

If you brought a Bible with you, take that and turn to 1 Peter. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be one in the back of the seat in front of you. You're welcome to use that. If you don't have a Bible at all, you could take it with you today. We are right in the second week, so kind of in the middle, of studying this little letter the apostle Peter wrote 2,000 years ago to a group of churches in modern-day Turkey.

If you missed last week (I know many of you were out for various reasons), I'm sorry. We're not going to have any time to really cover what we did last week, but the context we tried to set last week in terms of our culture and why this letter speaks so clearly and powerfully to us now is really important. If you have time this week (maybe you have already done this), I would encourage you if you want to catch back up with us in the series to go listen to last week. It will really help set the context for, even, what we're talking about today, but then, of course, the next two weeks.

Today and the next two weeks we'll finish out studying this letter, and I'm just trusting and praying, regardless of where you jump in with us, it will be powerful and God's Spirit will minister to you. I do want to say this. How many of you are graduating? Raise your hand. It's okay. Somebody last service was like, "Yeah. Finally." It's like they had been here for eight years.

I just want you to know we love you and we are excited for you. You can put your hands down. Some of you, I know you're the first person in your family to ever graduate from college, so that's a significant, significant deal. We just want you to know we celebrate with you. I'm not going to be anywhere near that coliseum, but I'm glad some other people love you enough to go in there with you. I'll just pray for you from around here.

Why don't we jump in here? If you're in 1 Peter, we're going to be in chapter 1, verses 13 through chapter 2, verse 10. Let me just give you the point of this section we're going to study today. Last week, Peter put in front of the church this vision of their salvation. He put the vision of their salvation in front of the church because it's stunning, and it transforms us because it's beautiful.

He knows if we are as a church to persevere in the midst of a culture that is hostile to Christianity, just like the culture was to the churches in this day, we need a vision of this gospel, of this salvation, of this inheritance that is ours that is so stunning that it transforms our character. Today, he's going to continue

that thought. He's not going to go away from it. Peter didn't go, "Do you know what? I think Beau is going to stop at verse 12, so I'm going to just stop with him, and then I'm going to write the letter." He didn't do that. He just wrote the letter.

It's one letter. It's one argument all the way through. This morning, what he's going to say... He's going to take a couple of rabbit trails here and there, but his main point is as we as Christians, in the midst of a culture that is increasingly hostile to those of us who are Christians, put our faith and hope on this salvation, on this good news he talked about in chapter 1, verses 1 through 13, it is going to necessarily transform us and conform us to be more like God.

That's going to be his argument. As you put your hope totally on Jesus and who he is and what he's done and what he's going to do when he returns, it's going to transform us. It's going to conform us and make us more like God. In making us more like God, that is going to empower us as Christians to persevere and to flourish, even in the midst of persecution. Beyond that, it's actually going to empower us as Christians to be a blessing to the very ones who are persecuting us. Does that make sense?

What he's going to say here is beautiful, and again, he's going to do it by rooting our identity in Christ and what he's done for us. He's going to tell us what God has done for us and encourage and exhort us to live out of it. Let me just pray again. I know Ben just prayed, but let's just pray we would be stunned by what we read, that it would captivate our hearts, that it would...

Man, some of you just have such a jaded view of Christianity. You think it's about more regulations, but it's not. It's about what we're going to read about this morning, what God has done for us. That is what transforms us. Let's just pray it does. Even those of you who know what I'm going to say and you've studied this letter (maybe you've even taught on it and long since forgotten the beauty of what's in it), that the Lord will transform us.

Father, we are thankful this morning for your Word. We pray now by your Spirit you would come and you would stun us by the beauty of who you are and what you've done and what you're doing in our lives, in our church, and in the world. God, come now and powerfully speak to us through this letter you inspired Peter to write. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

We did spend a great deal of time last week talking about our culture. If you missed it, one of the particular things we talked about was the god of our culture being personal freedom and autonomy. That's really the god we worship, a god that is what we want to do, essentially. We become our own gods, and life is about our own desires and our own longings of heart and our own freedom and being able to express that freedom how we see fit.

We talked about how disastrous that is for everybody last week, but what Peter is going to write in chapter 1 verses 13 through chapter 2, verses 10 is going to fly in the face of that culture. It is going to directly and inevitably confront this god that is worshiped in our culture. He's going to say, "No. That's not God. This is God. No. You are not your own. You are God's, and you've been purchased with a price. Therefore, you are to live not based on your own desires but based on God's desires for you as his people he has purchased."

Are you following? What he's going to say is, "Listen! We're Christians, and that means we live differently and we become a counterculture, an alternative society, of God's people here in this world." Tullian Tchividjian is a writer. I've shared this quote with you before.

He says, "Christians make a difference in the world by being different from this world; they don't make a difference by being the same. We need to remember that God has established his church as an alternative society, not to compete with or copy this world, but to offer a refreshing alternative to it. When we [as a church] forget this, we inadvertently communicate [to the world and] to our culture that we have nothing [as God's people] unique to offer, nothing deeply spiritual or profoundly transforming. Tragically, this leaves many in our world looking elsewhere for the difference they crave."

God has made us into his people so they would look here, and that's what Peter is going to argue. Listen, church. Whether you know it or realize it or not, our culture is trying to disciple you. Beyond even trying, our culture is discipling you. Every advertisement, every new fashion and trend going on in culture... The culture is trying to disciple you, and as Christians moving through this culture and attempting to do so faithfully, we need to get in our minds and ringing in our hearts Jesus' refrain from the Sermon on the Mount over and over where he says, "You have heard it said *this*, but I say to you *this*."

What Jesus says contradicts what culture has said. That's what Peter is going to do to these Christians who are living in the midst of this culture that is hostile to their faith. He's going to say, "Listen. The culture is telling you that you are your own, church." Our culture is telling us, "You are your own. Therefore, whatever you want to do, whatever you desire to do, you can do it. You're free to do what pleases you."

Peter is going to say, "But I say to you, you are not your own. You have been purchased by God at great cost to himself. Therefore, you don't live to please yourself; you live to please the one who has purchased you." Do you see the distinction? That's what Peter is going to say here, that we are God's people he has purchased at great cost to himself. Therefore, we live to please him.

That's a different message than the culture. It's a way different message than our culture, so let's look at how he does this. He does it by using striking and stunning language about how God has purchased us as

his people to make us more like himself. Look at verse 13. In verses 1 through 12, again, he has articulated this vision, this salvation, this inheritance, this living hope that's ours because we've been born again through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

He says, "**Therefore...**" In light of this great salvation, in light of this inheritance, in light of this gospel and this living hope... "**...preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully [totally] on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**" In other words, our faith is a forward-looking faith.

Yes. We look back to the cross. We look back to our old way of life and what God has done, but we're always looking forward as Christians. We're always looking to Jesus returning and coming and completing what he inaugurated through his resurrection to realizing our salvation we've tasted now more fully when he comes. That's the argument throughout the letter. What he's saying is, "Look and put your hope totally and completely on that." As Christians, that's where our hope is. You might go, "How do you do that?" Well, he tells us.

1. *Have a mind that is prepared for action.* That's what he says in verse 13. In other words, in the original language it says, "Gird up your loins, the loins of your mind, for action," which, to us, means nothing but awkwardness. You're like, "What is that? Gird up your loins? We don't talk like that." In the first century, for these people he's writing to, it's not awkward. It makes perfect sense, because they wore tunics like many in many places in the world still do, especially the men.

They wore these tunics, and when it was time to get to work, when it was time for action, they would take their tunics, and they would tuck them in their belts so as to free up their legs so they could actually do the work. It's the equivalent of saying, "Hey! Roll up your sleeves and get ready," or for those of you who like to sag your pants, "Pull up your pants and let's get to work!" You don't work with your pants falling off. "Pull up your pants and let's get to work."

This is what he's saying. This is not going to be a walk in the park. You're going to need to be prepared. Get your mind right. Gird up the loins of your mind. Be prepared. Then he says to be sober-minded, which is, of course, the opposite of being drunk. Be self-controlled in your mind. Don't be blown about to and fro by every wind of culture and every desire of your own flesh. You be sober-minded. You be self-controlled in your mind and in your thoughts and be ready to work.

In other words, what he's saying is, "Set your hope totally on God and his return through his Son, Jesus Christ, and be ready." I did a wedding last night, and there were three brothers. One of the brothers was

getting married. There was this moment (I was out there with them before we walked in)... The mom had lost her husband a long time ago, so it was this really sweet story where she has these three boys.

She was so proud. She was just overcome with emotion, and she was sort of kissing them, especially the one who was getting married, right before she walked down. She just started weeping. It was like she couldn't keep it in. She was just kind of there, and the brothers were just trying to do the manly thing, the testosterone thing. "Hey, mom. Get your mind right. We're about to do this. It's game time, Mom. I appreciate the sentiment, but you can't be doing this right now. Get your mind right. We have a wedding to be a part of."

That's sort of what Peter is saying. Peter is not a coach. He's not filled with that view of manhood and testosterone, but he's saying, "Get ready, church. Set your hope on Jesus and be ready. Roll up your sleeves and be ready." John Calvin, who is a guy who lived a long time ago, wrote a letter, and he said, "[Our sufferings in this life] should, moreover, serve us for medicines to purge us from worldly affections, and retrench [remove] what is superfluous..." A big word that means really unnecessary or unessential.

It should remove what is unessential "...in us, since they are [our sufferings we're feeling and going to feel in the days ahead] to us the messengers of death, we ought to learn to [live as Christians with] one foot raised to take our departure when it shall please God." That's what Peter is saying. You need to have that mindset, a mindset where as Christians you know you're exiles, so you have one foot raised, and you're ready and longing for the return of Jesus Christ.

This is what gets at the heart of what he's trying to say. When this mindset happens, it will inevitably... There's no question about it. When you really have your hope set totally on Jesus and his return, it will inevitably transform us and form our character to that of God's, which is what he says next in verse 14. Have your hope set on Jesus. Have your mind ready and self-controlled.

2. *Don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.* **"As obedient children..."** Because we're now sons and daughters of God. **"...do not be conformed to the passions [the desires] of your former ignorance..."** It's not just, "Roll up your sleeves." It's, "Roll up your sleeves and do something." He says, "Don't be conformed to the former ignorance and the patterns you walked in before you were a Christian. Don't let the unsanctified longings of your heart, of fallen humanity, control you."

Like we spoke about last week, this is what little children do. They just let whatever they want to do control them. Their desires? There's no filter. There's no self-restraint. He's saying, "You're not to be like those children. Obedient children are what we are as Christians. We're still children, but we're obedient children

who are now, because we're Christians, not trusting in our own desires, but we're trusting in God's Word to us, his instruction to us as a good Father, and we're obeying his instruction to us."

Listen, church. I know even in this room for many of you, this is where you're at. You're trying to be an obedient child of God, but yet you're still very prone and tempted to go back to your old habits of life. Maybe because you're discouraged. Maybe because it's just the lust of your eyes or your flesh. You just feel like you have to have that. Maybe your life is a train wreck, so that's where you want to go for comfort.

Day in and day out, even this morning, this is a very real deal for you. You are prone and tempted to conform back to your old pattern of life. What Peter is saying, and what I would say to you as your pastor, is, "Don't do that. Keep your hope set totally on Jesus and don't do that." Don't go back to your old way of life God has rescued you from. Trust and entrust yourself to your Father.

3. *Conform to God's character by being holy.* Like an obedient child, do what he says. Don't conform to those old ways of life. Instead, he says, "Conform to God's character." That's what he goes to in verse 15. He says, **"...but [instead] as he [God] who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct..."** Your lifestyle. In all of your lifestyle. He says, **"...since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"**

This is what he's saying. We're not conformed to our old way of life. We're to be conformed as obedient children to God's holiness, because God is holy and he's our Father and he's conforming us and making us more like him. It's amazing to me this is where Peter goes, because remember what this letter is about. It's a letter of exhortation and encouragement to people who are suffering.

They're being alienated by their culture because they're Christians, so you would think he would just go right into their suffering and start talking about it. He doesn't do that. We saw last week he starts with this view of salvation, this vision of what God has done. Then he says, "Be holy." That's not the first thing I think of when you come into my office and you say, "I'm really struggling to persevere in my faith."

"Do you know what? You just need to be holy." Some of you would just slap me and leave the room, but this is where he goes. There's something about holiness Peter understands that we don't. For most of us, our view of holiness is just rules. Some of the rules are in the Bible, some of them aren't, but that's what holiness is. Just rules. If that's our view of holiness, we are missing the beauty of what God is inviting us into as he's inviting us in to obey him and live in line with his design.

In other words, what Peter is saying is, "If you want to persevere in faith, church, in the midst of a culture that is hostile to Christianity, then holiness is essential." That's amazing he says this. Most in our culture

(Christians included, and maybe even most of you) sort of live with this understanding that holiness or morality is an intensely personal matter, and it is.

It is personal. In fact, part of what Peter is saying here is, unless you are personally walking and living in holiness and being conformed more and more to the image of God then you may not be a Christian. If you're a real Christian who has really been born again to a living hope, you're actually going to conform and become more and more like God. Therefore, you're going to be more holy. If you're not, then you need to think about whether or not you're really a Christian.

We don't judge our Christian growth every day, so we don't wake up every morning and go, "Am I more holy today than I was yesterday?" You'll be a failure every day if you do that, but if you can't look back over the last year of your life, the last three years of your life, the last five years of your life and think, "Wow! The Holy Spirit of God in his grace is making me more like God even though I still struggle and have plenty of scars and temptations," then it is a good point to just pause and think through whether or not you really are a Christian and have the Spirit of God conforming you to the image of God.

Holiness is personal, and yet that's how most of us think about it. If we just leave it there, it doesn't go deep enough, because holiness is not just personal. It's also communal with communal implications. Let me just tell you what I'm saying. The idea that holiness is just personal comes out in statements like this: "Well, this is what I'm doing for me, so it doesn't really affect anybody else, so therefore, it's okay for me to do that."

Some of you say that and actually say that about your friends who are walking in an unholy way. Instead of running that brother or sister down in love and encouraging them, you just go, "Well, that's on them. That's what they want to do. It's none of my business." Peter is saying that's naïve. It's impossible for you personally in your holiness not to affect the whole. It's not the way God designed the world.

You know this just by virtue of your own life. My holiness affects my family. My son, my little boy? You don't think how I live and my character affects who he is and how he thinks about the world? Of course, it does. My wife went out of town this week to go to an orphan conference, the National Alliance for Orphans, so I had the three little ones and loved it.

Three kiddos under 3-1/2. We just had a great time, but do you know what I learned in the starkest of ways? My wife's beauty and godliness and servant heart affects our family, because she was gone, and there was a vacuum in our family of some of those things this weekend. Especially the beauty part. Her life and her character affect my family.

It's the same way in any community. If you're on a team, if you're a part of a workplace, you know that. It's not just what you do that affects the team. It doesn't matter who is doing what, everything affects the team in one way or another, and so it is with the church. Part of what Peter is saying here is not just, "You personally be holy." He's saying, "Your holiness personally affects the corporate holiness of this church, which affects how and whether or not we're able to persevere and flourish in the midst of a culture that is persecuting us."

Holiness is deeply personal, but to think of it as just personal doesn't go deep enough. It affects everybody. Peter is saying, "Be holy." Do you want to be able to persevere? Be holy, because without holiness your team is going to be dysfunctional. Your church is going to be dysfunctional. When the winds and the waves of culture come, you're going to just scatter.

That's why he starts here... It's amazing to think about his argument about holiness. Holiness is important for our community and not just yourself. When you get that, when I get that, it actually helps you want to be holy personally. When I understand what I do affects you because you're a brother or a sister in Christ of this church, that gives me yet another motivation to be holy, because it's not just about me. It's about the reputation of God, first and foremost, but it's about you too.

What I do or do not look at on my computer screen matters to you. How I treat my wife or do not treat my wife matters for you. Whether or not I confront my friends in my community about their sin matters for you. The same goes for you with me, but we don't think like that because we're so individualistic. We don't think in corporate terms unless we're forced to. Peter is saying, "The holiness of the community is important, especially if you want to persevere in this culture, brothers and sisters." That is so significant. He doesn't just say, "Be holy."

4. *Fear God.* He also says in verse 17 we're to fear God together as well. He says, "**And...**" In addition to being holy. "**...you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear [with reverent awe] throughout the time of your exile [here on earth]...**" In many ways, following Christ and persevering in our faith, especially in the midst of a hostile culture, actually comes down to fear.

Who do you fear? Do you fear God, or do you fear man? Peter's going to get into this. Peter was one, don't forget, who was crucified upside down, so he's not just sort of writing, "Hey, you need to fear God," and then he's unfamiliar with the struggles of fear. Peter struggled big-time with fear throughout his life. You have some of those stories in the Bible, such as the night when Jesus was betrayed.

He left him because he was afraid of what they were going to do to him if he stood with Jesus. Even after Jesus rose from the dead and healed Peter up and forgave him of that and commissioned him to go, Peter still struggled with fear. That's what part of Galatians is about. Paul and Peter had this big confrontation because Peter was acting in a hypocritical way because he cared what other people thought about him.

Peter knows what it's like to struggle with fear. As he's saying this and giving this counsel to these churches, he's simply echoing and repeating what Jesus taught him about how to persevere even though he's afraid of people and tempted toward that. This is what it says in Matthew 10, verses 28 through 31. This is Jesus. Jesus said this to his disciples as he was preparing them for suffering.

He said, **"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him [God] who can destroy both soul and body in hell."** You don't fear people. Who cares what people do to you? Why are you afraid of people when you have this ferocious, all-powerful God who could not only kill you like these people can, but he can take your soul and throw it into hell for eternity. "Why would you care what people think about you compared to him?" is what he's saying.

Then he goes on. I love this. He says, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you [church] are of more value than many sparrows."** I love this, because it holds in tension this reality God is, at the same time, this all-powerful God who can do whatever he wants including send people to hell for eternity, and yet, for those who are his sons and daughters, he's loving, and he knows the hairs on your head, and he cares about you.

Those things are not contradictory in Jesus' mind, apparently. They're harmonious, even if we can't understand them. The fear here is not a fear of this wicked tyrant, like many of us think of God, which is why so many of you are still running from him, but it's a fear of this all-powerful being who is a Father and loves us. It's this amazing mixture of God's character and who he is.

Peter is saying, "If you call on him as God who is a Father, fear him. Don't fear the world. Don't fear what they can do." When you really fear God and when I really fear God, we don't fear the world. Who cares what they say about us? Who cares if even they want to persecute and martyr us for our faith? This is what pleases God, and we're addicted to pleasing God, and we're being weaned off our addiction to pleasing man because we're afraid of them and what we think about them.

Do you know what? Do you know what leads us to fear God, to stand in reverent awe of him and weans us off the addiction of the world? He says it in verse 18. What leads us to fear God is not that he's this all-

powerful God. It is that partly, but it's more so knowing we were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers.

In other words, what makes us fear God as Christians is we understand God has rescued us, that he has bought us back from our slavery. We were once enslaved to the very same things the rest of the world is a slave to, and he has rescued and redeemed and ransomed us from that. When we understand we've been ransomed... When a slave understands they've been set free, it changes them.

How many of you have actually seen the movie *Taken*? Great. A lot of you. More of you probably didn't raise your hand for some reason. This movie, if you've never seen it, is the story of a daughter's relationship with her father and how it's transformed. Some of you are like, "Well, that's a new take on it." That's what the story is about. Go back and watch it.

It's the story about how a daughter's relationship with her father is transformed. The movie starts off where she (her father and mother had a divorce) doesn't like her father, so her father is trying to win back her affection. Her father was absent. He's controlling. He's a bit on the crazy side, because he was a CIA agent. He kind of brings that mindset into his parenting, which doesn't go well, so this little girl doesn't like him, doesn't respect him.

Then this little girl goes on a trip to Paris, and she's actually kidnapped and enslaved into the sex-trafficking industry. The rest of the story, which is what most of you thought it was about, is this CIA daddy going after this little girl, killing a bunch of people who tried to get in his way. Blowing up all sorts of stuff. It's really rad, to some degree, especially when you think about him going to get his little girl. The rest of the story is this father pursuing his little girl, going to the ends of the earth to rescue her and to ransom her from her slavery.

Not to be a spoiler, but he does. He rescues her. Do you know what happens to that little girl's relationship with her daddy? It's transformed. How could it not be? How could she be in slavery and in that state she was in and know her father came and at great cost to himself, at great risk to himself, rescued her and bought her back and brought her back? That's necessarily going to transform their relationship. She and her father are reconciled. Man, they live happily ever after...until *Taken 2*.

It is the same with us as Christians. God didn't risk anything because he's God. He's all knowing, but at great cost to himself, God saw we were in slavery. We didn't get kidnapped; we dragged ourselves into slavery. We chose to be in slavery, and we chose to rebel against God and say, "No, thank you. I don't want life and what you have for me. I want to do things my own way, because my desires are more important than your desires."

God still came after us, despite our faithlessness, and he bought us back at great cost to himself. How could that not transform us and stun us if we really see that and grasp that with our hearts? That's what Peter is saying. He says, "He did it not with perishable things." He ransomed us and bought us back **"...not with perishable things such as silver or gold..."** Like they would do to slaves at the market. **"...but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."**

This is an Old Testament reference. The payment for our sin, our ransom, didn't cost gold and silver; it cost blood. It needed to be pure, and God slaughtered his pure Son on the cross to provide the payment for your sin and my sin if we were to trust in him for it. This, my dear friends, is why we're no longer our own, because he bought us with his Son. He bought us, and he brought us into his family, so we're not our own. We're his. We're his possession.

To live in our useless, former ways of life is not an option for us. It's not an option for us as Christians. To do so is to devalue the death of Christ. To say you're a Christian and then to live like you want, as if you're your own, just like the rest of the culture is to actually devalue the ransom price God paid for you and for me. It does call into question our faith.

Just to pause and be stunned by this... Some of you know this mentally, but with your heart it doesn't matter to you. Just to have a moment this morning where you say, even if it's just quietly to yourself, "How precious is the blood of Jesus Christ," as we'll sing about, that he who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we could become the righteousness of God in him.

That's the heart of our faith. This Christ, it says in verse 20, was foreknown before the foundation of the world. It was planned. It wasn't an accident. He was **"...made manifest [and revealed to us] in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."**

Again, if you're not a Christian, this is the message of Christianity. This is what gives us the power and the motivation for the moral implications of our faith, but our faith is not primarily the moral implications. It's primarily what Christ has done for us, and that compels us to live differently, which is what he's saying here. Think about this.

5. *Have our hope set on God.* He goes on, and he begins to talk about a community of faith that has its hope set totally on the salvation that is going to be revealed with Jesus, that is being conformed to the holiness of God, that is fearing God and living holy lives because they know they've been ransomed. This

community is going to look a certain way. It's going to create certain attitudes and actions within this community that are different than the society of the world and the subcultures around them.

He goes into telling that. This is what he says in verse 22. He says, "**Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth...**" which is an Old Testament, long way to say, "Because you have now been set apart by God because he's ransomed you..." "**...for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart...**"

This is amazing, because the fundamental result of a mind and a hope set fully on Jesus is a community that...does what? That loves each other. That's the result. I know this is not the way many of us have been trained, even by good preaching, to think about our spiritual maturity. Most of us don't think of spiritual maturity by thinking about how we love each other horizontally.

Do you know what we are prone to think of as Westerners as spiritual maturity? How much Bible you read this week. How long your prayer times were. Those things are important, and they're a part of spiritual maturity, but if you read the Epistles, if you read these letters these apostles wrote, you know the fundamental thing they keep pointing back to over and over again to judge your maturity by is whether or not you love each other as a church.

That ups the ante because, basically, what he's saying is, "You can know all you want about justification by faith, but if you're not willing to help a brother or sister and love a brother or sister in need in your church, you may not be saved, because the true result of your salvation will work itself out in the way you love each other." It's not to say you don't need to read the Bible or pray. That's not what I'm saying.

What he's saying here is a holy community is a community that will love each other. If you want to check on your spiritual maturity, look sideways. Look and see what you think about your brothers and sisters in Christ, which this really gets into. Some of you come to church and it's about you. You're not even a part of the church. You just come and show up, and you just kind of have your moments individually, but you're not going to be a member of a church. You're not going to join a Home Group. You're not going to serve in Little Village. You're not going to do anything. That says something.

First, probably just about how you were taught growing up, so some of it's not your fault. Secondly, your view of Christianity is intensely and radically individualistic, which is foreign to the Bible, because you can't do what he's saying you should do here if you're not connected to an identifiable group of people who you're a part of a church with. You can't do it. You can't just come in here and leave. It's impossible. This wouldn't even make sense.

Maybe even some of you this morning, you just need to pause and repent of your individualism, of your sense of, "I'm going to do what I want. I'm not going to think about the church." God is waiting for you to invite you into this joy of being part of such a community where you know your faith and what it means to be a Christian based in large part about how your faith works itself out in love to one another.

It's so amazing what he's saying here. Do you know what the memory verse for Little Village is this week? Haddon and I have been talking about it. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love..."** That's what he's saying, and all the other things that come after that are sort of encapsulated in love. Church, the question is...*Are you loving one another from a pure heart?*

I think you are. I'm so encouraged. I know this service, some of you are just scattered. Many of you are not a part of this church or any church, so maybe what I've said has been helpful. I hope it has been. But for those of you who are Covenant Members, I think you do such a great job. I'm just so encouraged, so even as Paul would write (I know I quote this often), you're already loving each other. God has taught you how to do that, but continue to abound more and more in it.

Continue to love each other more and more and more, because the holiness and fear of God that leads us to love one another is the glue that is going to bind us and hold us together in unity as we move through a culture that is hostile to our faith. If we aren't a community of gospel-shaped and Spirit of God-wrought love, then we're going to fall apart when persecution comes. You know that.

Even on an earthly level, your teams, when things start going bad (I'm just looking at some of the athletes here) what happens? The team will fall apart. You can't handle it. You can't handle hard times if you're not unified. That's what he's getting at. In verse 23, he gives us the motivation again. He says to do this, **"...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed..."** Which is human seed. **"...but of imperishable [God's seed], through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls..."**

In other words, it's perishable. **"...but the word of the Lord remains forever."** It's imperishable. **"And this word is the good news..."** It's the gospel. **"...that was preached to you."** His argument is we love one another because we've been reborn of God's seed, and we've been reborn of God's seed in order to be like our Father in heaven. That's his whole argument here.

He says, "Love one another." Then in verse 1 he keeps going. Positively, love one another, but **"...put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."** He here lists some things that actually undermine a loving community. This is not like an exhaustive list of sins, obviously, but these are

vices he lists on purpose because these vices in a unique way unravel relationships in the church, unravel the social cohesiveness we need and that is created by love for one another.

Isn't that amazing? It's not just a random list of sins he's throwing together. He knows malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander, these things are poison to unity and to love in the community. You know that. This is why he lists these. I just wonder which one of these for you might keep you from loving and building up the church.

In what ways might you actually be weakening our church because you're prone to slander and to be a hypocrite, to put on pretense for these people here and then go be a different person for these people here, to have malice in your heart, which is ill will toward others, and on and on and on? Maybe it's not something on this list, but his point is these vices undermine community. These vices are the opposite of love.

If you want to have an unhealthy community, you operate and let these things flourish. You'll have an unhealthy community. I'll just pastorally take a moment (whatever the Lord is speaking to you personally) and give you some... Corporately, we're prone to have division in our church, and a lot of it has to do with the culture of our city seeping in and us being more informed by our culture rather than, as Ben said earlier, us leading our culture and informing our culture about how we're to live.

I'll just give you a few examples. This is an easy one. First, we live in an educational city with universities, so what that means is there are a lot of young adults who are going through intellectual puberty. What I mean by that, not to be condescending to those of you who are in school, but when you come to college you begin for the first time, many of you, to think through what you really believe about all sorts of things, not just spiritually but in every way.

Do you know what happens when you first learn things and begin to understand things you've never understood before? You become radical, and what everyone is prone toward is taking what they're learning and that radicalism of the heart and beginning to impose it and look down your nose at other people who don't understand that or don't agree with you about that.

There's this real arrogance, this real sort of condescension, knowledge can bring if you're not careful. We do that. We learn things in school, and then we meet with people and we think we've got our thoughts on a certain subject all figured out, and therefore, we're just going to be so sure about it and dogmatic about it. We do it with the faith as well, so there's this real sense in which, if we bring that into the community of faith, that sort of condescension and strife, it's not healthy.

You have to be careful with what you're learning. Learn and think critically, but don't allow your puberty and what you're thinking about certain subjects to lead to this radicalism that will lead you to being condescending toward your brothers and sisters in Christ, because do you know what? You may not be right, and five years from now you may look back and say, "Wow! I thought I had it all figured out, and that was dumb. I never knew." There's one area.

Another area is we're an activist and creative city. It's all about what we do. Everybody is doing something. Really, there are just a lot of creative people in our city. I'm not an artist. Some of you are. I'm the furthest thing from an artist, so I feel like I can say this as objectively as maybe any. What I hear from the artists (those of you who are artsy) is there is this real sense of pride in the art community.

You're creative, but that creativity can often lead you to think you're the Creator and mess up that distinction that God is in every person and put his image, and part of that image is we're creative, but when you begin to forget you're creative because you reflect God's image and that reality, rather than you're the creator and you're the all-knowing one about whatever you're doing, whether it's music or drawing or photography... It doesn't matter. That leads to, again, a certain sort of strife.

Then, of course, you begin to identify yourself... Your identity becomes your art. Your identity becomes your creativity. Your identity becomes whatever it is you're doing as an activist. That just gets really weird really quickly. What you have to do to prop up your identity is put down other artists. "Well, that song is horrible," or "That picture is horrible," or "That person doesn't really know what they're doing."

There's this weird culture that's happening here in the subcultures of our city where that's the case. You just have to tear down other bands or other people. Then you bring it into the church, and it's just potentially really poisonous. Another one... This is sort of more general. We're such a diverse congregation, politically, financially, educationally, ethnically, and we've said this before, but that leads to opportunities for division in a way a homogenous congregation does not.

What happens when there is diversity is we don't understand each other. When we don't understand each other, it's really easy to just assume what the other person is thinking and why they're doing that instead of really trying to enter in and ask them why they're doing that. It's like, "You voted *that* way instead of *that* way? Are you really a Christian?"

I could give a hundred different examples of how that has happened. Instead of thinking, "I love this person, this person is a brother or sister in Christ, and I don't understand them. I don't understand the culture they came from. I don't understand the way they think about the world." Instead of just assuming

they think about the world that way because they're an idiot, I'm going to go learn who they are, raise my IQ about their life, and love them and serve them instead of look down upon them. That's easy to do.

The last one... This one may be silly to some of you. There are not as many young mothers in this service, I know, but the last one is we're such a natural culture in our city. Apparently, even if you're not a Christian, you believe you're going to hell if you don't walk to work and recycle. I didn't know that. I've learned that. It's just sort of the ethos of our city, or at least certain pockets of it.

One of the ways this has really worked out, and it's silly, among some of our young mothers, is this divide over natural birth and hospital birth, over breastfeeding and formula-feeding, over cloth diapers, which is nasty, (we've had cloth diapers, so I can say that. It is nasty) or disposable diapers. There becomes this sort of condescension... "I'm doing it the right way, and unless you're part of the club, you're an outcast."

The young mothers in our church... Some of you are just going, "I don't even have a boyfriend. I'm trying to take finals this week. Great." Let me tell you what happens. I was up in Philadelphia, and Eric Mason taught on womanhood. He was teaching on Titus 2, and this applies to all of us, whether you're a woman or a man, whether you have a kid or you don't have a kid. Everything I just talked about, this is probably a big part about why it happens.

He talked about how, as women, there is this core calling you have. It's really just being a Christian. Your core calling is the same as her core calling is the same as my core calling. We're disciples of Jesus, and that means certain things. As a woman, there's also a feminine calling, sort of working out in concentric circles. That feminine calling is different than my calling, because I'm not a female.

Yes, we have the same calling as Christians in some respect, but you have additional calling because you're a female who is a Christian, so that looks different for you. Lastly, there are personal callings we all have that are more specific to our individual lives. What Eric Mason said was... By the way, he's just praying for you. Even this morning, we were texting back and forth. He loves you and is praying for you.

He said what happens more often than not is human beings, especially (he was talking about women in this sermon) get their personal calling and their core calling mixed up, and they begin to identify themselves by their personal calling instead of their core calling, and it gets really weird really quickly. Your identity is not your personal calling; it's your core calling as a Christian.

If you make anything else your identity, it's not helpful for the body of Christ, because what you're going to do is look down on the people who don't have that identity, because you need to prop yours up. If they're

different, it must mean they're lesser, and that's not true. You can have an opinion. That's fine. You don't have to share it. That's what he's saying here.

His argument, again, is to set our hope totally on the Lord as a community of holiness that fears God and loves one another that is putting aside these things that would unravel our social cohesion. He goes on and says, **"...if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."** Verses 2 and 3. **"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk..."** That's not a proof text for breastfeeding. Just don't go there. I know I just talked about that. Some of you are just weirded out I just said that again.

Anyway, he says, **"...long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation..."** In other places in Scripture when it talks about spiritual milk, it's talking about a certain quality of teaching. That's not what he's saying. If you follow his argument, he's saying, "You've been born again, and just like a kid who is born needs milk and needs the proper nourishment, you as a Christian who has been born again need the proper nourishment."

Long for that. Long to be grown up. Then he switches metaphors, but really he's saying the same thing. In verse 4, he says, **"As you come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men..."** Rejected here means he was examined by the builders, and he was deemed a reject, unfit to found their community on. He's rejected by men, **"...but in the sight of God chosen and precious..."**

He says, **"...you yourselves..."** You exiles, even though you're being rejected as well, **"...like living stones are being built up..."** Just like we're grown up through the milk, we're built up as...what? **"...a spiritual house..."** In other words, we're the new temple of God not made with human hands but made through Jesus Christ to be a holy priesthood.

We're those who get to draw near to God. We've been invited to draw near to God and to be set apart from the world to offer spiritual sacrifices of everything he's been talking about (praise and thanksgiving and love for one another) acceptable to God because of Jesus Christ. He says, "Drink this milk so you'll grow up." He says, "Come to Jesus so you'll be built up as that spiritual house."

As you come to Jesus just know you're going to share his fate. You're going to be rejected, but at the very same time, you are chosen and precious to God, which gets us back to this theme of your elect exiles. He goes on. He says, **"For it stands in Scripture..."** Verse 6. **"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone [Jesus], a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in [Jesus] will not be put to shame."**

Even if the culture is shaming you because you believe in Jesus, if you believe in him you're not going to be put to shame. The culture may put you to shame, but God's not going to, and that's more important.

That's his argument here. **"So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."**

What he's saying here is, as people move through life, all of us encounter Jesus. In one way or another, God places this stone, this cornerstone of Jesus Christ, in our lives, and he says, "You're either going to build your life and join the community that is building their lives upon this cornerstone, or you're going to stumble over this cornerstone, not believe in him, and eventually that will be your eternal downfall."

It's amazing to think he's basically saying there are two categories of people in the world and that's it. Two. There is the church, the community that is building their lives upon the cornerstone of Jesus, and then there's the world, those who are building their lives as a community on something other than Jesus Christ. There's not a middle. There's one or the other.

Even today, if you're thinking with the text, you should think, "Which one am I?" The invitation is for you to build your life on Christ with the rest of us as his people. He says, **"But you are a chosen race..."** Which one of these are we, church? We're a chosen race building our lives on Christ. We're a royal priesthood. We're the King's own priests who are near to God. We're a holy nation, set apart for his own possession.

Though exiles and aliens here, we're chosen. We're the elect of God. We are the most privileged in all of the world. He says this is why, so you and I may **"...proclaim [or announce] the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."** He's leading us to worship. We've been ransomed, and we're God's people, and that's meant to give us the platform to proclaim and announce this to the world, that this is what God has done. He's taken us from darkness into light.

He finishes by saying, **"Once you were not a people..."** Man, if you could feel the weight of that again, some of you who know that, but to feel... We were once not his people. We couldn't say any of this about ourselves at one point. We were slaves, helpless and hopeless and dead. **"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."**

He's pointing back to Hosea, the story in the Old Testament about this wife who left her husband and was faithless and took her children with her, to some extent. Yet, Hosea, picturing God in the story, was faithful and went and got her, even though she was faithless. He's saying, "That's you and that's me, and that should change us from the inside out."

I just end today (we're going to come to the Lord's Table here now) by saying, "Where are these truths not connecting with your heart?" This is stunning what he has just said about us and our identity in Christ and

how it's meant to change us and make us more like God and to love one another and to be different than the world. Where is this not connecting with you? Where do you not believe this, even though you know it mentally and have heard it a thousand times?

Where is this not connecting? Where have you forgotten these truths? Because you have forgotten these truths, you're tempted to return to your former way of life, even right now, today. Because you have forgotten and don't believe these things about your identity, you're dominated by the fear of man instead of the fear of God, and it leads you to hypocrisy and all sorts of other evils.

Where are you living your life defined by your personal calling instead of your core identity as a Christian, as a son or a daughter who has been rescued and ransomed by God? Because you're living that as your identity, it has just confused you, as it should, or at least it has disheartened others, as it naturally will. Where is your hope not set totally on Christ but set on something else?

I don't know what it could be. It could be anything. As we come to the Table, as we come and remember Christ paid the ransom for us by his body being broken and his blood being shed, it's a great opportunity to worship, to repent, to rejoice, to be stunned again even as we've talked about, to have a picture of what God has done in giving his Son at great cost to himself. Let's pray the Lord will encourage us, and then we'll sing together.

Father, we bless you and love you and pray now as we come to this Table that really does in visible form speak the same message we just read from Peter, that you would, Lord, incline our hearts to you. Strengthen us and stun us and convict us and change us and help us love you and love each other more, we pray, even through these elements. In Jesus' name, amen.