Purifying Grace

Fifth in the summer 2019 sermon series, “Amazing Grace”

# Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-2:3; Titus 2:11-14

# Key Thought**:** God's grace is continually at work to purify our minds, hearts and future expectation.

# Intro:

Imagine living in a small village on the Southeast coast of Africa. You work in the fields every day, and you have to walk 3 miles from your house to get clean drinking water. One day out of nowhere gusting winds and flash floods begin, and you have to climb up into a tree and stay there for days to survive. You pray the tree you are resting on does not fall like many trees around you. Once the storm calms, you go to where your house once stood, but all that is left is a pile of debris. You go to get water from the well you always used, and you learn from another local that people who were drinking from that well were getting sick and dying of cholera. You are trying to have hope, but everything seems hopeless. This story was one told by many when the World Hope International relief team landed in Mozambique.

In mid-March (2019), Mozambique was hit by cyclone Idai, causing devastation for the people destroying their houses, fields, and livelihoods. World Hope International had the opportunity to partner with three other organizations, Amazon, Katadyn, and Airlink, to bring relief to the people in Mozambique. Without relief from organizations and people around the world, disasters like cyclone Idai would be even more ruinous.

The team of 6 from WHI were trained and ready to help fight against the aftermath effects of the cyclone. Airlink provided the air travel for the team, getting them to Beira, Mozambique. Katadyn and Amazon provided water filters that could be used to clean the water and protect survivors from the second crisis of a cholera outbreak. Together, these organizations were ready to equip Beira citizens with essentials such as clean water and food.

<https://www.worldhope.org/relief-in-the-midst-of-ruin/>

In such situations the need for pure water is obvious. Here in the Northeastern US we are blessed with good water, but even here, we test it to be sure.

What other things can you think of that need to be purified? Metals, chemicals, etc. What about the hearts and minds of people? That is exactly the matter for this sermon.

## Keyword

In our summer series of sermons titled “Amazing Grace,” we have been exploring God’s works of grace in our lives. Today we explore a work of grace that is a classic emphasis of Methodism. In our English translations, there is a common word in our two texts today that speaks of this key action of God’s grace in our lives. It is the word “purify.” In 1 Peter 1:22 we read this instruction;

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 NIV

The verse immediately gives us clues that the kind of purity that we are talking about has to do with our hearts and our love. The Greek word that is translated as purify here is from “hagnizo” meaning to make clean and is related to the words for holy and for sanctify.

In Titus 2:13, 14 Paul writes about;

“…our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:13-14 NIV

In that passage, the word translated “purify” is from the verb “katharizo” means “to cleanse” and is often associated with washing.

Both verbs are used together of how God works in our lives when Paul describes what Jesus has done for us in Eph. 5:25. There Paul is comparing us as the church to a bride prepared for her wedding.

“…Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” Eph 5:25, 26 NIV

Peter in describing to the Jerusalem assembly the action of the Holy Spirit upon those assembled in the house of Cornelius, declared,

God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8-9 KJV

The Greek word is “katharizo.”

So, this idea of grace purifying us is important for disciples of Jesus to understand and to cooperate with.

# A mind ready for action

As we examine the workings of God’s grace to purify us, we look first at our minds. This is one of the foci of our text. All of us know that it is important to keep our minds pure. But exactly what does that mean? In our text today, we have a very practical perspective on what it means to have a pure mind.

Peter’s first concern in the passage that we have for our text today is with our minds. He suggests that we need to prepare our minds for action. The idea behind the text has to do with the clothing that was worn by men in that era. They wore long robes that were not suitable for hard work or running. So, when the men needed to move about easily or run, they picked up their robes and tucked them into their belt. Then they were ready for action. Peter uses the act of tucking in the robes and thus getting ready for action as a metaphor concerning our minds.

So how do we prepare our minds for action?

## A mind ready for God’s work is a mind fed on God’s Word

In this passage Peter said,

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:2-3 NIV

I can’t help but think about how Peter’s idea in this verse contrasts with how our minds are usually fed in our society today. Rather than being nourished by God’s Word, our 21st century minds are fed largely by media inputs that reflect questionable values. Christian disciples need to take intentional steps to change that input. What are some ways we can counterbalance what the culture offers us as mental input?

* Personal Bible reading
* Attendance at services and Bible studies
* Online or written devotionals
* Bible memorization
* Scripture songs

## Peter desires that we have a mind prepared to answer

In the next chapter of 1 Peter we read;

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” I Peter 3:15b NIV

We need to be expecting God to use us at all kinds of times and in all different situations. I have surprised some people who stopped to tell me about troubling issues in their family or among friends by suggesting that we pray for the situation right then. It may be in the greeting line after church, or in the grocery store. But I believe there is no time like the present for bringing the situation to God in prayer. When we are the kind of person who is prepared, other people sense it.

When my father-in-law was alive, he had several extended family members who did not live as Christians. He thought he was having no effect upon them. But he discovered that whenever they faced a situation that needed prayer or when they wanted an opinion from someone they trusted, they asked him. They instinctively knew who was prepared to answer.

## A mind prepared for action has “wholesome thinking”

Peter gives us some ideas as to the kind of thinking which we will have when our minds are properly fed on God’s Word. For this point we borrow a verse from the third chapter of the second letter that Peter wrote. But in this second letter he tells us clearly one of his purposes in writing his first letter, including our text for today.

I have written both of them [letters] as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.  
 2 Peter 3:1

Let’s use this letter of Peter to enumerate. Wholesome thinking:

* Does not focus on evil or base desires (2 Peter 2:1; 3:3). Some kinds of thinking just don’t fit with following Jesus.
* According to three different verses in first Peter (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), wholesome thinking is sober thinking, as in not dulled or altered by drugs and alcohol.
* Understands the enemy of our souls is real and devious (1 Peter 5:8) If you have a medical condition, you learn to know your malady so that you can avoid problems and stay healthy. Similarly, when we know the enemy’s traps, we can better serve the Master of our souls.
* Looks toward the heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 1:3, 4, 13) More on this in a moment.

## If our minds are ready, what sort of action can we anticipate?

Here are five suggestions from the book of 1 Peter. Some of them are obvious and ones that we would like to encounter. Others are ones we wish to avoid but that we might encounter anyway along life’s way and it will be good to be prepared.

* Prayer 4:7 One purpose of right thinking is to be ready to pray.
* Loving actions 4:8 Another purpose is to be ready to love well.
* Using our gifts 4:9-11 We can use our God-given gifts best when we are spiritually ready.
* Suffering 4:12-19 Suffering of one kind or another comes to all of us. It is better to be spiritually prepared ahead of time.
* Resisting Satan 5:8,9 For example, the Bible tells us that Scripture tucked away in our minds will help us to avoid evil (Psalm 119:11).

# A heart of pure devotion

## Wesley’s warning

But even before we can work on work on purifying our minds, we need to pay attention to the seat of our affections which we call our heart. A pure heart is a heart of pure devotion to God. This stress upon the heart was the primary emphasis of John Wesley, founder of Methodism. He faced in his day as we do in ours, the temptations to be distracted by many other things rather than focusing on God. Wesley wrote in one of his sermons something that could have been written yesterday.

[People] are generally lost in the hurry of life, in the business or pleasures of it, and seem to think that their regeneration, their new nature, will spring and grow up within them, with as little care and thought of their own as their bodies were conceived and have attained their full strength and stature; whereas, there is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions, which are lost upon us while, in the Prophet's language, we "scatter away our time," — while we squander away our thoughts upon unnecessary things, and leave our spiritual improvement, the one thing needful, quite unthought of and neglected.

(Sermon 138 - On Grieving The Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) from Sermons of John Wesley, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

How much more are we distracted today. Churches everywhere report that even people who are regular at church are less regular than in years past. And even people who have attended church for years are surprisingly ignorant of Biblical stories and details due simply to limited exposure. They do not invest many hours in listening to pastors or Bible teachers and some pastors they do listen to are not Bible teachers but spend their time telling stories, or talking about the news. So the flock of God remains Biblically ignorant.

Peter has three words or phrases to describe the former lifestyles of the Christians to whom he was writing. I’m afraid that many today can relate far too easily to these three words. His three descriptions were

* Ignorant of God’s ways (v. 14) – In the history of the US, our English has been dominated by Biblical idioms and metaphors. But today it is becoming dominated by movie and gaming phrases and metaphors.
* Dominated by desire (v. 14) This is truer than ever in our day.
* An empty way of life (v. 15) As evidence of how empty people are today, consider that suicide is a leading cause of death among both young and old.

We need the message of the Good News of God’s Word as much or more than the world of Peter and Paul.

If we are going to be motivated to eliminate the spiritual distractions and move from our spiritually unfulfilling ways to Jesus’ abundant live, it will take a change of heart! We will need to set our inner affections on following Jesus. Christian discipleship will need to become our inner priority! Listen again to Wesley, this time from his formative book, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection

"This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped on our hearts. It is a 'renewal of believers in the spirit of their minds, after the likeness of Him that created them.' God hath now laid 'the axe unto the root of the tree, purifying their hearts by faith,' and 'cleansing all the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.' Having this hope, that they shall see God as he is, they 'purify themselves even as he is pure,' and are 'holy, as he that hath called them is holy, in all manner of conversation.' Not that they have already attained all that they shall attain, either are already in this sense perfect. But they daily 'go on from strength to strength; beholding' now, 'as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.'

(from Of Christian Perfection, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

## Peter’s admonition

Peter talks about this change of heart in our text,

Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. 1 Peter 1:17 NIV

What does this reverent fear of God look like? How do you break it down?

### Live as one accountable to God

First, to live in reverent fear means that we live as people accountable to an impartial and holy judge.

Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.   
 1 Peter 1:13 NIV

Our example is Jesus who “entrusted himself to him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

There is an appointed end to this race that we are running. The Judge has been appointed. It is Jesus! John quoted Jesus’ words for us.

Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. John 5:25-27 NIV

### Be encouraged that God’s imperishable seed is at work

We might be discouraged when we compare our spiritual state to where we think we should be. But Peter encourages us. He wants us to remember that as Christians, as those who have opened our hearts to the Word of God and the Spirit of God, something powerful and unstoppable is at work. Peter uses the metaphor of a seed that does not rot. Any gardener knows that many seeds do not sprout, they rot. But the gardener counts on those that do sprout. A seed that sprouts is a powerful thing. It can break through a paved driveway. It can split a wall. It can heave up a sidewalk as it grows. Peter says that spiritually speaking, we are born of an imperishable seed. God’s Word has produced a new birth in us, and this new life cannot be stopped by outside opposing forces.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;  
the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”   
1 Peter 1:23-25 NIV

This reminds us of what Paul wrote to the church in Philippi.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil 1:6 NIV

### Live as one indebted to Jesus

To live in reverent fear is also to live with a strong consciousness of the price that has been paid on our behalf for our redemption. Peter wrote:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18, 19 NIV

Think of it this way. Suppose someone sets you up in business at great expense to themselves. But when the opportunity arises, you make decisions that betray the interests of your benefactor. How will your benefactor look at you? What will people who know think of you?

Yet we often live and prioritize we our lives forgetting who our greatest spiritual benefactor is! How does Jesus feel when we live in ways that betray his interests and bring dishonor instead of honor to Him!

### Love deeply

Peter also encourages us readers that the right kind of thinking, thinking purified by God, will result in loving other people deeply (1 Peter 1:22). It is too easy for us and Christians to focus our religion on things we don’t do and on pious acts of personal devotion. These things are needful. But if our religion does not result in loving others, it has not reached the goals that God intends. What does James say?

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.   
James 1:27 NIV

What did Paul write to the Galatians?

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Gal 5:6 NIV

# A focused expectation

Finally, to have a pure mind is to have a mind with a properly focused expectation. Let’s review what Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:13.

Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.   
1 Peter 1:13 NIV

We hate to admit it, but most of our motivation today comes from our current comfort. Occasionally we stretch to include the welfare of others and our prospects of future success, but mostly, we look for our comfort.

But Peter tells us that our thinking will be healthier when we are ultimately motivated by the day that we will see Jesus. It is the day of the climax of our salvation. The person who runs a race runs for the finish line. The person who works labors toward a paycheck. The one who climbs a mountain is aiming for the summit. Jesus said to his followers:

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:3 NIV

He also compared us to lead servants overseeing a household for the Master until he returns to check on their work. He concluded that instruction with a blessing.

Blessed is that servant, whom his master will find so doing when he comes.   
Luke 12:43 NKJV

# Conclusion

Perhaps there are some of you this morning who would say, “Pastor, I need for the grace of God to do a purifying work in my heart and mind.”

“I’ve been allowing my mind to be filled with this world’s garbage and I’m really not prepared for spiritual action.”

Maybe you are here this morning and you would have to day, “Pastor, I’m afraid I am one who has been forgetting who my spiritual benefactor is. I have not been living like I have been redeemed with Jesus’ precious blood.”

Maybe some things you’ve been doing are hurting your greatest benefactor greatly. This morning there is a place of repentance for you.

Lots of us today live just for this world, with no thought of Jesus coming again. But as long as we live with only an earthly perspective, we can’t have the purity of motive that God desires for us. This morning the sanctifying grace of God can help us fix our thoughts on Jesus, crucified, risen and coming again.