

Legalism is not Living

Growing up in a small Free Church congregation in Glasgow, Sunday School was a major part of my faith. The Sunday School would consist of a few choruses, a small teaching session and a little revision of the past week's memorisation passage. As a ten-year old this memorisation was the bane of my Sunday.

The material for memorisation would vary from verses from Scripture, metric Psalms (1650 version), or questions from the Shorter Catechism. To my surprise, I still remember some of this material. Well, to be honest I don't remember much of the Catechism or the metric Psalms mainly because I am not regularly in contact with these fine collections (to my shame). However, I have remembered some of the Scriptural verses.

One in particular stands out: 1 Peter 1:13-16: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy.""

I held these few verses close to my heart over many years to come. As a young Christian I tried to be characterised by self-control, obedience and purity. I strived to put away all the evil desires of my past. With great effort I sought to be as holy as my Father in heaven is holy.

I felt I was thrashing around like a beginner swimmer struggling to keep my head above water, when Scripture gave the picture of a vibrant athlete attempting to stroke his way above the currents.

This was until a few years ago when someone pointed out that there is a word in this passage that I had been ignoring: 'therefore'.

'Therefore'; 'because of this'; 'on account of what has just been said'.

My eye skipped back to the previous verses of the chapter to see what Peter was building these commands on: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." (v. 3-5)

Suddenly I saw what the commands were built on. They were built on our new life in Jesus. "He has given us new birth into a live hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is on account of this new birth that Peter exhorts his readers to prepare themselves.

In my mind I had dislocated these few verses from the rest of the chapter for years. They had turned into legalistic orders to make me something I didn't think I was. However Peter appeals to his readers to be exactly what Christ has made us: self-

controlled, obedient and pure. We must rely on the new birth of Christ for all these things, and not our own will power.

Peter wants us to have life to the full. We can only have this in our new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we don't concentrate on this we will turn what is naturally fruitful life into an existence of legalism characterised by frustration.

Matthew J. Ford

Monday 6th March

1 Peter 1:3-5

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Prayer

All praise is due to your name, my Father and Lord. I offer you praise that you have transformed me by new birth, that the old is gone and the new has come. I offer you praise that you have given this new birth into a living hope that I may live life to the full in your hope. Thank you, Jesus, for setting me free from a life bound by legalism. Amen.

Tuesday 7th March

1 Peter 1:13-16

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for your transforming work in my life. I praise you that I can live life to the full in self-control, obedience and purity. Help me when I find it difficult to live in the way you have made me, and resort to my existence before I received life in you. Help me to delight in my new life in you, today and everyday. Amen,

Wednesday 8th March

John 4:13-15

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Prayer

Lord, you are the one who gives living water. Thank you that you give me life. I confess that I have been drinking from other wells of other gods. I confess that I have been looking for satisfaction in jumping through man-made hoops. Sorry, for not drinking your water that does not run dry, but my own that does. Help me today to drink constantly from your life giving water. Amen.

Thursday 9th March

John 10:7-11

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Prayer

My Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, thank you for providing the path way for your people. I praise you for opening the way that we can have life, and have it to the full. May I not burden myself with a man made load, but may I enjoy taking your load that is easy and light. Be with me today, that I would look to you to shepherd me through all the concerns of the day. Amen

Friday 10th March

Psalm 46:10-11

“Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Prayer

I praise you Lord Almighty that you are Lord of all. All the nation of the world, and all nature will praise you, because you worthy of all praise. I thank you that I can rest in the fact that you are God. You are the one who is sovereign over my creation, salvation and transformation. This is a great truth. May I know this is true today and be able to rest in the great knowledge of you as God. Amen.