

1 Peter 1:13-25 Take Time to be Holy¹

Before the lesson: Prepare to show the six-and- a-half minute audio/video of “Holiness.” <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/holiness/> as well as a rendition of the hymn, “Take Time to be Holy.” (Links in the text below.) You may also want to have hymnals or lyric sheets. Make copies of the handout on Theories of Atonement for the Instruction time and bookmarks for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

When it comes to learning something new... 1. I want to be the first on the block to have or know something 2. I usually come around, but it may take a while. 3. New is evil.

If I am preparing for a trip, I 1. Like to have my bags packed at least a day ahead of time. 2. I am usually rushing around until the last minute getting packed. 3. Someone else does my packing.

Information

In today’s text, Peter urges Christians to “be prepared for action.” For some of us that is more natural than for others. Actually, we may find it easier to be prepared for new technology or for a long trip than we are for new spiritual exercises or spiritual journeys. Let’s try to be open as we listen to this saint who walked with Jesus and led the Church. Peter traveled a long way from being a simple, stubborn fisherman.

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

This passage begins with the word, “therefore.” When a passage does that, you should look before the word to see what it is “there for.” In this case, Peter has just praised God for a salvation that gives us great joy, even when we face persecution. We have not seen God, but we love God and are receiving our salvation. All of this sounds great theologically and theoretically. But Peter was a practical person. “Therefore...” how ought we to live?

How does your translation word the phrase, “prepare your minds” (NRSV)? Some translations are closer to the original Greek which reads, “gird up your loins.” If we were going to run in a race or swim at a meet, we will be in shorts or swim suits. This is the idea. Get ready to race. Wear nothing that will prevent you from doing your best. To gird up the loins was to pull up the long flowing robes that men of that place wore and to tuck the loose ends into their belts. This image may have come from the Exodus and/or from the words of Jesus.

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In the Exodus passage, Moses is giving the people instructions about getting ready to leave Egypt. They are to put a lamb's blood on their door's frame, cook the lamb, and eat it with unleavened bread (no time to let the dough rise!).

- Have class members read Exodus 12:11-13.

When Jesus taught about a master's return, he used this imagery of girded loins, also.

- Have a class member read Luke 12:35-37.

We are to be ready to face the Master at any time. We are to be ready to act quickly when an opportunity arises.

What are some "loose ends" that keep us from being ready to do ministry at a moment's notice? (our calendars are too full; we are not "still" to listen to God's voice; bad habits or sins that hinder us, etc.)

In verse 15, Peter instructs us to be "holy in all your conduct." Let's watch this six-minute video about holiness as described in the Bible.

[Show 6:35 minute video from The Bible Project about Holiness:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/holiness/>]

What did you learn about holiness from this video?

"The most striking feature of Peter's interpretation... is the linking of holiness with 'conduct' or daily life... Holiness, which in many religious traditions epitomizes all that is set apart from the world and assigned to a distinctly ceremonial sphere of its own, is in Peter's terminology brought face to face with the world and with practical decisions and concerns of everyday life... [with] positive ethical virtues: purity and reverence, and above all the doing good in specific human relationships."²

Is holiness who we *are* or what we *do*?

"We humans do what is consistent with our nature: we sin. Therefore, in order for humans to be holy, we need a new nature. Just as God's holiness is more than the sum of his actions, holiness for human beings does not consist merely of a list of 'dos and don'ts.' It is about being distinct from the broader society, but as a result of having a new nature. That new nature is one of love, goodness, and obedience to God."³

² J. Ramsey Michaels. *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, 49 (Waco: Word, 1988), 59.

³ Dennis R. Edwards, *1 Peter*, The Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 63.

Bible scholar Dennis R. Edwards offers a helpful discussion about quantitative versus qualitative holiness.

“I think of the commitment to holiness made in one’s heart and mind as a *qualitative* dimension of holiness, while the physical act of separation – or rejection of certain activities – may be considered a *quantitative* dimension... Sometimes the motivation behind this quantitative understanding is pure, but unfortunately it can lead to a legalistic understanding of Christianity rather than a more accurate notion of a relationship with God. ...Qualitatively, holiness means a change in one’s heart and mind, which leads to upright behavior. The life of God’s people reflects God’s heart, and our actions should spring from hearts that are in sync with him.”⁴

Take Time to be Holy remains a popular hymn though it was first published in 1882. It incorporates this idea of holiness injected through our daily lives.

[Play this hymn. One online source, an acapella rendering (2:04 minutes) is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz-i5riSt-U> Another, a womans’ ensemble, with a different tune is here (3:20 minutes): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIxD9By43mc>)

*Take time to be holy, speak often with God
Thine rest in Him always and feed on His word*

*Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek*

*Take time to be holy, the world rushes on
Much time spent in secret with Jesus alone*

*By looking to Jesus like Him thou shalt be
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see*

*Take time to be holy, let Him be thy guide
And run not before Him whatever betide*

*In joy or in sorrow still follow thy Lord
And looking to Jesus still trusting His word*

Take time to be holy, speak often with God

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:17-21.

⁴ Edwards, 66-67.

You might think that we can easily explain why Jesus died: “for our sins.” Or, “to make things right with God.” As a matter of fact, there have been multiple theories offered for what is called Atonement.

[Distribute the handout.⁵ Walk through the handout and give a brief history of six theories of atonement that have been offered by Christian scholars.]

Which of these is Peter offering in this text? (ransom theory)

As the Church has matured, our interpretations have changed. Some groups cling to one interpretation while others choose another interpretation. One question for us is, how comfortable are we with mystery? Must every doctrine be clear and provable? Can we live with paradoxes? When it comes to “why” Jesus came, lived and died and “what” his life and death accomplished, can we trust in Christ while not fully understanding? Isn’t that the definition of “faith?”

After two millennia of pondering these theories, some recent writers are asking, “why do we have to choose just one? Is there truth in each of them that we need at different times and situations?” In his book, *A Community Called Atonement*, Scot McKnight argues that the atonement theories are like a bag of golf clubs. You need different clubs for different situations.

[Read the following quote from CS Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*. It is on the lyrics handout.]

“We believe that the death of Christ is just that point in history at which something absolutely unimaginable from outside shows through into our own world. And if we cannot picture even the atoms of which our own world is built, of course we are not going to be able to picture this. Indeed, if we found that we could fully understand it, that very fact would show it was not what it professes to be - the inconceivable, the uncreated, the thing from beyond nature, striking down into nature like lightning. You may ask what good will it be to us if we do not understand it. But that is easily answered. A man can eat his dinner without understanding exactly how food nourishes him. A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed, he certainly would not know how it works until he has accepted it. We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed. Any theories we build up as to how Christ's death did all this are, in my view, quite secondary: mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself.”⁶

⁵ Handout is based on Jeremy Smith, “Primer on Atonement Theories”, <https://hackingchristianity.net/2013/03/primer-on-atonement-theories.html> accessed 7/31/2023.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 58-59.

You might remember how 1 Corinthians 13 begins, “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” This is where Peter is going next, too. You can stand on a particular theory of atonement, but if it doesn’t lead to loving one another, it is nothing.

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:22-25.

Look again at the theories of atonement handout. Where do you see God’s love in that theory? How would this theory lead us to love one another more deeply?

The “word of God” that Peter refers to is not the Bible, but the “good news that was announced to you.” That good news of God’s love for the world as demonstrated through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection will never fade or wither or rot. It is not a sandcastle faith. It is a rock.

Transformational exercise

In this passage, Peter urges us to be prepared to love and to serve. This love and service comes from a heart that is holy and a mind that sees holiness even in the ordinary things of life. Our love and service is based on and fueled by God’s love for the world as demonstrated by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

What Peter is saying is repeated throughout the New Testament, but may summed up in this small verse, 1 John 4:11, “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

This week, remember Peter’s lesson that the holy lives through the ordinary. Be prepared to show God’s love in small, ordinary ways.

Let’s spend a moment in silence pondering this question: Because God loves you, who can you help? Because God loves you, how can you serve?

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *We thank you for your love for us, O God. We thank you for the sacrifice Jesus made for us, even if we cannot fully comprehend it. May your love energize us to love others. Be with us as we demonstrate your love in this new week. Amen.*

Take time to be holy

*Take time to be holy, speak often with God
Thine rest in Him always and feed on His word*

*Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek*

*Take time to be holy, the world rushes on
Much time spent in secret with Jesus alone*

*By looking to Jesus like Him thou shalt be
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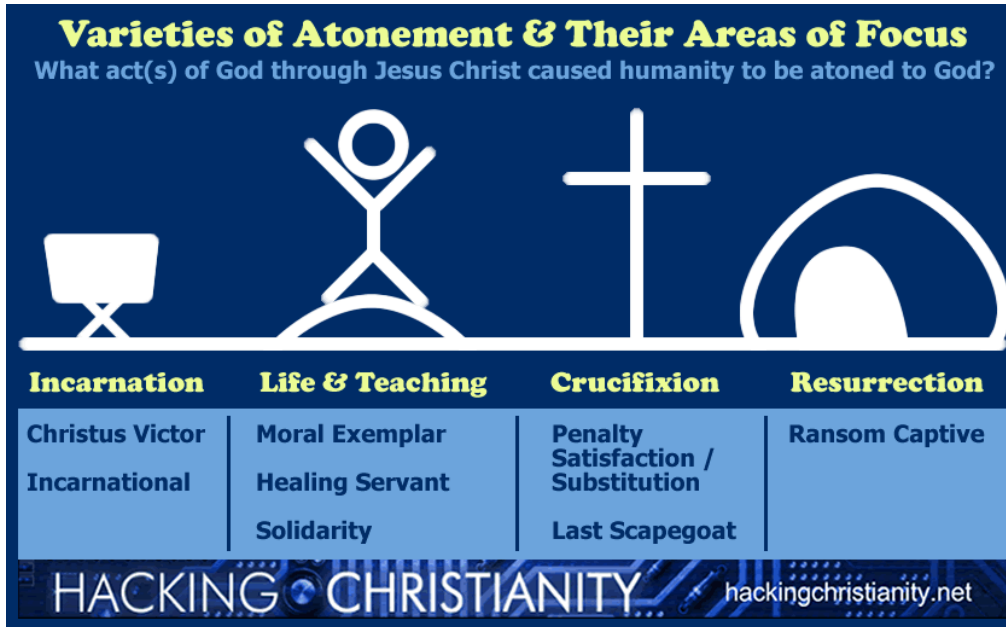
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Take time to be holy, speak often with God

“We believe that the death of Christ is just that point in history at which something absolutely unimaginable from outside shows through into our own world. And if we cannot picture even the atoms of which our own world is built, of course we are not going to be able to picture this. Indeed, if we found that we could fully understand it, that very fact would show it was not what it professes to be - the inconceivable, the uncreated, the thing from beyond nature, striking down into nature like lightning. You may ask what good will it be to us if we do not understand it. But that is easily answered. A man can eat his dinner without understanding exactly how food nourishes him. A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed, he certainly would not know how it works until he has accepted it. We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed. Any theories we build up as to how Christ's death did all this are, in my view, quite secondary: mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself.”⁷

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 58-59.



How can we understand the atonement?⁸

The word atonement comes from sixteenth-century English and literally means at-one-ment. Atonement is the process of reconciliation between God and human beings (either on a communal or individual basis) with the goal of righting a wrong or injury, i.e. sin.

Christians contend that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is intimately related to this process. But not all agree on *when* this act of atonement happened.

So in your mind, what part of Jesus' life *was most important* in redeeming humanity?

1. God becoming human in the Incarnation (Christ's birth)
2. Jesus teaching us and performing miracles (Life and Teaching)
3. Jesus dying on the cross (Crucifixion)
4. Jesus rising from the dead (Resurrection)

Based on your answer, you are able to see where you might want to study more on the Atonement chart. *Note that the theologians mentioned are jumping-off points for discussion, not the end-all authorities on these theories.*

If you believe that the locus of atonement is that **God became human**, then you might study:

⁸ Handout is based on Jeremy Smith, "Primer on Atonement Theories", <https://hackingchristianity.net/2013/03/primer-on-atonement-theories.html> accessed 7/31/2023.

- **Christus Victor.** Popularized by Irenaeus, Jesus' life is a victorious struggle against evil. While many would place this at the Resurrection, Irenaeus would place the locus at the Incarnation and God existing before time as part of the Trinity.
- **Incarnational Atonement.** Popularized by Fredrick Schleiermacher, something about the way Jesus *is* invites us into ideal humanity, made possible simply because of the Incarnation. God becoming flesh atones humanity in that instant, and all that matters is that God became human.

If you believe that the locus of atonement is **Jesus' life and teachings**, then you might study:

- **Moral Exemplar.** Popularized by Abelard, Jesus' life and death is a powerful enough example of love and obedience to influence sinners to repent of their sins and improve their lives.
- **Solidarity.** Popularized by Tony Jones and Jurgen Moltmann, Jesus' life stands as testimony that he always stood with the marginalized, the poor, the prostitutes and the tax collectors. His death was the result of his life. We are called to identify with Christ's suffering and to stand with those whose experience of being forsaken parallels Christ on the cross.
- **Healing Servant.** Popularized by some interpretations of John Wesley, this perspective sees sin as disease and grace as healing, referencing Christ as the Great Physician.

If you believe that the locus of atonement is **Jesus' death on the cross in the crucifixion**, then you might study:

- **Penalty Satisfaction/Substitution.** Popularized by Augustine/Anselm, the death of Jesus on the cross is the paying of a debt (or satisfying a debt) caused by humanity's sinful nature offending God's honor. Also framed as Jesus taking the place (substituting) for humanity on the Cross.
- **Last Scapegoat.** Popularized by Rene Girard, tribal human societies needed a release valve to let off the pressure of increasing rivalry and violence, so a scapegoat victim is sacrificed, thus relieving the pressure of violence. Jesus' death as a "visible victim/scapegoat" shows the injustice and inherent immorality of the scapegoating system on display.

If you believe that the locus of atonement is **Jesus' resurrection and triumph over death**, then you might study:

- **Ransom Captive.** Popularized by Origen, Jesus' death is the ransom paid to the devil (or evil powers) to free humans from the bondage of sin. Its locus is the Resurrection as that's when the Devil was tricked and he didn't have any control over Christ at all. RC has gained some traction in the postmodern world when you substitute "Satan" with "the powers" as popularized by Walter Wink and Gustav Aulen.

In the end, no one atonement theory may be sufficient to understand the acts of God through Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to God's self. But in the studying of different theories and areas of focus, one confronts exactly what one believes about Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection and perhaps by illuminating what is most important a stronger constructive theology can be made.