

“STABLE:

...in the midst of chaos”

1 Peter 1:13-25

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, 24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

In 2025, mental health statistics in the US reveal a widespread crisis, with significant percentages of adults and youth experiencing mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety. Approximately one in five American adults experiences a mental health condition annually. One in six young people have had a major depressive episode. One in twenty Americans live with a serious mental illness like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression. Suicide is a leading cause of death, especially among young people (ages 10-24). In 2020, over 45,979 Americans died by suicide. A majority of adults (61%) feel they could have used more emotional support in the past year, with this number rising to 82% for Gen Z adults, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). Anxiety disorders affect 40 million U.S. adults (19.1%) annually, with women being more than twice as likely to experience them as men. Up to 20% of children ages 3 to 17 have a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder.

Peter began his letter by acknowledging the trials, tribulations, testing's, and persecutions that the greater church had begun to suffer through. Despite what was no doubt a heart of compassion and sympathy for the readers, Peter's answer to what they were enduring was not more social services and counseling, but rather with a simple clarity...a simple call, to be strong in Christ. He reminded them that Christ Himself had suffered before them and *for* them, and that their pain did not compare to what was waiting for them eternally, not to mention the plethora of blessings they had already received in Christ *in this life*! Peter didn't coddle them or in any way fuel their self-pity. He wasn't being cold or calloused, but he reminds them that they had the presence



of the Spirit of God to stand amongst the chaos. He called them to “...*think clearly and exercise self-control*”... to “*Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.*”

Again, we need to note that Peter didn’t just tell them to suck it up...to “pull themselves up by the bootstraps,” but rather throughout this letter He would encourage them and remind them that they were in possession of the greatest power in existence. He would tell these believers how to live out this consistent and faithful life and what such a life was to look like. This life they had been reborn into...just as it has for us, was not salvation from all of life’s troubles and difficulties, but rather a transformation in thought, attitude, and priority as they would pass through them. As ‘new creatures’ we are now passing through this life with “eyes wide open.”

Therefore, if actually reborn, we are in possession of a clarity and understanding that the unbelieving world does not have. And therefore we should have an enduring spirit that surpasses someone trying to make their way through this world without Christ and the gospel understanding. This means many of us need to spiritually grow up. We have maturing to do! Despite the enduring message from scripture and certainly from this church, there are still many amongst us that struggle to find a place for God in our self-designed lives. We know the scriptures tell us clearly that we are to “seek first the kingdom of God” and yet we struggle constantly to arrange our lives to merely contain some presence of God, but only in blessing of the priorities we have set for ourselves. So God is being asked to take the back seat to our extended families, our careers, our worldly passions, etc. Effectively we are saying that we know better than God, thus we have to emphasize these other matters if we want to do them well and experience them to the greatest degree, and that means Jesus is expected to step back. We have never acknowledged the reality that if Christ is calling us to “seek first the kingdom of God,” then by doing so will bring success in “all these other things.” We claim He is first, but our lives defy that testimony. And then we inexplicably wonder why we mentally and emotionally struggle.

Even without the level of understanding of the gospel and salvation that we have today, the players in scripture still overwhelmingly endured such suffering. In the first century AD, daily life for the average reader of this letter, life revolved around the demands of long hours and hard physical labor. Life expectancy was relatively low, and illness was a constant threat. Sanitation was often poor, contributing to the spread of disease. In the cities, there was dense population, with people living in multi-story apartment buildings that were often cramped and poorly maintained. The streets were noisy and busy with carts, animals, and people, and the lack of garbage collection contributed to pollution. There was constant war and slavery was rampant. Bottom line, *life was tough.*

And yet despite such overt difficulties, for the early follower of Christ there was still such a passionate love for His kingdom pursuits. Today’s prosperity, material centered thinking, and self-absorbed culture has proven to be our worst enemy, which sadly has crept in the back door of even the modern church because we never expected something that is so physically and emotionally pleasing could be our very destruction! One would have to wonder that if verse 13 was written to *those* folks, what would Peter, and Christ Himself, say to us today? For people today are frankly so fragile and emotionally sensitive that a vast amount of us can be spiritually sidelined by a “splinter.” We are so often insulted, angered, discouraged and simply put out of the race because of minor incidental issues that we paint as epically devastating experiences! And we attempt to “fit Jesus into” our lives that, if born again, He literally was murdered in order to redeem, and scripture uses the language of our reborn relationship with Him as literally a “slave.”

Thus, with tact for sure, Peter is still telling us to “man up.” Again, if you are not reborn today, and therefore this is not “your mail,” then you will quite simply not endure such instruction. But for the redeemed, Christ actually expects us to follow in His footsteps! In the next chapter, Peter elaborates further on this issue by

declaring “For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21 NLT

Verse 14 calls upon us as believers to “gird up the loins of your mind.” Or the NLT says “So think clearly and exercise self-control.” This seems to be the closest thing in scripture to telling us to “face the music.” To “pull ourselves together.” The “girding up of the mind” may seem to be a strange phrase, but it would be clear to the original readers of this letter. You see, in eastern countries, people wore long, flowing robes. When they wanted to walk fast or with a minimum of hindrance, they would tie the robe up around their waist with a belt. In this way they ‘girded up their loins.’

So you see that Peter’s call herein was not merely a call to hang tough for the sake of appearance or because it was the religiously right thing to do. But moreover it had in it the idea that by doing so you are ready and prepared to actually move. To serve, to fight, to run, to live and love, to get ‘out there’ into the fray for God and kingdom. Many of us are quick to say “well...I *want* to, but I have school, my job, a house, kids, etc etc.” No excuse is entertained here or anywhere in scripture for that matter. Peter is saying gather up our loose thoughts and mental justifications in a manner wherein you are ready to run the race and fight the fight.

The bottom line in all of this is that while the prophets and believers of old, lived and died so much for us who would follow, the fact is that many of us essentially live today solely for ourselves... **our** comforts and **our** feelings. And there can be no greater insidious cancer! For when I become the center of my universe, the universe becomes so very small, empty, meaningless and depressing. We fail on this account when we refuse to yield ourselves totally to Christ as our Lord. We want salvation, but we reject surrender, Lordship, repentance and other-centeredness.

There is something in the Christian experience that requires the mind to run hard against competing ideas, emotions and persuasions. But the problem often comes from a lack of girding up – when the troubles and challenges come that require a readied mind, so often we are found wanting. Instead we tend to embrace a lifestyle of mental apathy where we soak in the latest cultural novelty with wild abandonment. Absorbing all the world’s ideas is as good for mind girding as absorbing all the McDonald’s in the world is for an athlete. We end up bloated, out of breath and pinned to the ground by those who are enemies of the Gospel and by our own lusts and emotions.

Paul spoke of this in Romans: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* **And how do we do this?** *“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”*

All of this process involves what Paul calls the “dying to self” and Peter calls the “seeking after holiness.” What we will organically seek after as true spirit-filled born again believers is seeing and thinking about life from God’s perspective. Such is not a perfect road, however true rebirth brings true change...a heart that desires to be like Christ. This is not a hope or desire, but an absolute! To allow ourselves latitude in this will be a mistake with eternal consequences! *“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”* Romans 8:6

Peter does not just tell us to knock off the poor behavior and then leave us to flail about and languish in our failure. He goes on to tell us that the answer is not to click our heels together and give a snappy salute, but

rather the path lies in the active and personal pursuit of holiness. In our rebirth, we now have the power and thus the ability to walk in holiness! It doesn't say *become* holy, or *receive* holiness, but it says BE holy! So it stands to reason that the choice ...as well as the power... is available to us! God would never ask of us anything that we are unable to attain to. Holiness is given to us. It is our choice to walk in it or not!

What exactly is this thing "holiness?" Holiness speaks of being set apart and consecrated to God, encompassing both separation from sin and the world, and dedication to divine purposes. Yet holiness is a characteristic, not an attribute. It has in it the idea of a way of living...a way of being. Not a situational decision, but a lifestyle. One that seeks in all matters to be as Christ. God is inherently holy. It is the very nature and embodiment of His being. Seeking to be like Him in this matter is the driving force of our diligence and dedication. It is what is to drive us onward. Yet for many of us, our reasons for being here vary greatly. The motivator may be morality, peer or family pressure, or maybe we are just your current secular community until something better comes along.

In the act of seeking to be holy as He is holy, there lies something that most of us tend to despise and reject in this new 'Jesus light' age of the church in which we are living, and that is to "fear" God. We have generally tossed out such a concept in order to make our God more gentle, palatable, and socially acceptable in what we have already pointed out is our present age of "fragile sensibilities." And yet, here it is in front of us! Verse 17 says "...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear."

"if you call on the Father...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear." **"If."** If we call upon Him, then we are therefore bound to come under His rule of Lordship. There is no halfway...no compromise! If no obedience, then no blessing.

All of this does not mean we cloister ourselves in some monastery or a cave somewhere, rejecting societal interaction and contact with people. We must seek to be missional, and evangelistically and relationally engaging, but we must be "suited up" for such a war or we will not survive it. It was when Lot stopped being a sojourner, and actually became a *resident* in Sodom, that he lost his way as well as his testimony, which then was followed by a famously spectacular "crash and burn." We must be *in* this world but *not part of it*. That was the prayer of Christ. (John 17:15)

To "fear God" means that we are to "hold Him in awe, to reverence His holiness, power, sovereignty, and wisdom." But it also quite simply and quite plainly means that we are to literally be afraid of His judgment and potential wrath! Understanding this principle is crucial to our relationship with Him! For God longs to have a close intimate and gentle loving relationship with us...like my earthly father did me. But when I was growing up, I also never forgot that my dad had the 'power of the state' behind him...meaning the ability to discipline me in various ways which all brought me some degree of discomfort. I didn't like it, but it made for a very lucid clarity in my life. I could rebel and have the wrathful dad, or I could obey and have the fellowship of unity and peace of stability. He, like my God, always loved me in either case, but how that love was manifested in my real world was my choice. And it still is with my heavenly Father. My options seems to be a pat on the head or a slap on the head.

Verse 17 tells us that we will be judged "according to our works." This is not speaking of being judged as to my redemption...my salvation state. That is not an issue of works, but of His grace. This speaks of our standing before God today, as well as when we arrive on the other side. This should cause us some pause, if not some legitimate fear! Are you able to jump to your feet on this matter and shout a hearty "Hurrah?" Are you sure about your works before Him?

When we fail to live in the constant light of the cross...the fact Jesus literally allowed himself to be brutally and horrifically murdered so we could walk free, we are on the road to ruin. Those who are able to “return to their vomit,” are seemingly unaware that they give up steak and lobster to have it! Such truly is one of Satan’s greatest coups.

The price paid for your salvation is beyond human comprehension. Its value is priceless and timeless! Paid for not with temporal things, like money or material possessions, but literally with the life of the Son of God! And please note the language of the NKJ...that you were redeemed not just from sin, but moreover even from your “aimless conduct.”

Some of us want to believe we have indeed been redeemed from the guilt and penalty of our sin, and yet we are still wholly under the power of our “aimless conduct.” We drift from one direction to another. From job to job, church to church, boyfriend to boyfriend, from one living arrangement to the next. We compromise. We marginalize. We don’t know for sure where we have been and we certainly don’t have any idea where we are going. We are “aimless.” No kingdom direction, goals, or calling in our lives. We’re just...well...*here*.

How does one know that you ‘get all this?’ Because such will make you stand in awe and worship. It makes us "marvel!" And ultimately it makes us *act*. Yes, God saw the whole movie played out in His timeless eyes, long before He even created us. Yet He went ahead and created a species that would overwhelmingly reject Him, and then died for those same individuals who for thousands of years have refused to even acknowledge Him. One could wonder what could motivate such a decision, especially in light of His foresight into man’s wickedness, stubborn hearts, and self-centered pride. But He tells us, (and His children know it to be true!) that he did so because he loves us, and longs for a relationship with us. Even if only one ever came to Him because of such, He would have went to that cross for the one.

Let us remember the context of this letter...a *suffering people*. A persecuted and hurting group of believers that now struggled with their faith and their lack of strength. Again, while Peter seemed to express some genuine compassion for these fellow believers, he never gave them a free pass. Instead he is calling them into remembrance. He is reminding them what God gave, what Jesus did, what they have because of it, and how they should live now due to such.

How I wish I could reach those of you that have so forgotten...have so marginalized such a gift. The premise has found a nice place on a shelf in your heart, and now the sorrow of a fallen world and/or your “aimless conduct” has caused you to lose sight of the road behind you and how God has been there every step. You are blinded by the mere moment of eternity that you currently stand in, and it seems like all that matters is right now, but will it 1000 years from now? Will it matter then?

Now herein lies the core of this issue and a lot of us aren't going to like it. "*You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth...*" Is Peter adding to the requirements of salvation? Absolutely not. But he is clarifying the fact that true salvation does not bring us merely a *belief* in the truth, it brings us *an obedience to it*. Jesus Himself reiterated this fact in Matthew 7:21 "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*" Ignore this nuance, and it can cost us eternity. Hell will be full of folks who believe in all that we believe today! What starkly separates the possessor from the professor is obedience.

James put it this way, "*So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*" Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone. It is always accompanied by “newness of life”. (John Piper)

Some of us are not so much living in active “commission” of sin today, but rather walking in sin by not living Christ first. You can argue, debate and even bristle at those words! But ask yourself, are you ready to be judged today for your works? Are you ready for Him to shine that bright light upon your living?