September 16/17, 2017

Therefore Put Your Game Face On

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 1:13-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Last fall there was a group of us on staff that were interested in getting into leather working, so we organized a class. We invited Stacy to offer a beginner class, get us started, and both Patti and I took the class. We found it interesting and over the years have made various projects and found it kind of fun. But I wanted to tap into my blacksmithing hobby, combine it with the leather, and so I wanted to make myself a brand that, when I make something out of leather, I could put my brand on it—kind of like putting my mark on it to identify it. So I made the brand which was no simple task, and I'll show you a picture of it. It's not terribly complicated (—the letters "BC" within a circle—) but that's what it looks like (*laughter*). But here's the deal: You can invest twenty to thirty hours making a leather bag, but the moment of truth is when you burn that brand on it because there are multiple ways it can go wrong and there's no going back. You can't fix it; you can't un-brand it. You've just ruined thirty hours worth of work. So when I get ready to put the brand on it, I am *in the zone*. I make sure I'm not tired. I clean everything up; I turn off the television; I say to Patti, "Honey, not now." *(laughter)* I'm *in the zone* and I am dialed in because you get only one chance. I refer to this as my *game face.* "I get my game face on."

Anybody that has been involved in sports understands what a game face is, but I would suggest everybody has a game face. You just have to figure out where is it for you? What is that moment when you shut out the world, when you are in the midst of intense concentration—this is the moment—you know you're *in the zone;* you have your game face on and you kind of tap into that because the question we're wrestling with this morning is: how do we live as hope filled people in a culture of despair? And I would suggest to do that, you have to have a really good game face. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have your Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 1. If you weren't here last week, we started our study of 1Peter and really verses 3-12 are the foundation of this study. If you missed last week, you really need to go back and either find the transcripts or CD or get on the website because in order for Peter to make sense, you really have to understand what he said in the opening part of the text which was last week. Verses 3-12 are one long, beautiful, run-on sentence that fills our lives as believers with hope.

So verse 13 starts with the word **therefore**, and we've kind of rehearsed this adage over the years: "Whenever you see the word *therefore*, you stop and see what it's *there for*." Whenever you see the word *therefore*, to interpret the text properly, you have to go backwards before you can go forward. You have to understand what it's referring to: *therefore...whatever.* This is a really important, theological point to understand because basically what the text is saying is a very consistent message in the New Testament—that our lives, our behaviors start with the right theology and then it moves to the right behavior. In other words our behavior—our attitudes, the way we live—flows out of right beliefs in order to understand it and to believe it. At the end of the day, every person in the room ultimately lives out your belief system. If I could trail behind you for a couple of weeks, I could determine very accurately what it is you actually believe, what you value, what matters to you, what you think is worth living for. I could assess your belief system based on your behavior, because at the end of the day, everyone lives out his or her belief system.

The **therefore** here is a reference to this magnificent truth that when I was nothing more than a sinner, misfit, and loser—for reasons only God ultimately understands—God chose me. God chose me to be a son/daughter, to be a recipient of the family fortune. We were told that *according to the mercy of God, God has caused me to be born again to a living hope in order to make me an heir to the family fortune*. It is a fortune that can never be destroyed; it can't be corrupted; it can never be diminished in any way. And because it's based on the grace and mercy of God, and not on the basis of my performance, it is so sure that it's actually reserved in heaven for me today—and will ultimately be revealed when Jesus returns. That is, in essence, the fullness of the hope of the gospel, made possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

The idea, then, is *if* I understand that and believe it—I posed the question at the end of our time together last week—either God is a liar—and if He's a liar, let's be done with this and walk away—or He tells the truth—and if He tells the truth, then that is true. And if it's true, it should change the way I live. Almost all of Paul's epistles are written this way. So Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, Ephesians—they're all written front-loaded with doctrine, back-loaded with what this looks like when it's lived out. So: we understand it and believe it and then we live like it. The problem is we want to skip the front part and just go to the back part. We want the practical: how to fix our lives, but we're not as interested in the deep, rich theology that ultimately is necessary for that to happen.

If you go to a Christian bookstore, if you go to Barnes & Noble, if you go to Amazon and you look at the Christian books, almost all of them deal with the back half of the epistles. I want to know how to fix my marriage; I want to know how to fix my kids; I want ten ways to be happy and joyful in life; I want all of that practical, fix-my-life stuff, but there aren't that many books on the front half of the epistles, which have really the deep, rich theology that makes it all possible. Churches and preachers are notorious for over emphasizing the behavior part of our Christian life. That was kind of our problem in the fundamentalist movement. We were all about the rules and guidelines and the behaviors. It was very well intended but, in essence, when the behavior becomes more important than the core theology, it simply results in legalism. We just, in our flesh, are trying harder, and that will never give us the joy, the peace, the hope that we long for deep in our souls.

So the **therefore** is reminding us that when we first understand and believe—and we believe it to such a degree—that then it flows out of our lives in how we live. If you have a behavior problem, it's ultimately a belief problem—and that's where it has to be corrected. So all that is part of the **therefore**: because verses 3-12 are true; therefore we should live like it.

> **Therefore, prepare your minds for action,** (*NASB, 1Peter 1:13a)

The actual Greek there is, "*Gird up your minds.*" The translators try to find some English phrase that kind of has the same meaning. If you were to read the words "*gird up your minds,*" you'd walk away saying, "I don't know what that means." But to a first century reader it was full of meaning. The men in the first century wore robes for a variety of reasons. They were great except when it was time for action; then they were kind of awkward and clumsy. So basically when it was time to fight, when it was time to run, when it was time for action, they would reach down, grab the bottom of the robe, pick it up, tuck it into their sash or their belt, and that was referred as to "*girding yourself for action*". In that moment I'm ready to run; I'm ready to fight; I'm ready to move. It had this sense of urgency—"It is go-time." When it's translated in English, **prepare your minds for action**, to me that has a little bit of a flavor of a slow, methodical preparation: "I need to go to Sunday school; I need to go to church; I need to have a quiet time." It's kind of like going to college to prepare to be a doctor or engineer, or whatever. That is not the sense of the phrase. It's not a long, slow preparation process. It's much more of a sense of urgency. Some translators like

the idea of "roll up your sleeves". The imagery that makes the most sense to me is if you imagine a sprinter, right before the race he or she has warm-ups on, and in that moment when they're pulled off and it's time to get in the blocks, that's the sense—it is now "go-time"! There's a sense of urgency; it's time for the game face; the moment of truth is here. It's kind of like a pitcher taking off the jacket and running out to the mound. It is now time for action. So that's the first thing: **Therefore prepare your minds for action.** I get my game face on and I have to remember in the most difficult, confusing, hurtful times in life, that ultimately what's true in verses 3-12 is the basis of my hope. I have to be dialed in and *in the zone* in certain moments of life to make sure I don't forget.

> **Therefore prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit,*** (Vs. 1b)

Sober...we tend to think of sober versus intoxication—and that's a part of it—but it's far more than that. When you're intoxicated, you're kind of distracted, confused, fuzzy, and here your thinking is just the opposite of that. There's absolute clarity; there's focus—no distractions that would kind of zone out everything else in the moment—game face on, ready for action. Why is that necessary?

> **...to fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Vs. 1c)**

So when I have my game face on, what am I fixated on? The text says fixated **completely on the grace...to be revealed at the revelation of Jesus Christ**". That's kind of shorthand; it's a summary of verses 3-12. It is remembering in the most painful, in the most difficult, in the most confusing, in the most hurtful moments of life, that I'm not distracted by all kinds of things that ultimately don't matter. Instead, with my game face on, with absolute clarity and discipline of mind, I fixate completely that ultimately *my hope is found in the grace that will be revealed to me at the return of Christ.* In other words, ultimately my hope is not based on my circumstances; my hope is not based on my money, on my job, on my physical health, on the government. It's not based on my career or my relationships. It's not based on my marriage or my singleness. It's not based on the Republican Party. It's not based on the Democratic Party. It's not based on any of that stuff. This is a consistent message in the New Testament: that regardless of my external circumstances, my hope is found in the grace and mercy of Jesus to fulfill the promise He made to fulfill my salvation, which is the hope of the gospel, which will happen at the return of Christ.

So in those moments in life when you are hurt, when you are confused, when you are upset, when you are discouraged, when you are in pain, when it feels like life is just so messed up—those are the moments when it's so easy to get distracted and off course and get your mind focused on a hundred things that will discourage you—that you have to put your game face on and you have to fixate completely that the basis of my hope is found in Jesus, and because it's on the basis of His grace and mercy, it can't be diminished or taken away. I remember that on my worst days as well as on my best days that my hope is secure in Christ and no matter what's happening, I have every reason for hope. That's essentially what he has said in that verse. Verse 14:

> **As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written,** "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."(Vs. 14-16)

So now as obedient children—now we have been radically born again through the grace and mercy of God—I am now God's child and my desire is to walk in obedience. He says we should not return to our **former lusts**. The word **lusts** there doesn't necessarily have to refer to evil things.

They're just simply the desires of my heart that I was seeking to satisfy through the things of this world. Before my relationship with God, I had legitimate, deep longings, deep within my soul, but I did not know how to satisfy them. I tried all kinds of things in this world to find something that would ultimately satisfy, but nothing satisfied. I lived that way because I was ignorant of what was happening. I was ignorant of what my soul was ultimately longing for. But now that I have experienced new life in Christ, now I understand why those things of the world were not satisfying, why that wasn't working. Why, now that I know the truth, would I ever go back to those things I was doing in my ignorance? So in essence that's what he is saying, **"Therefore now, as obedient children, do not be conformed..."** kind of squeezed into the mold of this world. Don't go back to those behaviors **"...to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance**." So don't do that! So what *should* you do? Well, *we should seek to be holy as God is holy*. He ends that paragraph with a quote from Leviticus, **Be holy as I am holy**.

So what exactly does that mean? If I was to say to you this morning, "Don't be conformed to your former ways of life, but instead be holy as God is holy. Have a nice day. See you next week," you're still left with the question, "I don't know what that means. What does it mean to be holy?" It's kind of that vague, religious language that sounds good, but you don't know what that means and it kind of conjures up images like a halo, maybe you glow a little bit. Maybe it's full of lots of religious behavior, religious language. Maybe I say, "Everything's a blessing." You know, whatever sounds kind of holy, religious like.

When my girls were younger and living at home, they would invite their friends over and sometimes their friends were a little intimidated—"I mean it's the pastor's house"—so I used to say to them, "Just tell them your dad's like anyone else except he glows in the dark!" (*laughter*) It's kind of the imagery of, "Is that holy? Is that?" Sometimes we also kind of get this idea that now that I have a ticket to heaven, I'm obligated to obey the rules—so that's holy. "Here are the rules; you have to do them." There's kind of this negative tone to it. But that isn't what it's talking about at all.

The word **holy**—the root word means *to be different*. I think my favorite definition of holiness is *other than*. God is holy because He's utterly *other than* anyone else in the universe. Basically the idea is this: Before God created, God existed eternally in eternity past. Even though God is *One*, yet He is *three persons*. We were introduced in the introduction of this letter to God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit with the reminder that all three members of the trinity are busy at work to bring about the fulfillment of the promise of salvation. Now the Doctrine of the Trinity is kind of this strange, wondrous, mysterious doctrine that frankly none of us can get our minds around. But the relevance is that from eternity past God has been a relational God. God existed in a relationship with Himself—the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Spirit, the Spirit loving the Father; the Father celebrating and glorifying and enjoying the Son, the Son the Spirit, and the Spirit the Father. So there has been this life that has defined God forever. It is the very essence of life.

Theologians refer to this as the *Dance of God.* When you go back to Genesis 1 and 2, we were created as people made in the image of God—in essence to be relational as God is relational in a way that separates us from all other creation, in order that we might enter into the depth of the life and the love and the relationship that has defined God forever. That was God's intent. That is essentially what we were made for. But once Adam and Eve sinned, sin separated all of us from God; so we feel that deeply! In this world there's this sense I was made for something *different* than this. I was made for something *more* than this. There's this restless feeling in our soul that somehow I think there's supposed to be more, and what that is, is my soul's longing for the world as God intended it to be—longing to enter into that life as God defines it. Essentially the offer of salvation is the offer—the invitation to *join the dance.* We experience it to some degree now, but in

its complete fulfillment, at the revelation of the return of Jesus Christ, that's essentially what salvation is. So when Jesus is talking about *eternal life*, it's not just *a duration of life*, but it's *a quality of life*. This is life as God intended it to be! This is the fullness of life that is found in God, and on the basis of our salvation, we're invited into the dance.

So the idea of being **holy** is the idea of being utterly *other than* this world—to understand that life is found in God; it's found in the salvation that He offers! This is the life that has defined God forever. He's so utterly *other than* everything else in this world; and now as His child, why would I return back to the futile, empty ways of life that just left me disappointed and wounded and confused again and again and again when He's actually called me to enter into this life that is utterly *other than* anything this world can offer? God says, "**Be holy as I am holy.**" Why? Because that's where the fullness of life is found...that's where we find life...that's where we find joy...that's where we find peace...that's where we find hope. That's the essence of what he's saying there. Verse 17:

> **If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these 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.** (Vs. 17-21)

Basically what that paragraph is saying is that the One that you now as a child of God call Father, there's a sense of relationship and intimacy there that now has been made possible. Never forget that the One that you call Father is still the sovereign judge of the universe. This is still the One who will judge every man according to his or her works. This is the God that ultimately brings condemnation on sin. The idea of fear is not so much afraid, but a deep respect. Basically the idea is that now that we call God, Father, now that we are no longer under the condemnation of our sin but rather we have been forgiven on the basis of the blood of Jesus, why would we return to our old sinful, futile ways? The idea is now that you call the ultimate judge, Father, don't somehow convince yourself that sin is somehow not that big of a deal. Don't diminish the reality or the offense of sin! Don't somehow trivialize your sin—that now on the basis of the grace of God, God's got it covered—it doesn't really bother Him all that much—no big deal...no harm...no foul. It's actually saying, "No, actually the opposite!" Now that you call the ultimate judge your Father, you should be aware that sin is so offensive to God that it actually separated us from God! It is so offensive to God that God brings condemnation on that sin, and for those that don't experience God's salvation, they will be ultimately judged and condemned forever...because sin *is* offensive to God! So now that you have been saved, now that you call the judge your Father, don't somehow trivialize sin and excuse it and think it's no big deal because God's grace covers it all.

So he reminds us of the cost, what it cost God to forgive your sin. He says, "Your sin is so offensive to God that you actually had to be purchased...redeemed." It's a slave-market term. You were purchased out of the slave-market of sin in order to be set free before God. The purchase price was so great it could not possibly be paid by something as worthless as gold and silver. The only thing that had enough value to purchase you out of the slave-market of sin is the precious blood of the Lamb, the sinless Son of God. It actually cost God His Son to pay the purchase price to cover your sin because it's that offensive to God. There is a reminder that this Son who shed His blood was actually the eternal Creator of the universe, that He existed before there was anything else. Somehow, some way, the eternal God—the Genesis 1:1 creator God—took on human flesh. Peter

essentially says He actually lived in our lifetime—He walked this earth while Peter and the first readers were alive on earth in order to shed His blood to provide salvation for future generations awaiting the return of Christ.

We learned last week that we live in the generation—the time period since the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that the prophets looked forward to, and wondered who would be the lucky generation that would live in the fulfillment of the salvation God promises—something so spectacular that the angels longed to look on, to watch what God is doing. We happen to be "*the"* generation—all those since the resurrection of Christ who actually live in the fulfillment of everything God promised. All we await now is the return of Christ and the fulfillment of everything God has promised. He says the ultimate result, then, would be *to the glory of God* and that we as His children *would find our faith and our hope in God.*

If verses 3-12 are true, **therefore** we should *not* go back to the empty way of life that defined us before. We should *not* be seeking to satisfy our deepest longings in the things of this world. We did that when we were ignorant, but we are not ignorant anymore. We should *not* go back to that empty way of life, but realize that life is found in God! It's found in this *other than* way that is so different from everything this world offers and can only be found in a relationship with God. We remind ourselves that our salvation was so costly to God that we should never trivialize sin, but we should seek to walk in obedience. We should walk in holiness because that's where life is found. Ultimately we then find our hope regardless of our circumstances, regardless of our pain, regardless of our confusion, regardless of our heartache, regardless of anything you're going through. No matter what this world throws at you, our hope is found in God! Our minds are fixated on the grace to be revealed when Jesus returns. If you have trusted Christ as Savior—no matter what happens on this earth—your future is absolutely spectacular, and that is the basis for your hope!

But here's the deal: This is *not* how we just think naturally. Just because you heard this today doesn't mean somehow by osmosis it sinks in and that's how you will think tomorrow. There is no one in the room who is so spiritual that this is your default mode. I absolutely guarantee you this is *not* your default mode. The only way to experience the joy, the peace and the hope that can be yours in the most difficult moments of life is, it is absolutely necessary to get your game face on, and to understand in those difficult moments of life, "I have to fixate my mind, clearly disciplined in my thinking, to remember that ultimately my hope is found in the grace that will be revealed in the return of Christ. It is only when we, with all of our self-discipline and mental skills, get our game face on, get in the zone, and in those moments focus, that we remember—no matter what...no matter what!—I have every reason for hope. It's the only way you're going to live as a hope filled person, living in the midst of a culture of despair.

> *Our Father, we do celebrate that when we were lost in our sin with no hope, You gave up Your own Son to shed His blood that we might have life. Lord, it is virtually impossible for us to understand the depth of what we have in Christ, but, Lord, help us, give us what we need in those most difficult, confusing moments of life to fix our minds completely on the truth that our hope is ultimately found in Christ, ultimately to be fulfilled in His soon return. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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(Video):

"On December 20th of last year, my wife and I served each other divorce papers. I've been in the Army National Guard for 18½ years; I've served overseas three times. I went to Bosnia which is also known to have more than a million mines still unaccounted for. I was a gunner at the time and so I was the most exposed person in this vehicle, and so the truck is just constantly hitting all these ruts in the road, and I mean, you are just...your nerves are so shot at this point. You are just waiting for one of those times the truck actually comes off a rut and it's over. Game over!

I came home after my third deployment. I'd started a job that I had no idea how demanding it would be. It could be a six-hour day; it could be an eighteen-hour day. I can't be a coach. I can't promise that I can be home by a certain time. There's nothing I can commit my life to except to this job. I became very demanding after all the money and the hours that I worked and earned and all that, I just became very entitled.

You knew the words that were coming out of your mouth were bad. You knew they were wrong to talk to somebody like this, but at the same time you didn't care. I felt a lot of anger, but it was at myself and the more I felt angry at myself for acting like this, the more that I lashed out at her. So little by little it pretty much chipped away at her self esteem and who she was as an individual. You can just see how everything is just building on top of each other. Five days before Christmas we served each other divorce papers is what it came down to. I was sick to my stomach every day. You feel like your heart is stopping, like the only way to actually like physically stop the pain is your hand over your chest, trying to calm yourself down, or hold your chest together.

I had decided to go for a walk around Holmes Lake. I was trying to clear my head, trying to get a breath. So as I was going on this walk, a lot of the words that were coming to me was failure... failure as a husband...failure as a father, and I couldn't help but just keep having this overwhelming feeling that I needed to surrender myself to something higher than me, higher than her, and so the only other person you think of is God. I think like a split second—I can't make this stuff up—in a split second it was all gone! All that pain that I was feeling, everything that I thought I couldn't understand or I couldn't control, I couldn't think straight was gone— like in a split second all that weight that was on me was just gone! I had come home from this walk with just all this clarity; I just got behind my computer and I just started typing everything that was on my mind—5 years of things that you can go back to and just see: this was wrong, this was wrong; I made a bad mistake here—so that maybe my wife would see that I see what I did was wrong. I know what I did wrong and I see it now and I'm truly sorry, I am. I completely understand if you leave me, but I want you to know that I know that I did the wrong thing."

(Statement read at his baptism) "Shawn Nichols: After years of making very bad decisions and hurting the people closest to me, I had a moment of clarity. I firmly believe that this was God speaking to me and telling me I needed to surrender myself to His grace and to a life through Jesus Christ. Had I continued making the bad decisions, so many people would have been impacted and so much pain and misery would have ensued. I'm being baptized because I'm ready to surrender myself to God."

Shawn: "What I surrendered is nothing. It's actually nothing compared to what Jesus did for us. Today it means I don't have to be angry anymore. I'm not that person anymore. I can easily see that. It feels so good to even say that. The hardest thing that you'll ever do in your life is give up control, but when you do, you'll find peace."

September 16/17, 2017

Therefore, Put Your Game Face On

Hope-filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 1:13-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Bryan said that everyone has a game face for something in life. What would be the activity in your life that requires a "game face?" What does that look like for you?

2. What are some of the distractions around us that can cause us to lose sight of what's true of us as Christians? What are the biggest distractions for you personally?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of the main truths from 1:3-12. Write a quick summary statement.

2. Read I Peter 1:13-16. The "therefore" is critical in understanding this text. The command is not to try harder but rather to live in light of what's true according to verses 3-12. What happens when we put the "doing" ahead of the "knowing?"

3. To "prepare your mind for action" and "keep sober" means to put your Christian "game face" on. What does that mean to you? What are some practical ways of doing this?

4. What does it mean to be holy as He is holy? According to verse 14 what is the real practical implication of holiness?

5. At one time we engaged in futile behaviors because we were ignorant of the truth. Why would any Christian go back to those behaviors now that we know the truth?

6. Read I Peter 1:17-21. Does our salvation by grace mean we now have a license to sin? Is our sin after conversion now somehow less offensive to God?

7. What did our redemption cost God? The redemption price reveals the depth of the offense of sin to God. Gold and silver could not begin to cover the cost. What is the point Peter is seeking to make regarding our behavior after salvation?

8. What is the result of holy living according to 1:21?

Application

1. List two or three areas in your life where you tend to get distracted away from what is true of you as a Christian. What are some practical things you can do to consistently put on your game face in those situations?

2. Are there any specific areas of sin in your life you need to address? Why do you think you are willfully choosing the futile way of life when you now know the truth? What are some practical steps you need to take to be done with that sin?

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