

Chapter 2: Passion and Patience

1 Peter 1:13–25

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Interpreter (who trains pilgrims in doctrine) takes Christian to a room where he sees two children, one named Passion, and the other Patience.¹ Passion is discontented, but Patience is quiet and content. When Christian asks about the reason for Passion's discontentedness, the Interpreter explains, "The governor of them would have him stay for his best things till the beginning of the next year, but he will have all now; but Patience is willing to wait." Then, when Passion suddenly receives a bag of treasures, he rejoices and laughs at Patience. Only a little while later, though, those treasures were gone, leaving Passion in nothing but rags. Passion, the Interpreter explains, is like the men of this world: "They must have all their good things now; they cannot stay till the next year, that is, until the next world, for their portion of good." All too soon, however, they lose that portion of good, without anything left to show for it.

Patience, however, is willing to wait, so that he may have his treasure "lastingly." While Christian readily understands that "it is not best to covet things that are now, but to wait for things to come," the Interpreter adds an important lesson about how difficult it is to control our appetites for temporary, worldly things, and to cultivate an appetite for eternal, heavenly things: "You say truth: for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal. 2 Cor. 4:18. But though this be so, yet since things present and our fleshly appetite are such near neighbors one to another; and again, because things to come and carnal sense are such strangers one to another; therefore it is, that the first of these so suddenly fall into amity [friendship], and that distance is so continued between the second." While Bunyan does not explicitly quote 1 Peter 1:13–25 in this portion of *Pilgrim's Progress*, he nevertheless echoes the themes we find in this passage. Here, Peter urges us to *gird up your mind to pursue Christ*.

Passion and Patience (1 Pet. 1:13–19)

In v. 13, Peter transitions out of his doxology and the celebration of the eternal inheritance that awaits us in heaven in the previous passage (1 Pet. 1:3–12) into practical instructions for Christian living, using the word "therefore" (v. 13a).² As Edmund Clowney notes, "The imperatives of Christian living always begin with *Therefore*. Peter does not begin to exhort Christian pilgrims until he has celebrated the wonders of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. The indicative of what God has done for us (and in us) precedes the imperatives of what we are called to do for him."³

Peter begins these instructions by a strange image. What the ESV paraphrases as "preparing your minds for

¹ Available online: <<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.iv.ii.html>>

² Michaels, *1 Peter*, 52.

³ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 42.

action,” is literally “gird up [ἀναζώννυμι; *anazōnnumi*] the loins of your mind.” Lenski explains the imagery: “Girding up the loins refers to the long, loose robes worn by [those of the Near East], which were drawn up and belted at the waist when one wanted to walk or work with energy.”⁴ At a very high level, this imagery conveys the sense of “a mind prepared for active work.”⁵ More specifically, the imagery suggests a concern for being entangled with (as Peter will make clear in the next verse) our desires for the things of this world. Thus Calvin captures the full sense of this when he writes the following:

[Peter] intimates that our minds are held entangled by the passing cares of the world and by vain desires, so that they rise not upward to God. Whosoever, then, really wishes to have this hope, let him learn in the first place to disentangle himself from the world, and gird up his mind that it may not turn aside to vain affections. And for the same purpose he enjoins sobriety, which immediately follows; for he commends not temperance only in eating and drinking, but rather spiritual sobriety, when all our thoughts and affections are so kept as not to be inebriated with the allurements of this world. For since even the least taste of them stealthily draws us away from God, when one plunges himself into these, he must necessarily become sleepy and stupid, and he forgets God and the things of God.⁶

Or, as Lenski writes, “Instead of letting their thoughts, purposes, decisions hang loose while they move leisurely along in life as impulse and occasion may move them, the readers are to gird up their minds like people who are energetically set on going somewhere. To gird up the loins means business, decision, action, not idling, not drifting after this and that momentary attraction.”⁷ Within the wider context of this section, some have argued that Peter has in mind those who ate the Passover as they prepared to depart from Egypt: “In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened [i.e., girded up; LXX: περιζώννυμι; *perizōnnumi*], your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover” (Ex. 12:11). If so, then the image is evocative of people who are taking action toward entering into their inheritance (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4): “Like Israel in Egypt, we have been called out of our slavery to begin a journey to the promised land.”⁸

Next, Peter explains that this will require “being sober-minded” (v. 13b). As in English, the idea of “sober” means being free from drunkenness, but here it has a wider sense: “be free [from] every form of mental and spiritual ‘drunkenness’, [from] excess, passion, rashness, confusion, etc. *be well-balanced, self-controlled*.”⁹ Davids observes, “For Peter the cares of this life and the pressure of persecution can ‘intoxicate’ the Christian and distract his or her focus just as easily as wine might (as Jesus also taught, Mark 4:16–19). The need of the hour is clear judgment and a mind and will

⁴ Lenski, “The First Epistle of St. Peter,” 51.

⁵ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 66.

⁶ Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” 44.

⁷ Lenski, “The First Epistle of St. Peter,” 51.

⁸ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 43.

⁹ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 672.

prepared to resist anything that would deflect them from a hope set on Jesus' appearing."¹⁰ Later in this letter, Peter will use this same word again with more specificity: "Self-control of the mind facilitates prayer (1 Pet. 4:7) and an awareness of the devil's ways (5:8)."¹¹ Here, Peter says that our sober-mindedness requires setting our "hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (v. 13c). Just as the living hope of our inheritance gives us reason to rejoice, even when we are grieved by trials (1 Pet. 1:3–6), so also a mind girded for action with sober-mindedness is one that is not distracted from its focus on the final revelation of Jesus Christ at his return. This sobriety of mind allows believers to exercise patience until Christ returns.

As a further explanation of this kind of mind-girded sobriety, Peter urges his readers, "as obedient children," that they should "not be conformed to the passions of [their] former ignorance" (v. 14). The word for "conformed" here only appears elsewhere in the New Testament in Romans 12:2: "Do not be *conformed* to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Both apostles are urging us not to allow our lives to come into conformity to the wrong model (J.B. Phillips famously translated this idea as being "squeezed into the mold"), although we should note that whereas Paul warns against being conformed to the world (i.e., the mold of others), Peter warns against being conformed to the passions that arise inside of us (i.e., the mold of our own sinful *flesh*).¹² What are these "passions"?

A passion is a reaction to the world around us that is characterized by desire and suffering. In the previous passage, Peter spoke of Christ's "sufferings" (1 Pet. 1:11) by the word παθήματα [*pathēmata*], which appears throughout 1 Peter to describe the specific kinds of passions related to the sufferings of Christ and his people (1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; 5:1, 9). Here in v. 14, Peter now uses different for the word for the kind of sufferings he describes as "passions" (ἐπιθυμία; *epithumia*) that largely appears to describe concupiscent lusts (1 Pet. 1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3). These passions are sufferings, but of a different sort. The *pathēmata* of Christ indicates a passive kind of suffering—whether the suffering that Christ endured for his people, or the suffering that his people must endure for him. The *epithumia*, on the other hand, describes a more active kind of suffering that drives us to pursue some kind of good (i.e., a *pain* that pricks and prompts us to strive for some form of *gain*). Most of time, this word refers to the pursuit of worldly goods, and Peter will warn us against that throughout this letter, beginning in 1 Peter 1:14. On the other hand, 1 Pet. 1:12 uses the verb ἐπιθυμέω (*epithumeō*) to describe the desire of angels to look into the heavenly things preached through the Holy Spirit.

The key difference, then, comes down to motivation and intent: are we suffering from our desires to gain the goods of this world, or are we suffering because we long to inherit the eternal inheritance God has stored for us in heaven? As Davids points out, the problem is not desire *per se*, but the "undifferentiating" desires of our passions, in which "it makes no difference to desire whether the property belongs to you or to a neighbor or the man or woman is the one bound to you by covenant love or not. Desire goes after anything that satisfies the drive. It is indeed the proximate desires (tempered by the wish to avoid undesirable consequences of certain behavior) that control most people, and to conform to these desires is to slip right back into the life-style that the Christians

¹⁰ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 66–67.

¹¹ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 112.

¹² Lenski, "The First Epistle of St. Peter," 54.

should have abandoned at conversion.”¹³ In other words, the desires of our passions are not “rational” (see 1 Pet. 2:2; ESV: “spiritual”), because they are not guided by the truth of God’s Word. Peter’s words here strike a fatal blow against the gospel of our current culture, which tells us that life and joy and salvation come precisely through being conformed to one’s passions, so that I can only embrace “my truth” through (especially) the pursuit of (biblically undifferentiated) sexual lust.

These, however, are the passions of our *former* ignorance, and Peter warns us away from them. Instead, Peter calls us to embrace the holiness of the one who has called us: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (vv. 15–16). Then, he urges us to consider the way that we call on God “as Father,” while perhaps not remembering that our Father is the one “who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds” (v. 17a). If we forget the second aspect of God’s nature, we “convert him into an indulgent grandfather God who shuts an eye to the sins of his children, who, like Eli of old, takes no stern measures with them when they disobey.”¹⁴

Against this, Peter reminds us that this world is not our home, since we are now living through “the time of [our] exile,” in which we must “conduct [ourselves] with fear” (v. 17b). By this, Peter is bringing us back to the original characterization he offered, in which we are “elect exiles.” If the passions are ultimately appetites for worldly things in a way that does not incorporate a biblical differentiation of what is good and what is evil, then the remedy is (1) to cultivate a healthy sense of fear of the coming judgment of the impartial judge of all the earth, and (2) to shift our attention to the precious inheritance we have received, and the precious blood by which Christ obtained that inheritance for us: “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (vv. 18–19). Peter reminds us of the perishability of even a precious metal like gold, as he had mentioned back in 1 Peter 1:7. In contrast, he holds out something far more precious and enduring: the blood of Christ, our unblemished lamb. Here again, Peter may have the Exodus in mind, in which the blood of the lamb redeemed Israel from the Lord’s judgment as he passed through the land of Egypt.¹⁵ If the blood of those lambs was effective to redeem Israel in exile in Egypt, how much more effective is the blood of Christ to redeem of his people as we live out our lives in exile from our heavenly inheritance?

Our Precious Savior (1 Pet. 1:20–21)

Peter’s words in vv. 20–21 deserve standalone attention within this passage. It is as though, after calling us out of conformity to our former passions, and then briefly mentioning the preciousness of the blood of Christ to redeem us, that Peter cannot help but pause and marvel at our great Savior: “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the 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” (vv. 20–21). Earlier, Peter said that *we* were foreknown by God the Father (πρόγνωσιν; *prognōsin*; 1 Pet. 1:2), and now he says that Christ was foreknown (προεγνωσμένου; *prognōsemenou*) before the foundation of the world. Here, Peter suggests a critical link: we were elected not as standalone draftees as God attempted to find

¹³ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 68.

¹⁴ Lenski, “The First Epistle of St. Peter,” 59.

¹⁵ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 50.

the best and brightest among us. Rather, we were elected *in* Christ (e.g., Eph. 1:4). Our only hope rests in nothing that we can do, and only in God's foreknowledge that he would send his Son into this world for our salvation. As John Calvin observes, "In short, we cannot confidently [lean] on Christ, except we are convinced that eternal salvation is in him, and always has been in him."¹⁶

Further, the Father never lost sight of his plan, unlike the way that we sometimes forget to follow through with our best intentions. "In the last times" and for our "sake," Christ was "made manifest." This word for "made manifest" is similar to, but distinct from, the word for the "revelation" of Jesus Christ at the end of time (1 Pet. 1:13). Thus, in eternity past, the Father *foreknew* his Son in such a way as to plan to send him into this world for our salvation. Then, in the fullness of time, the eternal Son of God was *made manifest* for our sake, during which time God "raised him from the dead and gave him glory." Even though he is now out of sight, the Lord is leading us to love Jesus more and more (1 Pet. 1:8–9), "so that [our] faith and hope are in God," as we await his *revelation* at the end of time. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Preaching and the Purification of our Souls (1 Pet. 1:22–25)

After fixing our attention on the *source* of our salvation (Christ), Peter now reinforces the significance of the word of God (and, particularly, the gospel) as the *means* of our salvation. Again, at a high level, Peter wants us to see that, although the desires of this world are alluring, they are perishing, defiled, and fading away (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4). Thus, he reminds us of what we must do (namely, to love our fellow brethren in the Lord "earnestly from a pure heart") through an appeal to the *imperishable, living, and abiding* word of God. Towards this end, he cites Isaiah 40:6, 8, and then declares that "this word is the good news [i.e., the gospel] that was preached to you" (v. 25b). There are two points that we should emphasize this.

First, in contrast to giving ourselves over to the burning desires of the flesh, Paul says that we should instead "love one another *earnestly*," using a word that pertains "to being persevering, *eagerly, fervently, constantly*."¹⁷ We are called to be "sober-minded," but this does not mean that we are unfeeling stoics. Rather, it means that our eagerness and fervency must be characterized by a constancy that is differentiated by the way that the word of God trains our minds for right action. Whereas the world is awash in excess, passion, and confusion, believers know exactly where they are going as they gird up the loins of their mind for traveling to the promised land.

Second, we see here the importance of the preached word. Calvin writes:

There is here, besides, no common eulogy on preaching; for Peter declares that what is preached is the life-giving word. God alone is indeed he who regenerates us; but for that purpose he employs the ministry of men; and on this account Paul glories that the Corinthians had been spiritually begotten by him. (1 Corinthians 4:15.) It is indeed certain that those who plant and those who water, are nothing; but whenever God is pleased to bless their labor, he makes their doctrine efficacious by the power of his Spirit; and the voice which is in itself mortal, is made an instrument to communicate eternal life.¹⁸

¹⁶ Calvin, "The First Epistle of Peter," 52.

¹⁷ Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 310.

¹⁸ Calvin, "The First Epistle of Peter," 60.

As the instrument that God uses in purifying our souls, the preached word is something we should give ourselves wholly to, as often as we have occasion to receive it. As the Lord shapes the meditations of our minds through his Word, he trains our eagerness with a constancy that is not constantly distracted by the impulses of this world, but that is fixed on our inheritance. Theologians, then, have often distinguished between the *passions* of the flesh (*reactive*, worldly desires) and our *affections* (*proactive*, rational, spiritual desires). Whereas God does not have passions (Acts 14:15; ESV: “same nature”; lit., “like passions”), the Scriptures speak much of his affections, which are fixed through his wisdom. In laying aside worldly passions and taking up God’s affections, the Lord trains us to be holy, as he is holy (v. 16).

Discussion Questions

1. How does the word “therefore” connect this passage with what we read in the previous passage (v. 13a)? What does the literal imagery of the phrase “prepare your minds for action” (v. 13b; ESV) convey to us? What is the meaning of “sober-minded” (v. 13c)? What are our “passions” and what would it mean to be conformed to them (v. 14a)? Why does Peter tie our passions to our “former ignorance” (v. 14b)? How ought we to live instead?
2. What makes the blood of Christ “precious” (v. 19a)? Why is it so important that he was “without blemish or spot” (v. 19b)? What does it mean that Christ was “foreknown before the foundation of the world” (v. 20a)? How does this idea connect with God’s foreknowledge of us (1 Pet. 1:2)? What does it mean that Christ was “made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” (v. 20b)? What is the ultimate purpose of Christ’s redemptive work (v. 21)?
3. How are our souls “purified” (v. 22a)? What is the result of our souls’ purification (v. 22b)? What role does our regeneration play in this purification (v. 23)? What does it mean for the word of God to be “imperishable” (v. 23)? How does the living and enduring word of God contrast with the perishability and fading nature of this world (v. 24–25a)? What role does preaching play in implanting God’s imperishable word of God in our souls (v. 25b)?
4. Are the loins of your mind girded up for action, or are you drifting along reactively to every impulse you encounter in life? Are you sober-minded, or are you driven by the passions arising in your body? How attentive are you to the preached Word of God as the means of grace that God has appointed for your salvation and for your purification in holiness? What is one way to give yourself more fully to the good news that is preached to you?