example, if there is no resurrection of the dead, I mean “glorious resurrection through Christ Jesus,” why should we live as Christians, enduring suffering and pains? We will succumb to the pressure of this world, saying, ***“Que Sera, Sera!” which means, “Whatever will be, will be!”*** We will end up becoming Christian nihilists who say, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (1 Cor. 15:32)

Christ Jesus, who came to this world and gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, existed even before the beginning of the world. God also raised him from the dead and glorified him. Through Christ Jesus, we know that our God is not just suffering for us, but he also suffers now with those who suffer. This suffering will not end in just suffering and death. It will end in glory when Christ comes again. The glory of the resurrection is a mystery of God and a living hope for us as God’s children.

***Second, living a holy life means loving one another always (22).*** Read verse 22. “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.” We hear the message of love all the time, not just from the Scripture but through many places.

If we know that our friends and neighbors are starving in poverty or suffering in emotional pain, we feel sorry for them. But can we say that's love if we do nothing for them? No. Love is not just a feeling but an action, even if it’s small. When natural disasters hit people, I see so many people volunteer to help those in need. They sacrifice their time and money and even risk their security. Their act of love is heroic and inspiring.

However, loving one another is not easy when it comes to loving annoying people, including spouses and rebellious children. We know that love is always right. Yet, it’s hard for married couples to love one another due to negative thinking, disillusionment, rigid rules, expectations, and miscommunication. I believe that marriage shouldn’t be just romantic but therapeutic, which means that husband and wife should understand each other objectively as doctors do and learn to be empathetic toward one another. This is a huge task and a long journey in most marriages. That’s a holy marriage. This is just my opinion.

The way to live a holy life is not just to remain in the church and sing many songs of praise. The primary sign of God’s chosen people is to love others proactively. Jesus predicted that because of the increase of wickedness in the world, the love of the most would grow cold. Let us read Matthew 24:12, *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*

Why would the love of people, including that of Christians, grow cold when the wickedness in the world increases? Well, one of many possible reasons is spiritual fatigue; I call it **“emotional and spiritual burnout.**” People, who are living in a wicked world, are over-stressed beyond their capacity. As a result, their love grows cold. They become indifferent toward one another. It’s hard to find people who genuinely care for others, including some doctors and lawyers. What they want is money, not caring about people.

So, what should we do when burnt out due to a highly stressed lifestyle and environment? Of course, we should try to love one another more and more, not less and less. But without good self-care, we become burnt out; our love is doomed to grow cold. And our relationship with others, including our loved ones, gets hurt and suffers.

Sometimes, we must slow down, pay attention to ourselves, and learn to care for ourselves. That’s the first step in the act of love we should take in our distressed world. And we will be able to love one another deeply and from the heart. Self-care is different from being selfish. It’s an essential Christian discipline as God’s chosen people. Jesus said the one who stands firm to the end would be saved. (Mt. 24:12b)

As I grow older, I, from time to time, don’t want to be bothered by others. I often wish to remain alone. But today’s passage challenges me to be proactive in loving one another. Many people need my loving care. Living a holy life means loving one person at a time and from the heart. When we do so, we have new energy from above. Jesus said to his disciples, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” (Jn. 13:34-35)

***Third, we should live by the word of God. (1:23-2:3)*** In this section, 1:23-2:3, Saint Peter’s primary point is that Christians should hold on to the living word of God as their priority. Look at verses 23-25. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through God’s living and enduring word. For, ‘All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.” Here, Saint Peter points out that God’s salvation work in us began when the seed of God’s living word was planted in our hearts, as explained in the Parable of the Seed in the synoptic gospels. (Mt.13:1-15; Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-10). When the gospel seed is planted in good heart soil, it grows day and night until it produces a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown. (Mk. 4:1-20)

When Saint Peter mentions “imperishable seed” as opposed to “perishable seed,” it refers to the Scripture, particularly the gospel of Christ Jesus preached to them. More fundamentally, imperishable seed refers to Christ Jesus himself. Many early Christians in Asia Minor hadn’t seen Jesus in person yet experienced a new life in Christ Jesus when they believed the gospel messages. But that’s just the beginning of God’s salvation work in them. They should be sanctified continually through the work of the Spirit of Jesus in them.

Look at verse 1. “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” In this verse, Saint Peter urges his audience again to live a morally pure life. He already said in 1:14 that they should not conform to the evil desires they had when they lived in ignorance.

When we read the list of evil desires and sinful behaviors mentioned in this verse, we know that they are wrong: all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Yet, we are often blinded to admit the same evilness inside of us.

Why is it so? It’s because, in our sinful tendency, we can quickly look at the speck of sawdust in others’ eyes but fail to see or pay no attention to the plank in our own eyes. Why is it so? It’s often a result of sheer ignorance or lack of emotional intelligence. But it also is intentional denial due to our pride and self-righteousness. Unless we are humble and honest to ourselves and before God, we become oblivious to our spiritual condition and don’t grow in the wholesomeness of God’s grace. We need a good reflection of our inner self through a spiritual mirror. (pic#B) What is it? It’s the Bible, the word of God.

Look at verses 2 and 3. “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” When a newborn baby sucks a milk bottle, he looks cute. And the baby grows daily as he craves it more and more. When Saint Peter said we should crave pure spiritual milk, he didn’t mean that his readers are all spiritual babies. Some of them have been Christians for 30 years or more. He was using an analogy that, like newborn babies, we should crave God’s word.

It reminds us of what Simon Peter said to Jesus in response to his question. When Jesus saw many among those who followed turned back and no longer followed him, he asked his disciples, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (Jn. 6:68)

I am so thankful to the Lord for leading me to study the word of God at UBF since I was a young college student. The original name of UBF in Korean is “**University Student Bible Reading Fellowship – 대학생성경읽기선교회.”** It was a Bible Reading Fellowship. Later, God inspired many of us to preach the gospel to the world. But it started with Bible reading. I think it’s good to go back to our original calling to read and study the Bible. It’s good to read the Bible in the group and share our thoughts on God’s words. Listening to a pastor’s sermon once a week is good, but not enough to grow mature and strong spiritually. We need to have a spiritual craving for God’s word.

At the beginning of 2023, I made a small decision to read the Bible regularly, at least three chapters daily. It would take 10 to 20 minutes per day. If I use the Bible apps, it may take even less. And I can read the whole Bible at least once this year. I pray to listen to the living voice of God. I believe that it will nourish my soul. Through my observation as a pastor, I notice that people who nurture their souls regularly with spiritual milk make spiritual progress in whatever situation they face.

Our life in 2023 will be challenging in many ways. It’s not going to be easy. Yet, we have a great future ahead of us through Christ Jesus. May we live a wholesome life of faith by putting our hope in the glorious resurrection. May we learn to self-care and love one another more deeply from the heart. May we nourish our souls through God’s words daily. Living a holy life is challenging but greatly rewarding because, in all we do, we grow to be more like loving God our Father.