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**Sermon Title: *Obedient Children of God***

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**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end of the document.**

**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

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## ***Obedient Children of God***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, as we continue our study of this letter from the “apostle of hope,” Simon Peter, to the believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire settlements of Asia Minor. Last Sunday we considered the introductory words in 1:1-9 that gave an overview of our living hope in Christ Jesus and noted that our hope in Christ is much different from the way the world uses hope to mean wishful thinking or human optimism.

(Verses 10-12 are somewhat of an aside, appendix or footnote, sharing that this great salvation that we enjoy and are growing into was prophesied in the Old Testament but we enjoy it in its fullness. Prophets and even angels, says Peter, couldn’t experience or understand what is now available to every believer in the New Covenant)

Like in many of the letters of the New Testament, 1 Peter begins with the indicative statement of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Peter has set forth the living hope we have as God’s children, chosen for an eternal life of hope in God’s promises that sustain and encourage us in this present life and that prepare us for everlasting glory in the fulfilled kingdom. Following this

indicative of what God has done comes the imperative of what we must do as his obedient followers, as obedient children of God.

Follow as I read **1 Peter 1:13-2:3**

Last Sunday we noted that Peter wrote this letter of hope and encouragement to believers who were likely displaced refugees by edict of Caesar, who sought to populate remote regions of Asia Minor for the purposes of expanding the mighty Roman Empire. These Christians were already experiencing some degree of persecution because of their reputation for evangelizing and upsetting the status quo through their making converts to the risen Christ. Many of these believers were literally exiles in a foreign territory and found themselves in a strange and sometimes hostile culture (Jobes, 19-44).

These believers living in Asia Minor had been uprooted and separated from their homes and probably from members of their own household. But also some may well have suffered alienation from members of their own families when they decided to follow Jesus as Lord. They were experiencing the sword of family division that Jesus said would be part of the price of following him (Matthew 10:34). This same price of being disowned by family is being paid today by those converted to Christ from Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, other world and New Age religions, and various pagan or atheistic philosophies (Jobes, 85).

Peter reminds these believers, as he speaks to us today, that whatever price we pay to follow him, we are nevertheless now members of a new family, the family of God. To belong to God's family is a great privilege, as Jesus said, that more than compensates for the price we might have to pay (Mark 10:29-31). This eternal family membership is a great privilege and is at the heart of what it is to have a living hope, to live the resurrection life in the present as we await its consummation in the future. But also with this great privilege comes a responsibility to live up to our calling and privileges as children of God.

Let's note that we have, as God's children, a responsibility for our...

### **Resemblance to the Father (1:13-16)**

Peter calls us to prepare to go to work as we face the challenge of this responsibility. What a rebuke this text is to the idea that salvation is simply a matter of praying a prayer and waiting to go to heaven when we die! Using a word picture in verse 13, Peter literally says, "gird the loins of your mind." Before a man could work or run, he had to tuck his long robe into his belt (Moo, 2,124). Perhaps Peter is also alluding to the Israelites on the night of the Passover, who were instructed to gird themselves and be ready for action in their flight from Egypt (Exodus 12:11; Michaels, 53). In our time and culture we would say, "Roll up the sleeves of your mind," or "roll up your sleeves and go to work, getting ready for action." We are to set our minds on eternal kingdom matters and be people with an eternal hope perspective on present reality.

With these kingdom values and this perspective in place we are ready to fulfill our responsibility which is to bear a family resemblance to the Father. And to be like the heavenly Father means we must become...

### *Unlike the past*

Peter says that our hope is to be focused on the grace of Christ, whom we are convinced will fulfill all his promises to us (13). As we noted from the first part of this chapter, our hope is not wishful thinking but is an assurance of that we are now living in the kingdom, which will be consummated in the future. This grace is God's provided power in us, and we are to apply this enabling power by making a radical break from our sin-laced past by living a new life characterized by the holiness of God himself. In the past, Peter says, we lived in ignorance of God's ways, word and will, whether we were from a religious (Jewish) or pagan (Gentile) background (14). Referring to us as God's children, Peter is no doubt thinking about the term he uses in verse 3, the new birth.

Parents who adopt children understand that some uncertainty is involved in the developing characteristics of their adopted children. There's uncertainty about genetic traits that might influence emotions and behavior. Perhaps there was mental damage from the birth parents' drug addiction or psychological damage from neglect in infancy or abuse in early childhood. Possibly, if the child is adopted later in life there might be negative social and behavioral patterns that would be difficult to reverse or erase. But the word of the Gospel in our text is, our rebirth into Christ gives us the enabling grace/power of God and we are commanded to live a new life unlike our past life; and what God commands, he enables.

As God's children, we are making a break from our past and are...

### *Becoming like the Father*

Regardless of our past, we don't have to conform to those genetic tendencies or learned behavior patterns but we are now free to live as God's children, reflecting now his behavior and likeness. We are in fact even commanded to be holy as God is holy (15). Even though we will never attain to moral perfection in this life, we are to aspire to and grow in holiness, just as Jesus commanded us to grow toward perfection, even as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Some of you may have heard the expressions "Like father, like son," and have heard it said of a young man who bears a strong likeness to his father, "He's a chip off the old block!" Because I did look a lot like my father, those things were said of me. I remember one of my father's friends saying to me, "There's Ray Roberts 30 years ago!"

By the grace of God we have a new life in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and are commanded to live in step with the Spirit, who produces in us the fruit of the Spirit, the characteristics of Christ-likeness

(Galatians 5:16; 22f). Unfortunately for some of us, we can't change all our physical characteristics, but we do have the grace and power of God to change our moral and spiritual characteristics, growing in holiness (sanctification) until we reach the final goal (glorification) when we see Jesus face to face (1 John 3:2).

The irony of growth in true holiness is this: the more we become like Jesus the less conscious we are of our holiness, since humility is supremely a Christ-like virtue (Philippians 2:5ff). Moses was the most humble person on earth (Numbers 12:3), and when he came down from Mount Sinai following his 40-day meeting with God, his face was radiant with God's glory, but he wasn't aware of it (Exodus 34:29). There ought to be a difference in our character and even in our countenance that's obvious to others, but not to ourselves (Tozer, 68f). We should seek to grow in the family likeness so that others will take note that we have, like the apostles of the earliest church, "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

But we need to roll up our sleeves and accept responsibility for...

### **Reverence for the Father (1:17-21)**

Peter uses that word "stranger" again (17) to remind the church, scattered throughout Asia Minor as exiles and refugees, that they are radically different from their host culture. They will suffer disdain and even abuse from the surrounding population, but they need not fear. Jesus tells his disciples that if we have a holy fear of God we shouldn't fear anybody or anything else, not even those who could kill our bodies (Luke 12:4-7). Obviously, Jesus is not teaching us to fear God with a sense of dread of his capricious anger, but rather to hold him in reverence, and to trust in his protection as our heavenly Father. Peter gives reason for...

#### *Our fear of the Father*

God reveals himself as the glorious heavenly Father who has created us and all his creation to reflect his glory through lives of obedience to his purposes and will. We are commanded to worship him in the splendor of his holiness (Psalm 29:2) and in reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28).

I realize that language is dynamic and always changing, but I regret how the word "awesome" has been cheapened to refer to anything we think is "cool" or simply impressive. We say that the newest style of clothing and the latest film at the cinema are awesome. Awesome is a word that should be reserved for the majestic, what causes us to stand in wonder or bow in reverence. We have lost a sense of awe before a majestic and holy God who is incomprehensible apart from his word and unapproachable apart from his grace.

Peter says that we are to hold the Father in awe because we all will stand before him as Judge and give an accounting of our lives before him (17). We may be able to fool others through our hidden behavior and hypocrisy, but our

heavenly Father judges impartially. We will all stand before God's judgment seat, the judgment seat of Christ, to give an account to him of our faithfulness in following him as Lord (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). But we also know that, even though we will stand before his judgment seat and be accountable for our words and deeds before we receive his gracious rewards, we also are assured of the forgiveness, mercy, grace and...

### *The love of the Father*

The judgment and the love of the heavenly Father are not inseparable or mutually exclusive concepts. Because he loves us, he judges our sins through Christ and will discipline us for our sins in order to receive the full measure of his love. He loves us but hates our sin, as our perfectly loving heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:4-13).

Those of us who were privileged to have good earthly fathers can more readily understand this concept of God's judgment and his love. Because my earthly father loved me, I also feared his punishment when I behaved badly. After he meted out my much-deserved punishment, he would affirm his love for me. Later in life I came to understand his desire that I grow into a responsible adult as a result of his discipline.

Peter reminds us of how much the heavenly Father loves us, so much that he purchased us from an empty life in order that we might become his adopted children (in verse 18 adding the imagery of adoption to that of rebirth). He paid a great price for us to become his children. Slaves could purchase their freedom with enough silver and gold, but the heavenly Father released us from our bondage to sin and the old, former empty way of life and purchased our adoption through the death of his Son (19).

In observing the Passover Feast, the Israelites sacrificed Paschal lambs without blemish or defect. And to pay the price for our sins and to cleanse us and restore us to himself, the heavenly Father had to sacrifice his perfect and sinless Son (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 12:8; Numbers 15:11; John 1:29). "The blood of anyone is 'precious' (costly), far above gold or silver, but that of Jesus immeasurably so" (Robertson, 90).

As God's supremely loved children we hold him in reverence, and with gratitude we may enjoy freedom from our former way of life which was going nowhere but toward hell and eternal separation from God.

As God's children we roll up our sleeves and take responsibility for...

### **Love for the Family of God (1:22-25)**

Peter reminds the church that our experience of grace has given us a sincere love for one another in God's family (22). Love is the main attribute of the Christian life, the distinguishing characteristic and the first and greatest commandment (John 13:34f; Galatians 5:22f; Mark 12:29-31). Biblical Greek

language has a word for family love (storge), which should exist in any normal family, love of parents for children and love between siblings. But here Peter uses the word agape, meaning godly, selfless and sacrificial love, which is seen perfectly in God's sending his Son to die for us (John 3:16). This is the kind of love we are commanded to have for one another (John 15:12). Peter says we are to love one another with...

### *Sincere love*

Unlike a superficial or hypocritical display of artificial concern for others, intended only to impress, we are to have sincere love, loving one another deeply, "from the heart" (22). "Peter uses a word that means 'stretched' or 'strained.' The same term describes the earnestness of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane" (Luke 22:44. Clowney, 74). Jesus' love for us was stretched to the limit as he prepared his heart to go to the cross for us. When we think how much Christ loved us unworthy sinners we should realize our obligation to love one another. Our love for each other will never be as costly as was Jesus' love for us.

Sometimes, when we find ourselves irritated or at odds, family relationships require an intensity of love. But we are commanded by our Lord Jesus to love one another and even our enemies, who may be members of our own household (Matthew 5:43-48; 10:36). John makes one of the tests of the validity of our salvation our love for one another (1 John 2:9ff).

Sometimes our love is tested and stretched to the limit, and we may well find our enemies to be nominal professing fellow believers in the family of God. It seems that God always sees to it that I have at least one person in my life or ministry that I find difficult to love. And I'm certain that many find me difficult to love. But we are to *do* love even when we don't *feel* love. When we commit to give of ourselves, even to those who reject or oppose us, God will enable our love to stretch and even to grow until we become more loving people and thus more like our Savior. Regardless how difficult it may be to love someone, we need to remember how God loved and forgave us and reconciled us to himself when we were not only unlovable but were even his enemies (Romans 5:6-11). We then will be children of God of...

### *Enduring love*

Again Peter reminds us that we have been born again, not through perishable seed such as gave us physical conception and birth and our subsequent genetic traits, but we've been born again by the eternal word of God (23). This is more than the written word, the Scriptures, which reveal God's truth, but is also the living Word, Christ himself, who has given us his resurrection life. We are now God's eternal children and the love he has for us and gives us for one another will last forever.

Perhaps Peter is thinking about Paul's great love chapter, wherein we are told that the greatest reality that will remain forever is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). As we noted last week, when the kingdom is consummated, no longer will we

live by faith and hope because all our hopes will be fulfilled and we will live by sight. But we indeed will continue to love and will love with intensity and with complete sincerity and purity.

This sincere and enduring love is necessarily connected with and essential to the unity of the church. We are to bear with one another in love (intense and sometimes stretched to the limit) as we also make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2f).

As children of God, we are responsible for a...

### **Longing for Growth (2:1-3)**

Young children yearn to grow up. Ask a child of eight her age and she's likely to say, "I'm eight and a half, but I'll be nine next April the 10<sup>th</sup>! And as the child grows into adolescence everyone else wishes she would grow up! I remember how my sister used to get aggravated at me and say, "Just grow up!"

Peter says that we are to long for our spiritual growth, first of all...

#### *Getting rid of junk food*

We're all aware how that junk food can creep into our diet and even replace or spoil our appetite for healthy food. In my teen years, I would come home from football practice shortly before dinnertime, and tear into the cupboards, looking for anything edible, whether it was nutritious or not. And my mother, who would be preparing a good meal, would say, "Don't spoil your appetite!" Of course she knew nothing would spoil *my* appetite, and probably was relieved that by my eating a pre-meal snack I wouldn't eat more than my rightful portion of the family dinner.

Peter gives a list of self-centered, destructive attitudes and actions that spoil our appetite for godly, life-enriching attributes. These negative and unloving emotions and words rob us and others of the life-giving joy we should have in the family of God. As I look at these traits (2:1) I realize that I can indulge in all of these and still put on a good religious, pious façade. In fact, one of these is hypocrisy itself. I can even find religious words and pious-sounding reasons to express malice, deception and slander against my brother or sister in Christ. But my responsibility in the family of God is to get rid of this junk. Then there will be...

#### *Craving the best*

In contrast to Peter's usage, Paul uses the image of "milk" to refer to spiritual food for the worldly Corinthians, who, remaining in their spiritual infancy, were unable to live on the solid food of God's teaching (1 Corinthians 3:1f). The writer of Hebrews also used the milk image to refer to elementary teaching necessary for disobedient and immature believers who remained in spiritual

infancy. Spiritual milk was in lieu of the solid food of deeper teaching (Hebrews 5:11-14).

But in our text, Peter uses the image of milk to say that we are to crave the grace, truth, word and very life of God as an infant craves after his mother's milk (2:2). Peter is doubtless referring to the Psalm that speaks of tasting the goodness of the Lord (3 and Psalm 34:8). Just as an infant cannot do without her mother's milk, so we cannot do without our fellowship with Christ and our daily feeding upon his word and upon his life in us. I believe this is the image Jesus is using when he speaks about our eating and drinking of his flesh and blood, of his very life within us. This was in contrast to the crowd that followed him only because they were interested in the temporary food he provided for them (John 6:53ff).

As children of God, we are to grow in Christ, to grow up in our salvation, in the kind of maturity that makes us like Jesus and reflects his glory to the world around us. We have all tasted his goodness, but there is so much more to receive. Only by our continual feeding upon Christ can we be certain we're not mere "samplers" of Jesus, having just "tasted the heavenly gift," only to fall away from saving grace (Hebrews 6:4f). An infant's appetite won't be ignored or denied, but will awaken his parents at all hours of the night. In the same way, we are not to allow our craving for more of Christ to be denied as we call to him day and night (Luke 18:7).

Our responsibility as God's obedient children is to continue to feed upon his word and seek more of his life and the fullness of the Spirit, becoming more like him and bearing more fruit for him. We also are to encourage one another to stay off the junk food and to join us at the heavenly table of Christ's riches. We are to join Jesus in his work of making disciples, enlarging the family of obedient children of God.

### **Conclusion:**

We are greatly privileged to be the children of God. As John writes, "How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (John 3:1a). As God's children, we are called to a life of obedience, bearing a resemblance to our Father, having a reverence for our heavenly Father, growing in our love for one another and in our longing to be like Jesus and to feast upon his fullness of blessings.

Whatever your past or your present circumstances, you today can become a member of the family of God and one of his beloved children. You can, by believing in Jesus and following him as your Lord, receive the free gift of eternal life and be born again to this eternal hope we have in him.

But just as with those 1<sup>st</sup> Century believers in Asia Minor, we are not given an easy road for following Jesus. Our road is a cruciform way, but it leads to glory. And we are set on pilgrimage, not alone but as children in the family of God. We accept our responsibility to take on the family resemblance through growing

in holiness and by living in reverence for our heavenly and loving Father. We are called to intensely and unselfishly love one another with his enduring, eternal love. And we never stop having a longing to be for Jesus and to honor him with lives that delight in him as he delights in us.

It's time for us to roll up our sleeves and get busy being God's obedient children.

**Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. What do you think the idea of being children of God and members of his family might have meant to the believers exiled in Asia Minor and separated from family and homeland?
2. What believers do you know who have been disowned by their families for following Christ? How would this Scripture text and Jesus' promises in Mark 10:29-31 encourage them?
3. How is the former, pre-conversion life described in these verses? What is your definition of holy and holiness? What is the standard Peter gives for our holiness?
4. In verses 17-21, Peter says the heavenly Father is a judge to be feared but also a Father who loves us so much that he gave his Son to die for us. Are these pictures of God as a Judge and a loving Father contradictory or complementary? Explain your answer, perhaps relating how you might have thought of your earthly father who disciplined you but also loved you.
5. How does verse 19 impact your self-esteem, your feelings and thoughts about your worth?
6. Why do you think it was necessary for Peter to describe the love we are to have for one another as "sincere love?" How would you describe insincere love?
7. How can the "junk food" that Peter lists in 2:1 spoil our appetite for the full life of Christ described as "pure spiritual milk" in 2:2? Take inventory of your spiritual hunger and thirst (Matthew 5:6) and ask God to give you a new longing for growth in Christ's character and fullness of joy.

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