

Living in the Negative World

1 Peter 1:13-21

March 12th, 2023

1. Set your _____ completely on Jesus not present _____ . (1:13)
2. Be _____ not _____. (1:14-16)
3. Live in fear of _____ not _____. (1:17-21)
4. Applying the Word
 - a. Has God become your Father through _____ in the death of His Son?
 - b. Are you willing to be _____ and _____?

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on 1 Peter 1:13-21

1. Have you noticed a shift from a positive to neutral to negative view of Christianity in America over time? If so, in what ways have you noticed that shift?
2. Verse 13 begins with “therefore,” indicating that everything that precedes this verse is the basis for what Peter will say next. Summarize the basis for Peter’s command in this verse and consider how it impacts our call to holiness in verse 15.
3. Is it possible to intentionally choose what you set your hope upon? (v. 13) What are some specific ways you can prepare your mind for action? What would be the opposite of preparing your mind for action?
4. How do holiness and conformity to the world contrast with each other?
5. Why is it important that our personal, practical holiness flow downstream from an appreciation of the holiness of God?
6. How do each of the descriptions about our redemption in Christ in verses 18-21 fuel our personal holiness and fear of God?

Some questions partially adapted from Knowing the Bible: 1 Peter by Crossway.

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Big idea: Living faithfully while out of place requires intentional hope, holiness, and fear rooted in the gospel.

Intro

Last February in an article in *First Things*, cultural analyst Aaron Renn described three distinct stages of American secularization and the place of Christianity in America:

- Positive World (Pre-1994): Society at large retains a mostly *positive* view of Christianity. To be known as a good, churchgoing man remains part of being an upstanding citizen. Publicly being a Christian is a status-enhancer. Christian moral norms are the basic moral norms of society and violating them can bring negative consequences.
- Neutral World (1994–2014): Society takes a *neutral* stance toward Christianity. Christianity no longer has privileged status but is not disfavored. Being publicly known as a Christian has neither a positive nor a negative impact on one's social status. Christianity is a valid option within a pluralistic public square. Christian moral norms retain some residual effect.
- Negative World (2014–Present): Society has come to have a *negative* view of Christianity. Being known as a Christian is a social negative, particularly in the elite domains of society. Christian morality is expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order. Subscribing to Christian moral views or violating the secular moral order brings negative consequences.

Why 2014? The Obergefell supreme court decision that legalized same sex marriage in all states, quick pace of cultural change especially on issues of sexuality.

Examples – 2012 Louie Giglio was invited to pray at the inauguration of President Obama, largely over his work rescuing victims of human trafficking, but there was fierce opposition when people found sermons of his against homosexuality.

Just this week read of a school district in Arizona that for years has partnered with a local Christian university to place student teachers from their education program but the school board canceled that agreement because they said the worldview of the university could make students feel unsafe, that despite never receiving a negative complaint about the student teachers.

Of course, there are some weaknesses to this overly simplistic framework.

America and American Christians aren't the center of the world. Believers around the world have lived in a "negative world" all along, and many experiencing much worse opposition.

Not every place in America is the same. Some pockets will be more hostile, some more friendly to a Biblical perspective. There's a divide that could run not between decades but between urban, suburban, and rural settings. We're probably in a "more friendly" area, which is partly why we've had such an influx of people from California and Washington over the past couple years.

It's overly focused on one area of Christian worldview – human sexuality. But that appears to be the primary battleground of the culture right now, and not a battle that Christians initiated.

Even a negative world could get much worse – hostile world, actively persecuting world, closed country.

Opposition isn't all bad. A "positive world" allows large chunks of people to live under the umbrella of respectability that came from calling themselves Christians without actually being converted. Much of the reduction in numbers of those who call themselves Christians in America is actually just the shedding of those who were not really saved but it was advantageous to affiliate themselves with a church. But if affiliation with Christ comes at a cost, only those

If this is the case (that we are now living in a negative world), how should we live?

Some emphasize practical steps like ensuring your income isn't dependent on public goodwill or creating or supporting independent institutions like schools and universities. And there is wisdom to these approaches.

But I want to see how Peter instructed the early believers living in a clearly negative world in the 1st century. Whatever other cultural strategies believers take, however we assess the world around us, however things develop in coming decades, however it fits in with the return of Christ, we know God's Word applies and is ever relevant.

Three commands form the shape of this passage into three sections.

1. Set your hope completely on Jesus not present acceptance. (1:13)
 - a. Grammatically "prepare your minds for action" and "keep sober" modify the one command in the verse "fix your hope."
 - i. **1 Peter 1:13** Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace...
 - ii. So let's start with the command and see how the other phrases explain it.
 - b. "Hope" brackets this passage
 - i. 1:3 – God has caused us to be born again to a living hope
 - ii. 1:21 – your faith and hope are in God
 - iii. Hope is faith with a future orientation – it looks ahead to the full revelation of Jesus Christ – when He comes for us or we go to Him.
 1. In v. 8 Peter has already explained that although we don't see Him now, we love Him and believe in Him by faith, but one day that faith will be sight and we'll be with Him.
 2. And we are to fix our hope completely on Him and our future with Him.
 - a. Not cultural acceptance, because we may not get that. We can't assume if we are winsome enough and provide enough public good that we'll be accepted in the broader culture, not if we're in a "negative world."
 - b. No job security, overflowing finances, but Christ completely.
 - c. We have to prepare our minds to do this.
 - i. It's a great word picture here that some of your translations capture with the phrase "gird your minds for action."
 1. In the ancient world both men and women usually wore flowing robes. We know this which is why when we do a kids play with Bible characters we just put them in a robe and we know they are transported back to Bible times. Robes were great for comfort but not for combat. Any strenuous running or work required girding up the robe by wrapping it up and around yourself so that you could move unhindered. The closest modern equivalent is in our phrase, "rolling up your sleeves." It means you're ready to work.
 2. What we think affects what we feel and what we do. And our thinking easily drifts into laziness or foggy.
 3. "Sober" helps us understand "girding up the loins of our minds" also. In contrast to drunkenness that clouds our ability to think clearly and leads people to compromised decision making that they wouldn't do if properly inhibited, sober thinking is clear-minded.

- ii. Are you preparing your mind for sustained, clear thinking?
 - 1. How do you prepare your body for sustained, physical activity?
 - a. Stretching, warming up, use – it might be as simple as a daily walk when you get older or hitting the gym or crossfit.
 - 2. How do you do that with your mind?
 - a. **Hebrews 5:14** But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.
 - i. Don't just consume movies, but ask questions, "Is sin presented without consequences? What is the view of the good life?"
 - b. **2 Corinthians 10:5b** *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ
 - c. Instagram reels and Tiktok prepare our minds for quick, 15 second bites of content. If it doesn't capture attention in 15 seconds, we move on. That is the opposite of preparing your mind.
 - d. Read old books, books that stretch you, fiction and nonfiction.

2. Be **holy** not **conformed**. (1:14-16)

- a. This one section has two commands that are really the positive and negative of the same thing.
 - i. Negatively – do not be conformed
 - ii. Positively – but be holy
 - iii. "Be holy" can be seen as the opposite of "be conformed" because to be holy is to be distinct, set apart for God but to be conformed is to follow the pattern of the world apart from God. It's to fit in rather than stand out.
- b. Do not be conformed to former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.
 - i. Prior to coming to Christ, the original readers of this letter were not Jewish but pagans, following the Roman religions of worshiping many gods or the emperor as god.
 - ii. Doriani – they bowed to gods who possessed *greater power*, but not *greater virtue*, than humans. Their "gods" followed their passions, so the people did the same.
 - 1. Like Ares who was moody and unreliable and had an affair with Aphrodite, the wife of his brother.
 - 2. It's no wonder that in v. 18 he says they were redeemed from their futile way of life inherited from their forefathers.
 - iii. There are patterns of behavior – lusts – that might have characterized you prior to coming to Christ if you came to faith in Christ later. Even if not, they are patterns in the world around us. The command is not to be conformed to them.
- c. But believers are now God's children, and are to be holy because He is holy.
 - i. Quotes from Leviticus, could be Lev. 20:26 or one of the other 5 times in Leviticus where he says this.
 - ii. God Himself is Holy.
 - 1. Sanchez – God declares himself to be holy, he means that he is dedicated to himself, to his own service; everything he does is for his own name and glory. He alone is uniquely

distinct from all else; he alone is an uncreated being; he alone dwells in unapproachable light; therefore, nothing common or unclean can come into his presence.

iii. So, when we are called and come to Him in faith, we're adopted in as His child, we also are to be holy in all our behavior. (v. 15)

1. That's the fountain of our behavior. Rather than starting way downstream with questions like, "where is the specific line that makes a movie unwatchable, how far exactly can I go with my boyfriend/girlfriend, can I say this word, can I read this book, what specific clothes should I wear?"
2. We start down at the foundation or fountain.
 - a. God is Holy.
 - b. God has made you Holy in Jesus. He gave you holiness as a gift.
 - c. Now, be holy in all your behavior.
 - i. Live in a way that is set apart to God.
 - ii. That does filter down to practical decisions but when we start at the practical decisions we become rule-based and nitpicky against others.
3. "Holiness for us, then, is not merely getting away from sin but also must include getting close to God, who is the very definition of holiness." Unknown

d. If we live increasingly in a negative world, we must guard against the temptation to conform to the world to avoid the pressure of opposition.

3. Live in fear of **God** not **man**. (1:17-21)

- a. The call to holiness continues, now with an appeal to conduct ourselves in a manner suitable to our relationship with God as Father.
 - i. If the very God who is the judge of all the earth, who will *impartially* judge all humanity according to their works, is now your Father, how should you then live?
 - ii. Not in casualness before God but in Fatherly fear.
 1. He's Father – I can come near to His tender strength.
 2. Fear – I must come near in respect, reverence, holy awe.
- iii. A good dad is approachable, gentle, warm, playful, present. But he also teaches, corrects, disciplines, warns. Those aren't contradictory but are part of the package.
 1. If you're a dad with young kids, I hope you are engaged, present, tender. I hope it's impossible for you to lay on the ground without being attacked. But I also hope if your four-year-old screams "No!" and runs away when you tell him to put his toys away (assuming it's an achievable request), that there are consequences. They need to know they are loved and under authority.
 2. In the same way, He's Father and we call Him that, but there's an appropriate fear.
- b. We no longer fear the judgment seat that a verdict of "guilty" will come down, because our guilt is gone and His grace has come.
 - i. But there's a judgment of rewards that identify whether we've wasted or invested the life He has given.

- ii. **2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.
- iii. “God’s tenderness and love as Father is mingled with his judgment and the fear that should mark Christians in this world. Apparently, Peter did not think that the two themes negated each other but are complementary.” Thomas Schreiner
- c. “During the time of our stay on earth”
 - i. Lit. the time spent in a foreign land – sojourner language again.
- d. Why should we conduct ourselves in fear during the time of our stay on earth?
 - i. We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ
 - 1. Looks back to the Passover lamb that was to be unblemished, the blood was to be shed and painted on the door frame of the house, and judgement would “pass over” that home in the final plague against Egypt before Israel was finally let go. And then year after year the Jewish people reenacted the Passover through the Passover meal, anticipating the true lamb of God.
 - ii. The life and death of Jesus was not an afterthought but was determined before history ever began.
 - iii. We live in this privileged time, in the last times, and He has come for us.
 - iv. So, our faith and hope are in God.

4. Applying the Word

- a. Has God become your Father through **faith** in the death of His Son?
 - i. The whole context of this passage is speaking to those who have already come to faith in Christ.
- b. Are you willing to be **different** and **disliked**?
 - i. To be holy is to be set apart, to not be conformed, to be different. And yet there is a strong pull in most people to conform.
 - ii. There is also a strong pull to be liked.
 - 1. Are you willing to be disliked?
 - a. If we live in a negative world, or if it becomes more that way, are you willing to be disliked because of your faith in Jesus?
 - 2. Although ...
 - a. Elders are to have a “good reputation with those outside *the church*” 1 Tim. 3:17
 - b. It shouldn’t be that we are disliked because we are rude, separatistic, lazy at work, stirring up trouble, or unable to take a joke or laugh at ourselves.
 - iii. When I was sick last week I started rereading the Lord of the Rings books by Tolkien. I was struck by several quotes that will undoubtedly make their way into coming sermons. But I just wanted to share one as we wrap up. It’s one of the more famous quotes.
 - 1. When Frodo Baggins learns that dark forces are rising and even his peaceful little shire that has been a place of safety, gentleness, and calm is now at danger, he starts to despair. “I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo. “So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

- a. We might think, “I wish I lived in the positive time of the past.” Well, that’s not up to us to decide. But it does mean our lives are meaningful. God determines the very times and places of our lives. You’re here, now, strategically. Your life now matters.



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Negative World (2014–Present)

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