

The Divine Tapestry of Christian Moral Formation 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Context, 1:3-12

A beautiful poetic expression of praise that our *new birth* has brought us into a *living hope* based on the *resurrection of Jesus* (1:3). We are full participants in that resurrection with absolute assurance (1:4-5) of our final salvation (1:5). This allows even a redemptive view of suffering as a test of faith in view of sharing Christ's glory (1:6-8). This deep sense of meaning amid our present circumstances and the prospect of the "end result" of full salvation (1:8) provides us an "inexpressible and glorious joy" (1:8). Like the prophets who foretold of the salvation we now enjoy, so we, regardless of the difficulties and uncertainties of the present time, share completely in the sovereign unfolding of God's future (1:10-12).

Essential meaning – 1:13-2:3

The appropriate response of those who have received these incredible blessings is to counter the distractions of their circumstances with focused determination to *think* and *act* in a godly, upright way. The appropriate response to our salvation is *holy living*. The symmetrical (chiasmic)¹ structure of 1:13-21 makes the call to holiness the center of discussion.

- A – The believer's hope (1.13)
- B – The revelation of Jesus Christ (1.13)
- C – A reminder of prior sinful living (1.14)
- D – A call to holiness based upon God's character (1.15-17)
- C – A reminder of prior sinful living (1.18-19)
- B – The revelation of Jesus Christ (1.20)
- A – The believer's hope (1.21)²

Note the basis of this holiness is the purification we have received because of the sacrificial love of Jesus (1:18-19), and the motivation for the call to holiness is the second coming of Christ:

- 1:13, "the grace to be brought to us when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:13)
- 1:21, "belief in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

The return of Christ is one of the most common motivations for moral living found in the New Testament (Romans 13:11-14, Titus 2:11-14, 2 Peter 3:10-16, 1 John 3:2-3). This reality encourages a complete break with sinful patterns of living (1:14, 18-19) and into an intimate pursuit of with our heavenly Father whom we reverently fear (1:15-17).

¹ Chiasmus (pronounced ky-az-mus) was a common ancient rhetorical structure that can be imagined as shaping thought like one side of the Greek letter "X" (chi). It is a Latin term, *chiasma* "crossing," from Greek *chiadzo*, "to shape like the letter X." It is where phrases or clauses build toward a central theme and then out again in the same symmetry but in different terms. It may be as simple as A-B-B-A or complex like the one Peter uses here A-B-C-D-C-B-A.

² Dennis Edwards, *1 Peter: The Story of God Commentary* (Zondervan, 2017), 52.

None of this is possible, however, without the sovereign initiative of God, and the blessed assurance that we are now experiencing what God has willed since before the foundations of the world (1:20-21).

The next section, 1:22-2:3, teaches that to live into this holy calling, we need two things: 1) a deep sense of loving community, 2) a strong communal dependence of the truth of God’s word.

Condition (1:22):	You have all been converted (purified) by obeying the truth. And this love has the power not only to cleanse your souls but also to produce sincere love for each other.
Imperative (1:22):	So, love each other deeply from the heart.
Foundation (1:23-25):	Because your conversion (born again) has given you a shared eternal seed of the living and enduring Word of God that is designed to transform you in accordance with that seed.
Environment (2:1):	So, maintain a constructive relational environment that allows this “seed,” the Word, to have its effect upon you.
Nourishment (2:2-3):	And in this environment of mutual love and care, together, continually <i>crave</i> the milk (the Word) that will help you grow up in your salvation.

The Tapestry of Christian Moral Formation

1. Intellectual and moral discipline as cooperative response (1:13)

Main imperative: Set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

Required frame of mind: “With minds that are fully alert (i.e., “gird up the loins of your mind”) and sober. Remove whatever distractions impede concentration on God’s will for your life.

2. Second coming of Jesus as motivation (1:13)

The return of Christ is one of the most common motivations for moral living found in the New Testament (Romans 13:11-14, Titus 2:11-14, 2 Peter 3:10-16, 1 John 3:2-3). This reality encourages a complete break with sinful patterns of living (1:14, 18-19) and into an intimate pursuit of with our heavenly Father whom we reverently fear (1:15-17).

3. “Clean break” entailed in conversion as a precursor (1:14)

Peter frequently calls them back to conversion, not only to the radical work of God in bringing it about (cf. 1:2), and the clean break it represents (1:14, 4:3-4), but also to their *memory* of this event. Spiritual memory is a powerful deterrent against backsliding and motivation to continue down the path (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10).

4. Holiness based on the character of God as the benchmark (1:15-16)

Think about this at a theological or even philosophical level: God *is* holy. God doesn’t *have* holiness the way we have an iPhone. No, God *is in his being holy*. Now

another question: If God *is* holy, and if God is *prior to all creation*, and if some say holiness means being different from or separate from something or someone else, *when God was “all alone” and there was nothing else, was God holy then?* Yes, in fact, God was and is and always will be holy. This leads us to an important point: holiness cannot be reduced to separation or difference. At a deeper level, holiness means “devoted.” In the Do’s and Don’ts approach, holiness should focus on the Do’s. In other words, if separation focuses on differences *from* the world, the deeper level of devotion focuses on a life devoted *unto* God. The two belong together, and we need both.

There are three elements to holiness. First, we don’t make ourselves holy; holiness is the inner work of God. Second, holiness means learning to live a life that avoids sins. Third, holiness means learning to live a life devoted to God.³

5. Reverent fear of God’s fatherly judgment as motivation (1:17)

Paternal authority includes the right and responsibility of judging and disciplining the behavior of family members. The notion of God as judge is a biblical commonplace and recurs elsewhere in 1 Peter (2:23; 4:5, 6, 17; cf. 2:12). ...Peter urges his readers to have a sober mindset (cf. v. 13) about their relationship with God. When they approach God with awe and respect, recognizing him as holy, believers will know to keep an appropriate distance from sinful, worldly behaviors and move themselves toward holy living.⁴

6. Salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as foundation (1:18-19)

Peter knows of no foundation for proper conduct before God that does not begin with salvation and the life that comes in Christ. Precisely at this point too many Christians have compromised themselves. Ours is a pluralistic world, and this means that public discourse has to be tolerant of opposing viewpoints and alternative foundations for ethical discussions. But Christians must never pretend that the ethics of Christianity can be discovered by pure reason (as was attempted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) or by legislation. The proper motive for morals comes only from God’s work of grace, and a life pleasing to God finds its blueprint in the pages of the Bible. While we may have to tolerate alternate viewpoints, we must learn in our toleration not to compromise the foundation on which we stand. In our desire to be influential or to be acceptable, too frequently we have adopted the level of public discourse as the only level for ethical discussions.

Christians desire biblical ethics for society, but our society is frequently against Christian ethics. Thus, the only way we can work for Christian ethics in society is by way of the normal means of public discourse. This requires toleration. But tolerating other views does not mean accepting them (just as the materialist does not have to accept the Christian view) or permitting them to ruin the foundation of Christian ethics. We dare not be silent about our foundation, for it is a silence that can

³ Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God’s Design for Life Together* (Zondervan, 2014), 117-119.

⁴ Dennis Edwards, 64.

eventually lead to erosion. So let us be political, and let us be involved; but we must avoid surrendering why we do what we do.⁵

7. The sovereign work of God as both the origin and long view of holiness (1:20-21)

At the very beginning of the letter, Peter addresses his recipients in three ways: chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, chosen by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and chosen for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. This reflects the logical order of conversion “which finds its ultimate origin in the heart of God, is made operative in human lives by the Holy Spirit, and is evidenced through personal expressions of faith in Jesus Christ.”⁶ He echoes this here by referring to Christ as “chosen before the creation of the world, but revealed in these last times for your sake” (1:20).

8. Loving community as the environment for moral transformation (1:22, 2:1)

Here, Peter begins his teaching on how the community of believers, and not society at large, is to be the Christian’s primary social context, for their faith in Christ has brought them into the eternal fellowship of God’s people. Peter presents earnest love within the Christian community as the hallmark of having been converted. They are to love one another earnestly and to crave the spiritual nourishment that fosters a vital Christian community.⁷

9. Communal feeding on the word of God as the nourishment (1:23, 2:2)

N. T. Wright describes the “Word” as the “vehicle of the Spirit’s authority: energizing, shaping, and directing the church.” The apostolic writings...were not simply about the coming of God’s Kingdom into all the world; they were, and were designed to be, part of the means whereby that happened and whereby those through whom it happened could themselves be transformed into Christ’s likeness. ...This is not to say, of course, that the writers of the New Testament specifically envisaged a time when their books would be collected together and form something like what we now know as the canon. I doubt very much if such an idea ever crossed their minds. But that they were conscious of a unique vocation to write Jesus-shaped, Spirit-led, church-shaping books, as part of their strange first-generation calling, we should not doubt.⁸

⁵ Scot McKnight, *1 Peter, The NIV Application Commentary, Volume 17* (Zondervan Academic, 1996), 97-98.

⁶ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Publishing Group, 73).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸ N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Biblical Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 51-52.