

Living Righteously in a Corrupt Society

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1 Peter 1.13 - 21

On June 5th Richard Scott William Hutchinson celebrated his first birthday. What makes his birthday so special is that he was given a 0% chance of survival when born five months prematurely. He is the most premature baby to survive; he was “born 131 days prior to the expected due date and weighing just 11.9 ounces. Richard was so tiny his parents could hold him in a single palm of their hands.” He spent more than six months in hospital before being able to go home with his family.¹ Richard’s survival is evidence of the resourcefulness and exceptional ability of the medical system to facilitate something so unimaginable that even the attending doctors did not believe their heroic efforts would be successful. Nor would they have succeeded except for wisdom from God and the touch of His hand on that tiny little life.

Why would I begin a message on *Living Righteously in a Corrupt Society* with an example of such unprecedented and commendable expertise and commitment to saving the life of a premature baby no one expected to survive? I do so because while ingenuity and undoubtedly hundreds of thousands of dollars, perhaps even millions of dollars were expended to save Richard Hutchinson during his 6 months stay in hospital, thereby proving the viability of life at just 4 months gestation, during that 6 month hospital stay approximately 450,000 nameless babies were aborted in the USA.² Many of the babies aborted during that period were far more likely that Richard Hutchinson to survive if only they had been given the opportunity. Unfortunately, they never had a chance because they were classified as not being *human* and were disposed of under the banner of a “woman’s right to her reproductive health.” God’s intervention in preserving a child born 5 months premature highlights the viability and miraculous nature of life in a world that performs an estimated 40 to 50 million abortions annually or about 125,000 persons per day.³ Just a few weeks ago Canada’s members of parliament overwhelmingly dismissed even considering a law restricting abortion of babies who are not the preferred gender. The systematic killing of the unborn is surely an example of how corrupt our society which can preserve the life of a 5-month premature baby, has become.

While abortion is one of the more egregious examples that we live in a corrupt society, it is by no means an isolated one. Just a few days ago the *Cowessess First Nation* announced that it has found 751 unmarked graves on the grounds of the former *Marieval Indian Residential School* located just north of Broadview, Saskatchewan, and east of Crooked Lake in the Qu’Appelle Valley. While some of the graves may be of adults from the region it is believed that most are of children who are unaccounted for.⁴ The revelation eclipses the discovery of 215 children buried at the *Kamloops Residential School*. We can only grieve over the choice by those who claimed to

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/19/us/worlds-most-premature-baby-birthday-trnd/index.html>

² https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/

³ <https://www.worldometers.info/abortions/>

⁴ <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/cowessess-first-nation-says-751-unmarked-graves-found-near-former-sask-residential-school-1.5483858>

be representatives of the true God to be agents of such abuse and treat fellow human beings with such disdain.

We live in a world filled with endless examples of its depravity and disregard for God's standards of righteousness. Evidence our society is marred by sin is found in the marketplace, the workplace, educational and social institutions, government, personal relationships, in all areas of life; no part of life is immune to the ravages of sin.

How do we live righteously in such a society? How do we refuse to cave-in and become indistinguishable from the world in which we live? How do we stand steadfast when we encounter opposition because of our Christian values? Remember, Peter's letter was initially directed to first century Christians who were widely persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ and their beliefs and practices which conflicted sharply with their society. The conflict was so great and the opposition so strong, many lost their lives. It is to them that Peter directed a letter encouraging them to live righteously in their corrupt society. The details they faced differ greatly from the ones we encounter, nevertheless both the reasons to stand steadfast and the means to do so remain the same.

The Promise of Genuine and Enduring Hope

Throughout history people have pursued different courses to meet the challenge of living righteously in a world that is so imperfect. Some withdrew from the world entirely and lived as hermits; they completely isolated themselves from everything and everybody around them. Others chose a group approach as they withdrew and cloistered themselves away in monasteries, convents, and religious facilities far removed from the world. Still others have attempted to create a perfect setting where they tried to eliminate all sinful behavior. All those attempts are characterized by isolation from society. However, that is not the Bible's mandate to believers; while we no longer are a part of the world and are to be different from the world, we still live in it and are commissioned as God's ambassadors of hope to it. Throughout 1 Peter we are given insight into how to do that – how to live righteously in a corrupt society – a world that is out of synch with the Lord.

The section of Scripture beginning with verse 13 begins with, *therefore*. It connects what follows with the preceding verses where Peter reminds us that we have been born again into a living hope (1.3) and accompanying that God-initiated transformation is *an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you* (1.4). Sadly, the only hope the world can offer is temporal and precarious. Stable and enduring hope must look beyond present trials to the bedrock promises of tomorrow. Followers of Jesus Christ have been given living hope; it is an inherent part of who we are.

It is not readily apparent in our English translations that there are three imperatives in 1 Peter 1:13 to 21. They outline how followers of Jesus Christ might live righteously in a world hostile to Christianity. They encompass both reasons to live righteously as well as steps to follow to succeed. The first of those imperatives mirrors the direction he gave in the preceding verses. Hope in the present requires a perspective that encompasses the future. Living righteously in a corrupt society first of all requires us to:

Keep the Future in Focus

1 Peter 1:13 (ESV) ¹³Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Living righteously begins in our minds – it is there where we decide to make that our goal. It is in our minds where we win or lose the battles we face. The expression, *preparing your minds for action* (ESV), translates several words often understood as *gird up your loins* which pictures a Roman soldier pulling up his robe and tucking it under his heavy belt to provide unhampered movement. The use here is very similar to Ephesians 6.14a, “Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth.” In Ephesians the focus is on the *belt of truth*. We prepare our mind by filling it with God’s truth and then use that truth as a filter to evaluate the claims and opinions of our society. Peter’s instruction to us is very much in line with Paul’s when he said, “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” (Romans 12:2, ESV). We are all on a journey where we are constantly bombarded to conform to the world’s pattern; the world tries to squeeze us into its mold for how it wants us to live – to adopt its values, priorities, standards of conduct, beliefs, and so on. Instead, we need to follow the instruction of Psalm 1, “but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2, ESV).

Success in living righteously is beyond our ability, but God comes alongside us as we stand against the world’s agenda and hold to a Christian worldview. Let us not forget our battle is against satan and his ambassadors of evil; however, God indwells His children with His Holy Spirit which is essential for victory. Remember, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, ESV). It is little wonder Peter pointed out we been *born again into a living hope* (1.3). We are a new creation! We *prepare our minds* as we view the hardships of today through the living hope encompassing tomorrow. God’s truth – His perspective, is the lens to look at life through. The priorities, values, and expectations of a Christian stand in sharp contrast with those who do not care about the things of God. There is no cause for surprise when we experience pushback from those who disagree with Biblical truth; Jesus pointed out that just as He was persecuted, so would His followers (John 15.20). The longings of our hearts differ dramatically from those of the world; we look forward with anticipation to the day when grief, pain, and suffering will be no more. While death presents the end of hope for those who limit life to this world, for Christians, whose framework of life includes eternity, death is the doorway to the future where hope is fully realized. No wonder then we look forward to meeting Jesus face-to-face and receiving resurrected bodies which no longer bear the effects of sin.

Additionally, the preparation of our minds also necessitates being *sober-minded* or *self-controlled*. Paul when writing to the Ephesians used similar language when he said, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18, ESV). Rather than allowing an intoxicating drink like wine to influence our choices, we are to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Peter emphasized the importance of clarity of mind rather than accepting a distorted view of our circumstances which would lead to a flawed response. Common to those who are intoxicated is they minimize the demands and dangers they face and overestimate their abilities to meet them. It is common for people who are relatively meek and quiet when sober, to become boisterous and filled with enormous self-confidence when they are drunk – they are ready to take on the world. Unlike them, it is essential to accurately assess our situation. We need a view which stands in contrast to a large percentage of the western world who live as though life consists solely of what they achieve and experience during their days on earth. They measure their successes or failures from the vantage point of how they compare

with others on the same journey. However, the Bible makes it clear that people's journeys on earth fall within a much larger context – eternity. We all desire a life characterized by ease and pleasure, with minimal trials and difficulties. However, not only is that not the case for people generally, but for those who seek to live righteously, their stand for truth will generate opposition and conflict. The incentive to press forward comes from the hope of relief and the assurance that the final outcome of our faith will make the trials of today seem minor by comparison.

Peter exhorts us to look to the future, to look down the road to the occasion when grace will provide its fullest expression of our salvation. It will happen when Jesus Christ returns for His Church or when we physically die – *set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1.13b). The inference is that each person has both the ability, as well as the option of choosing how to respond when encountering trials or struggles. We decide whether we will reach out in hope and take hold of the outstretched hand of God or shrink back and be content with an attitude of hopelessness. It is imperative we place our daily trials and struggles, as well as our successes and victories into the comprehensive framework of the future.

Setting our hope on the future is not something that happens automatically, but rather is dependent on us choosing to do so. Don't overlook the adverb, *fully*. Not only are we to take the future into account, but it is to have a dominant place. That is certainly out of step with most modern day thinking which has no hope to offer to conquer hardship and suffering, in contrast to the hope God extends to His children.

Living righteously in a corrupt society demands an outlook that transcends our earthly existence. We must look beyond the trials of today to the treasures of tomorrow. Our hope is not some wishful thinking, some blind shot in the dark, but is directed by the immutable Word of God underpinned by the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Peter directed his readers to not only look to the future, but *living righteously in a corrupt society* also requires us to:

Follow the Correct Pattern

Peter summed it up this way:

1 Peter 1:14–16 (ESV) ¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The imperative in these verses is: *you also be holy*. Just as we choose what we will focus our minds on, we also decide whether we will obey God's direction on how to be holy. Peter anticipates his readers pressing forward with a life of holiness by referring to them as *obedient children*. If we had no choice to make and were preprogrammed to automatically do the right thing, the concept of *obedience* would be unnecessary. But the fact is, we are faced with two possible choices: follow the pattern of our past – our old way of life before we were born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or choosing to *be holy in all our conduct*. Not only are we not preprogrammed to do the right thing, but our inclination due to the fallen nature we inherited when we were born is to choose the wrong thing. Hence, we must be intentional and disciplined to be *holy*, to reject our *passions* of the past. The term *holy* means to be *set apart*. To be *dedicated* or *devoted* to another, i.e., to be separated for a special purpose. We refer to the third Person of the Trinity as the *Holy Spirit*. The term *Holy* “distinguishes God's

Spirit from other spirits.”⁵ Likewise, we often refer to the Bible as the *Holy Bible*, to distinguish it from all other books – it is set apart.

We are *set apart* by God as His people; therefore, He wants us to conduct ourselves accordingly. We are to forsake our former passions, which we blindly followed in our ignorance. Having been born again by the living God we are to use God Himself as our *Pattern – as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*. The scope of His pattern is all inclusive – *in all your conduct*, not just some, not only where it suits us, but in the places where we struggle and prefer different conduct. That is where obedience really comes into play; when we must intentionally decide to set aside a sinful habit, a misdirected priority, a place of compromise and rationalized sin, etc. This verse dispels any thought that God doesn’t care about our conduct, that because we live in the age of grace where we are no longer under the bondage of the Law, that He has dispensed with rules for us to follow or standards of righteousness. The timelessness of God’s holiness as a pattern for His followers, is clear by Peter’s use of the quote in 1.16 from **Leviticus 11.44** conveying it spans both the Old and New Testaments.

Considering the hope that is ours, it is only natural that our desire is to follow the pattern modelled by God for us. Obedience characterizes God’s children; it is the outflow of their love for the Lord. Consider:

John 14:15 (ESV) ¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

John 14:21 (ESV) ²¹“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

John 15:10 (ESV) ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

Romans 6:17–18 (ESV) ¹⁷But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Living righteously distinguishes a Christian from a non-Christian.

There is a third imperative in living righteously in a corrupt society.

Remember We Are Accountable to God

1 Peter 1:17 (ESV) ¹⁷And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

The admonition to fear the Lord does not picture people cowering in a corner, but rather an admonition to give God the honor due Him, to relate to Him with reverence, awe, and respect. We must keep our relationship to God in perspective – He is God, we are one of His children. It is our view of God that prompts us to worship Him individually and corporately. Our worship of God is not limited to when we gather corporately to worship Him in a more formal manner but is to be comprehensive. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1, ESV). It is because of Who He is that He alone is worthy of worship and obedience.

⁵ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 17.

It is easy to lose sight of the fact that we will one day give an account of our lives to the Lord. We tend to function independently and take the liberty to set the bar to assess how we are doing, rather than accept His standards. We are often able to control what others see. We can conceal our motives, the thoughts we dwell on, and even much of our conduct. However, that is not the case with God. The expression, *if you call on him as Father*, in verse 17, pictures our acknowledgement of God when we pray to Him. It is implicit when we pray to God that we know we are accountable to Him. We are unable to hide anything from Him; He is aware of all our thoughts, motives, choices, etc. Read through Psalm 139 where we are assured there is no place we can go and escape God's presence; for example, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" (Psalm 139:7–8, ESV). Nothing is hidden from His sight as we are reminded in **Hebrews 4:13** (ESV), "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

The judgement facing believers differs from the one unbelievers will face. The *Great White Throne Judgement* described in **Revelation 20.11 – 15** addresses those who have dismissed God and His provision of salvation through Jesus Christ and have chosen to rely on their opinions about eternity and how to secure a place in it. Since their names will not be found in the *Lamb's Book of Life* they will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Those who are trusting in Jesus Christ as their Savior will give an account for their conduct. While they are not saved by their works, righteous works are the product of their salvation. They will be held accountable to God for how they lived their lives. In **1 Corinthians 1.10 – 15**, how one lives their life is pictured as building on a foundation with gold, silver, or precious stones, in contrast to building with wood, hay, and straw. You like me, may have faced decisions where following Scripture was likely to lead to disagreement and opposition from those who viewed your interpretation as out of step with what many in the Christian community believed. In those situations, I was often reminded that while I wanted the affirmation of those who disagreed with me, one day I would have to give an account to God for the position I took. While sometimes, despite the predictable pain and opposition I stuck with unpopular positions I could defend from Scripture, there were also times when the potential for opposition and conflict caused me to cave in. One day I will stand before the Lord for all the choices and beliefs I upheld or failed to do so.

It is hard to face opposition when you stand up for what you are convicted the Bible teaches. We naturally want people to like us, to agree with us. Not only do we find ourselves in conflict with the pattern of the world, but sometimes with the stances of fellow believers. We need wisdom to navigate through them and as we do, we must be mindful of our accountability to God, whose approval is infinitely more important than anyone else.

As a final encouragement to his readers to live righteously in a corrupt society, Peter concluded by reminding his readers,

Remember the Cost of Our Salvation

1 Peter 1:18–21 (ESV) ¹⁸knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of

you ²¹who 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.

Salvation from sin is offered to all people. The price to those who respond to God's invitation is free. It is all by God's grace because of His love for them and His mercy towards them. However, while salvation is free to all who receive it, it does not mean salvation is free.

Salvation necessitated Jesus Christ to set aside many of His divine prerogatives and leave the glories of heaven to come to earth where He humbled Himself and clothed Himself with humanity because He was the only one in the entire universe who qualified to pay the price for sin. Sin has a price! It is the life of a sinless man. The sacrifices of animals throughout the Old Testament pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice – Jesus Christ. The most vivid sacrifice was the lamb at the *Passover* celebration instituted by God when the Hebrew people prepared for redemption from Egypt. Those innocent lambs which were slaughtered and their blood applied to the door posts and lintels of people's homes pictured Jesus' blood being spilt at Calvary for those who would place their trust in Him for their salvation from their sins.

No amount of money will ever be enough to purchase anyone's redemption, for the cost of redemption infinitely exceeds the value of silver or gold. Redemption necessitated the sacrifice of a Lamb who was without blemish or spot – who was sinless. God knew there was no other way to deal with the sin of those who rebelled against Him.

Those who have embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior look forward to the future with hope and anticipation, knowing that their physical death will be the end of all trials and temptations, and they will be ushered into the glory of God for eternity. However, those who ignore God's invitation, perhaps thinking their efforts will prove adequate, or their sins are not that serious, will be left to spend eternity paying the price for their sins in the lake of fire.

Our relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ is sufficient reason to lead righteous lives irrespective of how corrupt our society becomes or how many trials we endure during our earthly journey. Peter's outlines four essential ingredients to Leading Righteous Lives:

1. **Keep the Future in Focus** - *set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*
2. **Follow the Correct Pattern** - *but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*
3. **Remember We Are Accountable to God** - *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile*
4. **Remember the Cost of Our Salvation** - *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.*

May God minister to you through the following song:

10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord) - Matt Redman

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE_IRI0E&ab_channel=GloryToFatherGod