

## I PETER

Love, Faith, Rejoicing

September 02, 2012

### I. Love for God, Faith in God, Rejoicing in God

A. **I Peter 1:3-9** . . . *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, [5] who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, [7] so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; [8] and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, [9] obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*

### B. Pray

### II. Not seeing Him, yet loving Him

A. **I Peter 1:8a** . . . And though you have not seen Him, you love Him.

1. It seems to me that this is quite a statement about any group of believers, given the up-and-down condition of the church down through the years. Yet Peter says it as if it were a fact already, rather than a hoped for future reality.
2. Now admittedly, the first readers of Peter's letter were those who both heard and responded to the purest form of the message left by Christ for His disciples to pass on to those who came to saving faith.
3. And without question, we have that pure form of the message, today, in the holy scriptures, but it doesn't seem to be as loudly proclaimed as it was when Jesus spoke it.
4. Now the reason I say the purest form of the gospel is not loudly proclaimed today is because the most telling attribute and most important requirement of loving Jesus is obeying Him – not selectively or in part, but in whole.
5. Since Peter says they loved Jesus, they must also have been fulfilling the attribute and requirement of obeying Him.

B. Now you may be wondering why I would say these first generation Christians must have been fulfilling the attribute and requirement of obedience in relation to loving Jesus. Why would I assume his readers clearly understood the inseparable link between loving Jesus and obeying Him? To answer that question, I want us to look at nine scriptures from six different New Testament Epistles concerning the teaching and practices of the first generation Christians. I think you will see that the first Christians were taught that obedience to Christ and love for Christ were inseparable. In other words, they were taught to obey Christ and in that way fulfill the most telling attribute and most important requirement of loving Jesus.

1. **Romans 6:17-18** . . . But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
2. **Philippians 2:12-13** . . . So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; [13] for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
3. **I Timothy 1:5** . . . But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.
4. **Hebrews 5:8-10** . . . Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. [9] And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, [10] being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.
5. **I Peter 1:1b-2** . . . Who are chosen [2] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.
6. John, in his first epistle, makes a strong case for the unbreakable link between knowing and loving Jesus on the one hand and obeying Him on the other. Here are four examples:
  - a. **I John 1:6-7** . . . If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; [7] but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

- b. **I John 2:4** . . . The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;
  - c. **I John 3:17** . . . But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?
  - d. **I John 4:20** . . . If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.
7. The point I would like us to see is that Peter could honestly assert that his readers loved Jesus, because like all Christians of their time, they understood the need to obey Jesus as a necessary part of loving Him, and they put that understanding into practice.
- C. In some ways, we are like Peter's first readers. We have not seen Jesus and we do not see God, yet we are taught to love them both. So how can we love our Savior and Lord, and our Loving Father given the fact that we cannot see them?
- 1. The answer is no more mysterious for us than it was for that first generation of Christians. As Jesus said, we love him by obeying him. And He also said that if we do not obey Him, it is because we do not love Him (**John 14:15,21,23**).
  - 2. In principle, the path to loving Jesus seems simple enough. But in practical reality, those who have made an honest attempt to live a life of obedience out of a desire to love Jesus and our glorious God, know that it is not that simple. Obedience is neither natural to our flesh nor to the world around us, which makes obedience far easier to talk about than practice. So what are we to do? Let me give you several suggestions for making serious progress in loving God as you ought.
  - 3. **First**, make it your daily, and your situation by situation aim to treasure Jesus above all else. **Matthew 13:44** . . . The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
  - 4. **Second**, make it your aim to persevere at putting to death all known sin in your life so that should you sin, it is because of a weak or careless moment rather than the next time in the continuing practice of a known sin or sinful habit.

- a. It is possible you currently have enough known sinful habits and practices that you are unable to give the kind of obedience that shows God and His son, Jesus Christ, that you love Him as you ought. However, you can show God that you are serious about getting to the place of loving Him as you ought by putting forth the kind of effort that says you want to obey Him as you ought.
  - b. Now remember, putting off things like fleshly desires, irrational fears, selfish interests, anger and resentment, pride and whatever else calls you away from obedience to God is only the first half of making progress in loving Jesus. The other half is putting on true godliness, and then obeying accordingly.
5. **Third**, purposefully and consciously draw near to God. Talk to Him. Fellowship with Him. Set your mind on Him. And when you do these things, God comes to you. As God says in **Revelation 3:20** . . . Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.
- a. The point here is that God wants intimate fellowship with us, and on our part, obedience opens the door to God's personal presence – a presence that we can enter for the purpose of enjoying intimate communion and companionship with Him. Listen to what Jesus says about this:
  - b. **John 14:21** . . . He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.
  - c. **John 14:23** . . . Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.
  - d. **John 15:9-10** . . . Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. [10] If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
6. **Fourth**, consciously and intentionally enter each day with the goal of either gaining new ground of dying to sin and obeying God, or holding the ground gained so you do not fall back in any way.
- D. One more thought – a definition of love that I have found helpful in relation to dying to self and living for God is this: Love is seeking the good of everyone who is in any way affected by my choices and behavior.

### III. Not seeing Him, yet believing in Him and rejoicing as a result

A. **I Peter 1:8b** . . . And though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

1. It is interesting to note that Peter did not put faith in Jesus first and love for Jesus second. I am not sure why, but if I had to guess, it is because the kind of faith that Peter is referring to is not the initial saving faith, but the settled faith of an obedient, loving, and maturing Christian that is not easily shaken or discouraged. Such settled faith in Jesus comes from our daily experiences of being loved, cared for, provided for, and protected by our Lord Jesus, himself, as we obey Him and live for Him and serve Him.
2. Peter's reference to not seeing Jesus yet believing in Him was made very real when Jesus said to Thomas after Thomas initially doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (**John 20:29**).
3. The first point to take note of here is that faith is essential to the Christian life. Today, our faith is sightless faith in that we do not see Jesus in the flesh, and yet we believe in Him. But on the other hand, our faith is an affirmed faith—by means of our daily experiences with the presence and work of God in and around us.

B. Peter goes on to say that our faith leads to rejoicing

1. This is the second reference by Peter to great rejoicing on the Christian's part. The first had to do with rejoicing over the salvation yet to come.
  - a. This occasion for rejoicing has to do with rejoicing over who we know Christ to be, what He has done for us, what He has done for the Church, how He has changed our life as individuals and as a community of believers, what He continues to do for us each day, and what He will do for us in the life to come.
  - b. All this is cause for rejoicing in the one who lives by faith in God.
2. Now if faith leads to rejoicing, what are we to rejoice in? After all, Peter just finished saying (**vs. 6-7**) his readers were enduring trials and hardship. So what would give them cause to rejoice?
3. Paul answers that question in **Philippians 4:4** . . . Rejoice **in** the Lord [Himself] always; again I will say, rejoice!
  - a. What Paul is telling us is that we are to rejoice **in** the Lord, Himself—not because of the Lord, or as if you must rejoice in the name of the Lord even when we do not feel like rejoicing.

- b. The point here is that when Jesus is the both the **cause** and the **focus** of our rejoicing – which is what it means to rejoice in the Lord – there is always reason to rejoice regardless of the circumstances.
- 4. Returning to Peter’s words – Peter goes on to say that this joy we have **IN** the Lord is beyond definition or beyond clear explanation, and it is full of glory – that is, it comes from a godly life so that it is both sincere and pure, or untainted by hypocrisy.
  - a. Remember what we talked about in relation to love and obedience being inseparably linked? When we are seriously and persistently pursuing such love as that for Jesus, we will be consistently drawing closer and closer to doing away with the practice of all known sin in our lives – which means we will be drawing closer and closer to rejoicing from a sincere and pure heart.
  - b. I am not saying we will no longer sin, but we can get to the place where we no longer practice any known sin or repeat the same sin over and over.
  - c. And it is as we approach and finally dwell in that condition that the kind of rejoicing Peter is talking about wells up within us and comes out of us.

IV. Finally, Peter says the outcome of our faith is the salvation of our souls

- A. **I Peter 1:9** . . . Obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.
- B. When Peter speaks of the outcome of our faith being the salvation of our souls, he is not talking only about eternal salvation.
  - 1. You see, saving faith, according to the scriptures and the writings of the early church, begins with repentance, travels through the life-changing activities of sanctification, includes godly service, and leads to or ultimately results in eternal life with God.
  - 2. In other words, saving faith is not just focused on saving you from an eternity in hell, it is also focused on saving you from a life of sin now. Let me put it this way:
    - a. The salvation that saves your soul is focused on delivering you from the power and practice of sin so you can proceed to live a godly life while living here on the earth.
    - b. And the salvation saves your soul is focused on bringing you safely home to glory where you will live with God, and Christ, and the angels, and all the godly people from the beginning of time to the end of time.

C. Paul says this same thing this way in **Romans 6:22** . . .But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

D. So once again, our salvation is both eternal in nature and also present in nature. Jesus died to save us from the enslaving power of sin and the persistent practice of sin in this life just as much as He died to save us from the eternal wages of sin. May we treasure our full salvation. And may we, by our faith and perseverance, actively pursue our present salvation, and in so doing, affirm our longing for our future salvation.

## V. Conclusion

A. **I Peter 1:8-9** . . . and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, [9] obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.