

“THE HOLINESS OF GOD” PART 2 *CONTINUES*

HOLINESS DR. BRUCE BICKEL September 5, 2014

*(The men greet each other.)***Bruce:** Thank you, men, thank you. Don, set the tone for us to go quietly before the Lord, And know that He is God. May we just be still and know that he is God. *(Music.)*

May our spirits be stilled by Your grace, that we may know that you are God, for Jesus' sake. Father, we pray that You would open our eyes, that we might see You behind the words of the Scripture, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Why don't you open your bibles, please. The passage for our consideration today is going to be 1 Peter 1, verse 16. I want to read the context, because we'll be wrapping this up today, and moving on to the next verses next week. So may I invite you to open to 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 13, please?

“Therefore, 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. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all Your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”” May God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold Him, for Jesus' sake.

We've been looking at this particular verse, 1:16, this injunction which says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy,” understanding what that means, and we've been looking at it in four areas of our lives, because the way that God relates to us is always, in His relationship, through holiness, because God's nature is holy. That means that anything God does is going to be holy. He's going to have a holy love. He's going to have a holy compassion. He's going to have a holy justice. He's going to have a holy righteousness. He's going to have a holy sovereignty. He's going to have a holy salvation. So whatever God does in His relationship to us is always characterized by one of His attributes, and that is His holiness. God always relates to us in His holiness.

Now we've been looking at four areas of how God relates to us based on that verse in 1:16 of 1 Peter. We've been looking at how He relates to us in ourselves. That's where we get our value, or worth, our significance, and our dignity. It comes because of our relationship to Him, as a result of His relating to us through His holiness. When He calls us to Himself, before the foundation of the world, that is an act of holiness. So whatever God calls to Himself is an act of holiness, therefore His calling us is holy. So if you have been called by God into a saving relationship, you are now possessing His holiness. Remember that holiness is not something that we achieve. It is something that we receive in our relationship, because that's how God relates to us. He always relates to us through His holiness.

Now we have practical holiness. There is a difference between His personal holiness and our practical holiness. In His personal holiness, He defines what holiness is. We do

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not define that. We express that, because of our relationship to Him, because of the self relationship we have in our salvation.

So practical holiness is the visible expression of what god is doing in your life. Personal holiness god defines. You and I don't define that. We express that. And the way in which we express that first is in the understanding of who we are in god's eyes. When He calls us to Himself, that is an act of holiness. Therefore the Scripture says, and you'll notice, “since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”” The reason that you are holy is what? Because He is holy. Now that is how He relates to us in ourselves. That's where you get your value, your significance, your worth, and your security. It all comes from our relationship to Him. Because He is holy, therefore you are holy, because of that relationship. That's how He relates to us in ourselves.

Then we saw how He relates to us in our sin, in previous weeks. Sin is a violation of the dignity of god, because it violates the holiness of His creation. God created us before the Fall, and he said that everything was good. So sin is a violation of the creation order because it diminishes that which God created. You and I have been created in His image. If you have a relationship with Him, that is a holy image, and sin defames and degrades and diminishes that holy image. So sin is a violation of the dignity of god in His creation order. And the reason that god takes sin so seriously is because you and I are so significant. That's why God takes sin so seriously, because your significance is that you are holy, because you have received that holiness in that relationship through salvation. Do you see how that works? He take sin very seriously because of your significance, and because you were created in His image. Sin damages and defames that image. Therefore He takes sin seriously.

And then last week we talked about our service. How does god relate to us in His holiness in our service? By revealing His glory. The glory of god is the visible manifestation of the holiness of god.

Now we saw that in the Scripture. We saw the example of Him being the *shekinah* glory. We saw an example of that last week. When Moses came down off of the mountain, giving the ten commandments, His face shone because He was in the presence of God's holiness. We see several times in the Scripture, where it says, (*paraphrase*), “Take your sandals off, because the ground on which you stand is holy.” You see, when you come into the presence of god lie that, you're in His service. So any time god's glory is on display, His holiness is visible. The way in which god demonstrates His holiness is by having His glory on display.

Essentially, using the Old Testament phraseology, you and I are now the modern *shekinah* glory, because we are the means by which god puts His glory on display by our good works, and that describes and demonstrates His what? His holiness. Yes, don't

Don: It's interesting to me, Bruce, that in the Old Testament you have, and Paul quotes this in Romans too, where he says, (*paraphrase*), “because of you, the name of God has been blasphemed among the Gentiles.” So I think that's important for us to realize that we're on display, as you said. We're on display for a watching world, how we as Christians conduct ourselves, and whether they see Christ in us.

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Bruce: amen. We are the visible expression of God’s glory. That’s His holiness. Now that’s what practical holiness is—the visible expression of what god is doing in your life.

Now we need to understand, relating to our service, that the Scripture says that god is light. Because god is light, He is putting His glory on display. And when He puts His glory on display, what is He demonstrating? His holiness. The Scripture says that Christ is light. When Christ puts His glory on display, what is He putting on display? His holiness.

Now Scripture also says that who else is light? We are! “You are the light of the world.” That means this: that you are putting god’s glory on display when you’re demonstrating His holiness. That’s exactly what don just told us about in the book of Romans—that we damage that glory when we damage His visible holiness by the way that we live our lives inappropriately. So the visible expression of what god is doing in your life is what we would call practical holiness.

Christ is light. You and I are the light of the world. And in that sense, borrowing that phrase, you and I are the *Shekinah* glory of the New Testament. We are the means by which God puts His life on display.

Now go back to Ezekiel chapter 36, which we have referred to several times, when He says, “I will demonstrate My holiness” through whom? Through us. When I demonstrate My holiness, they will know that I am the LORD God of the universe. So you and I are the means by which some people will see god’s glory. And when they see His glory, they’re seeing His holiness.

So we talked about that last week in our service. How is it that we serve? I gave you about six different examples of that. First of all, we serve Him in our worship. We put His glory on display, and therefore His holiness is put on display in the way that we worship. I gave you a suggested style of worship last week, which is based upon the heritage of the Reformed Baptist tradition, and that would be what I would call a Word based worship service. You read the word, you sing the Word, you pray the Word, and you demonstrate the Word. It’s very Word based. That’s because you’re putting god’s glory on display, and people are seeing His holiness by the way that we worship.

I think that we really have to examine the validity of our worship styles. Are we really putting god’s glory on display? Is it for god’s glory, because the overriding rule is this, that when you worship god, you’re putting His glory on display. And by putting His glory on display, you’re demonstrating His holiness. That’s an act of service, that we demonstrate god’s holiness through our worship.

We also saw last week that it’s through our work, the way that we work, and the diligence and the deference we exhibit with our authorities. How we work is a demonstration of god’s glory. We do it for the glory of god. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of god.” 1 Corinthians 10:31. And that’s basically saying this: Put my holiness on display by the way that you work, because in the way that you work for My glory, you’re putting My holiness on display. People will see My holiness when they see you work for My glory, and you do it with the right motivation.

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Then we saw last week also in our warfare, our spiritual warfare. Romans chapter 13, verse 12. In fighting the system of this world, in the way that we do that, we put god’s glory on display by the way that we resist it.

Now the real issue that we’re going to talk about today is demonstrating god’s holiness in our suffering, and that comes as a result of our spiritual warfare. So that’s where we’ll be in just a moment.

So we talked about our worship as an act of service, putting His holiness on display, our work as an act of service, putting His holiness on display, our spiritual warfare as an act of service, putting His holiness on display. We then saw our walk, which is the direction of our life. The conduct of your life puts god’s glory on display, and therefore people see His holiness.

And then the way that we watch. We anticipate the Lord’s return. When we set our minds upon the right things, we’re looking heavenward, and we’re anticipating the Lord Jesus’ return in all of His glory, because His glory will be demonstrating His holiness. We’re watching for that. We anticipate that. We eagerly await the Lord’s return. We know who has already won the battle. Christ has already won that, so we don’t have to worry about what’s going to happen. We just know this, that the battle is already won, and we’re waiting for Him, and we’re watching for His return, in all of His glory, because when He comes in His glory, He’ll be demonstrating His holiness.

And then lastly, our witness. Philippians 2:15—the way that you and I witness. A witness is somebody who is a reflection of something else. You and I, in our witness, are reflecting God’s holiness, because we put His glory on display.

So we looked at all of these things last week in some depth. But today I want to take us to the next one, and that is this. If you and I are living a life of revealing the holiness of God in your service, in those six areas I gave you, if you and I are revealing His holiness in our service, then You will glorify His holiness by your suffering. Suffering is a consequence of demonstrating His holiness in our service. Let me explain why.

The holiness of god is why the biblical gospel is repugnant to sinners. It’s the holiness of God. People will buy His friendship, but not the demands of His holiness. Jesus was not taken to the cross and killed because He said, “Come unto Me,” but because He claimed to be holy. That’s why He was sent to the cross. You see, the Pharisees were the people whose name basically means “the set apart ones.” Christ had a higher level than the social standard, and that’s why He was put to death, because the Pharisees, who were the set apart ones, were supposed to be the ones who set the standard. The Pharisees were the ones who set the standard for moral conduct. When Jesus came along, and people saw the ultimate holy standard, it exposed the fallacy and the phoniness of their social standard. That’s why He was put to death, because He exposed the falsehood of their own standard. And so the Pharisees were supposed to be the ones who set the standard. But when the absolute standard came, the holiness of god in the Person of Jesus Christ came along, He exposed them as being false or counterfeit. Therefore He had to die.

You know, it’s very similar in our lives with the student who breaks the curve. Do you know what happens? Basically, he’s saying that the test wasn’t unfair, because somebody

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broke the curve. He’s basically saying that the test is fair. It wasn’t unfair, because look, I made it. Now we don’t like the student who breaks the curve, do we, because he makes it more difficult for us. He’s basically saying that the test wasn’t unfair. When Jesus came and lived a holy life, He was basically saying that the standards of god’s life and kingdom and His relationship are not unfair, because here they are. I’ve met them.

So when you reveal the true nature, the true mark of a person in Christ, which is practical holiness, which is defined as the visible expression of what god is doing in your life, you’re going to reveal that all of god’s standards are not unfair. Do you realize that? When you reveal god’s holiness, you’ll be telling the world that God’s standards are not unfair. And the world is going to do what when it sees that? What did they do to Christ? What do they want to do to us? Yes, Don?

Don: Isn’t it also true that not only did Christ claim to be holy, but He claimed to be God.

Bruce: Oh, absolutely.

Don: Which is the offense. When you think of the Muslim persecution going on around the world, that’s repugnant to Muslims. It’s repugnant to Judaism. It’s repugnant to anybody who isn’t a Christian, and any system, that a man could claim to be God. That’s really at the heart of the issue, as far as I’m concerned.

Bruce: It really is, because the Scripture says, “Be holy, for I am holy.” When Jesus said, “I am God,” He’s saying what? I am holy. And when He said (*paraphrase*), “I am holy,” He’s saying what? I am God. Those two are synonyms, because who defines holiness? God does. Jesus was put to the cross because people did not want Him to be god. They did not want Him to be holy, because He exposed the standard. When He said, “I am god,” He was saying that this is absolute holiness. And when He said (*paraphrase*), “I am holy,” it demonstrated that absolute standard. He’s saying “I’m god.” Those two things work interchangeably. And so that’s why the Pharisees had to put Him to death.

And so, when you and I put God’s glory on display, in the conduct of our lives, we are demonstrating His holiness, and we’re basically telling the world this, that God’s standards are not unfair, because they are visibly expressed by my practical holiness, and what God is doing in my life.

Now that does not mean that you and I are holy, in the sense that we define it. Who defines holiness? God does. We express that practical holiness in the form of what God is doing in our lives by our conduct.

Now when you live a life like that, understanding how god relates to you in yourself,-- your worth, your value, your significance, and security which comes from Him,--when you see the offense that sin is because it’s a violation of god’s significance because of who you are, and when you understand your service, the end result of that is going to be that the world is going to be attacking us. So today, we’re going to understand how we put god’s glory on display, when we demonstrate His holiness through our suffering.

You reveal that all of god’s standards are not unfair, and the world is not going to like you. Look at 2 Timothy 3:12. “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” And why is that? Let’s go to John 15. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

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Now my point is this, brothers. When you and I are demonstrating the practical holiness of God, the world is going to resent that, because you are basically telling the world that God’s standards are not unfair. When they see you being merciful to somebody who doesn’t need mercy, you’re basically saying that God’s standard is not unfair. The world is not going to respond well to that.

Look at John 15, beginning at verse 18. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know Him who sent me.:

Now friends, we ought to understand this. We should not be surprised if the world doesn’t like us. We should not be surprised at that. That is the consequence of our demonstrating practical holiness, because when you demonstrate practical holiness, you’re basically saying this: the standards of God’s kingdom are not unfair. They’re fair, because of visibly being put on display by the Holy Spirit working in my life. Do you see how that works? The logical conclusion is that we’re going to glorify God in our suffering. And so we need to understand that this is a consequence of God’s holiness. They treated Him that way; they will treat us the same.

God would rather that we have holy pain than unholy pleasure. Let’s look at a couple of verses. Go to Romans chapter 8, verses 16-18. “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs with God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him, in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

Now what does that mean? We suffer with Him so that we would be glorified with Him, and when we are glorified with Him, what is He putting on display? God’s holiness. You and I demonstrate the holiness of God in our suffering.

Now the issue is not why do I suffer? The issue is how do I respond in my suffering? Let me give you a couple of other verses.

Go to 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 12. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial, when it comes upon you to test you, as if something strange were happening to you. But insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.”

You see, friends, there is a correlation between God’s glory being revealed, and His holiness being demonstrated in the practical expression of what God is doing in our lives. So the issue is this, not why am I suffering, but how am I responding? Don’t ask the question “why?” There is no answer to that. That’s one of the secret things of God. The revealed things are for our benefit. The secret things God has not chosen to reveal to us.

Remember this. God gives us everything we need to know in the Scripture, but not all there is to know in the Scripture. The Scripture is logical in itself. Be careful not to take your own human logic and take that which is silent and come to your own logical conclusions. Keep your logic confined to the biblical revelation. It’s very logical. But

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keep that logic in that stream of biblical revelation. Be careful not to read into the things that are silent. When the Scripture is silent, let it be

Men: Silent.

Bruce: Silent. And don't say, "Well, logically, my conclusion would have to be this." That's when you're interjecting human logic into the biblical revelation, which is logical in itself. Be careful not to do that. Let what is silent be silent. The only response we can have in a moment of silence is what? Humble trust and humble belief. That's my response. Yes, Ted?

Ted: Could you give an example of what you just said?

Bruce: Okay, I'll try. Okay, let's try this one. You were chosen before the foundation of the world. That means that god is choosing to send people to hell. Based upon what? The Scripture never says that. The Scripture never says that god chose people to go to hell. Our logical conclusion is this humanly, which the Scripture doesn't deal with. Scripture doesn't ever say that. Let it be silent! I don't know the answer to that! All I know is this: that God chose me before the foundation of the world. I can believe that. I can trust that. I'm not going to say, "Well, therefore, my logical conclusion is that He's sending other people to hell." The Scripture never says that. Now there are some other things that talk about it. But you can't use your logical conclusions and say, "This is my logical conclusion. Therefore, God must be doing that. How can that be merciful?" You see, people come to their own conclusions. That would be just one example I would suggest.

But there are many others. You have to be careful, brothers, where the Scripture is silent, not to bring your human imagination or human logic into that, and come to a logical conclusion and say, "Therefore my assumption must be this. I come to that conclusion." Let it be silent, brothers. That's why we've been called to live a life of faith, not a life of sight.

Sometimes, the only response in these unknown things would be this. I just believe, because I know that god is holy. I know god's attributes. I'm just going to trust and humbly believe, because I don't need to know all those things. There is plenty for me to know, and plenty for me to obey, and plenty for me to base my life upon by faith, not sight. Yes, Karl?

Karl: We only put ourselves in a predicament when we start offering our opinions as the word of god.

Bruce: Exactly.

Karl: And that's exactly what you're doing, when we start quoting our opinions, and adding our insights—well, this is what it really means. No, that's not what it really means. It means what it says.

Bruce: amen.

Karl: You know, when you read it for what it is, and you follow what it is, then you get the light of what it is.

Bruce: Yes, Ian?

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Ian: Well, it seems to me that the reason, at least for me, why I drive myself to come to these extra-Biblical conclusions is that I’m a control freak, and I need to figure out the next part of the puzzle. But I don’t need to figure it out.

Bruce: that’s exactly right. We don’t need to do that. Remember this. 2 Peter chapter 1. “Through His divine revelation He has given us everything we need to know for life and godliness.” That is to live life at its highest quality, and to worship God correctly. Now it doesn’t say that I give you everything there is to know. The Scripture doesn’t give us everything to know, because if it did, then you and I would be god, wouldn’t we? Yes, don’t?

Don: Bruce, I don’t want to go down a rabbit trail here, and I’m going to. (*Laughter.*) What about 1 Peter 2:8 and Proverbs 16:4?

(Transcriber’s Note: Proverbs 16:4. “The LORD has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.”)

1 Peter 2:8. “They stumbled, being disobedient to the Word, to which they were also appointed.”)

Bruce: They’re good verses. (*Laughter.*)

Don: It certainly seems to imply double predestination.

Bruce: Let it be that way. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: Charles Simeon said, “I will let each part of Scripture mean exactly what it says.” He said, “You will say to me, “I must harmonize these.” He said, “If the apostles didn’t harmonize them, why must I harmonize them?”

Bruce: Don’s point is that these verses also speak about certain truths. My point is, don’t read one thing and then come to a different conclusion based upon that verse itself. You’ve got to support it by others. Let the other Scripture support itself.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Come to the conclusion based upon what the Scripture says in totality, not taking one verse out of context, and saying, “therefore the conclusion must be ...” Let the conclusion come from other verses, as Don just gave us. Yes, please?

Participant: Let’s take one step backwards, and go back to suffering. Now you’re talking about suffering. I would say that it seems to me to be the opposite. I’ve suffered before, but I’m not suffering now. This is the best part of my life. Something needs to be explained. I can see that in Third World countries, and I know Ted has great examples of what takes place in turkey. I can see them suffering. But here, in my life, it seems to be the opposite. I’m really not suffering.

Bruce: Suffering is relative. In other words, if we’re going to be honest, when you take the hard core definition of suffering, we in America don’t suffer, do we?

Men: No.

Bruce: We don’t. Other people in other parts of the world suffer excruciating pain because of their faith. For some reasons only known to god, we’ve not come to that yet in America. And we may be coming to that one day. That may be right around the corner. But you’re absolutely right. It’s relative. It’s something that only we can deal with. How is the world system treating us?

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Now we do a lot of complaining, don't we? Our complaining is basically because we don't think we're getting the things that we want. So we have to be careful when we talk about suffering. When I'm talking about suffering, I'm talking about it in general terms, how the world will respond to us.

Now the real issue is this. The ministry of putting God's glory on display and demonstrating His holiness is not in the reason for your suffering. It's in the response to it.

Now let me just give you a crass example, and I'm not picking on anybody. Years ago, during the Viet Nam conflict, when I came back to the States, there was a lot of persecution for those of us who served. Now I have a brother-in-law who went to Canada. Now, in my mind, he said he did that out of a clear conscience. I have to let that go. I can't evaluate and judge that.

My point is this. The issue is not going to Canada. The issue is how do you suffer when you break the law? In my mind, if that had been my position, I would have said, "I cannot go to Viet Nam and fight that war. Put me in jail," because the ministry occurs when? When I respond to the consequence of my choice. It's not fleeing from the consequence of my choice. Do you see the difference? It's how you need to respond to that. In my opinion, if I had been a conscientious objector, my approach would have been, "I cannot fight in that war. Put me in handcuffs. Send me to jail, because I know I just broke the law." Therefore that's how the ministry occurs, in the response in how you handle the consequences of your choices. That's what I'm saying. Ted?

Ted: A good example of one who stood and suffered would be Dr. Martin Luther King.

Bruce: Please explain.

Ted: Well, I mean that he said, "I'm going to break the law because the law is unjust, and I will go to prison for it. I'm not going to go to Canada, or someplace else."

Bruce: So my point is this, brothers. I can't define the suffering that the Lord may be pleased to take you through. I can't define that. And you shouldn't compare it to somebody else. We have to be wonderfully gracious and wonderfully thankful that our country has not been in the position of that occurring to us yet. But there may be some degrees to where you and I may be confronted by the system of this world, because our standards are not the standards of this world anymore. And there may be a situation where you may suffer the consequences of the choices you make by conviction. The real issue is not to avoid the consequence, but through the consequence is the way that puts God's glory on display, because how you respond to the consequence of your choice is the means by which He puts His glory on display, which is the means by which His holiness is described. The issue is not why am I suffering, by whatever definition it is. The issue is not why am I suffering? The issue is this: How am I responding? Yes, Tom?

Tom: Let me say that we have a tendency, as humans, to focus on the results. And if we look in Philippians 3:10, it's that we need to focus on the process. What is God taking us through? We suffer not to suffer. We suffer to be more like Him.

Bruce: Absolutely. The more you suffer, the more you should be motivated for what?

Men: Holiness.

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Bruce: Holiness. The more you suffer, the more you should be motivated for holiness.

Let me take you to another passage that might be helpful. Let's turn to 1 Peter chapter 3. Let's start around verse 13. "Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with ..." Retribution, anger and irritation. (*Laughter.*) It doesn't say that. It says, "Do it with gentleness and respect."

That's contrary to the system of this world! The world is going to say, when somebody reviles you, or harasses you, your response is to give them what is stimulated within you. A Christian doesn't do that, because we live in a higher standard. And when you don't respond that way, you're putting His glory on display, and God is demonstrating His holiness! You see the response to that. Do it with gentleness. Do it with respect.

"Having a good conscience,"---now notice!—"so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." What is your greatest defense when someone slanders you, persecutes you, reviling? What's your greatest defense? It is not your mouth; it's your life!

Men: Amen.

Bruce: That's what you put them to shame with. Don't give them what they stimulate within you. You see, the normal system of this world is going to stimulate certain things within us. Those are normal human responses. But because of the grace of God in your salvation, I understand that my response is for demonstrating practical holiness, putting on display what God is doing in my life. I respond differently to the same thing somebody else might not do, with gentleness and respect, because I'm putting God's glory on display, and His holiness. We respond to our suffering, and that is how we respond. Yes, sir?

Participant: This morning, on Compassion Radio, they were talking about the South Korean Christians going to northern Iraq. And their houses were burned down, and they met under the tree, and now they're in the open, and they're showing their support for the Christians in northern Iraq.

Bruce: Amen.

Participant: They put their lives on the line every day.

Bruce: Amen. Let me read the rest of this verse in 1 Peter chapter 3. We'll back up. "Having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."

One of the six revealed wills of God is the willingness to suffer. And why is that? Because God's what is being put on display in the way that we respond in our suffering? God's holiness is put on display because God is glorified.

Notice the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Let your good deeds be demonstrated to show that this glory comes from God, and not from us, and we give all attention to the Father.

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You see, the Scripture gives us plenty of things to know about what we ought to do. So don't ask yourself the question, “God, why am I being slandered? Why am I being harassed? Why am I being included with this suffering?”, however that may be defined? Don't ask the question, “Why is He doing that?” The question is “What am I doing good in this respect?”

Now guys, you can't do that naturally! That is unnatural! Do you understand that? Try it yourself. You can't do that! It is absolutely supernatural. That's why it's a result of our saving relationship, of having been regenerated, where God implanted His righteousness at our regeneration, and He imputes it to us at our justification. You see, it's the Holy Spirit working in us, because you can't do that naturally.

Notice what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Let's turn to Matthew chapter five. The word “blessed” in those eight character qualities, literally means “happy, in spite of circumstances.” Happiness comes out of happenings. Blessedness comes out of response to God's grace.

One of the chief components of the Beatitudes is “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” You know the one thing that you and I should never run out of is mercy, because you're not the source of it.

Let me show you something. Keep your finger in Matthew chapter 5, and go back to 1 Peter chapter 2. Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” You and I should never run out of mercy, because you've experienced it in God's what? In God's grace, in saving you.

Let's pick it up in 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

That's why we say that we're M-8s—mission-minded members of a movement motivated by mercy, for ministry in the marketplace, because of this. You and I have all the mercy we'll ever need. It's just that we need to trust Christ, for we are not the source of it. Be merciful. That's when you receive mercy.

That is unnatural, folks. But that is one of the ways in which God puts His holiness on display because of this. It's demonstrating that God's standards are not unfair. When you can give somebody mercy when they don't deserve it, you're basically saying that God's standards are not unfair, because I just put it on display—the practical holiness of what God is doing in my life.

So the real issue for us, brothers, as we continue to understand the holiness of God, in our suffering is in our response, more than anything else.

John Stott said this. “I would suggest, that some form of suffering is virtually indispensable to the holiness.”

Peter tells us these few beautiful things in the lifestyle of the saved. Let's go back and look at 1 Peter, chapter 1. Look at our verses, beginning at verse 14.

He's been giving us the lifestyle of the saved person. If you recall, the mindset of the saved person is one of hope. The motive of a saved person is a love response in

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obedience, and the mark of a saved person is practical holiness. Any holiness that we have in character and conduct must be derived from Him, not ourselves. To bear the mark of holiness means to be set apart for God’s exclusive use, and exclusive pleasure. To the person in Christ there is no such thing as the “secular” anymore. All of life is holy, as we reveal His glory because we’re putting His glory on display. Yes, Jay?

Jay: I was even jus thinking about everything that was discussed. I’m just thing of Paul, who says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel.” As we talk about suffering, and I look at myself in the mirror, am I an undercover Christian, where people do not know that I believe in Jesus Christ?

Bruce: now that’s a good question that we need to ask ourselves. I can’t answer that for you. So to answer the question, you have to go back and look at the man in the mirror, and ask yourself that question. My point is this. Yes, please?

Participant: This might be a bigger subject for a bigger conversation. But I’ve been involved in a a couple of conversations lately, in the past week or so, and quite honestly, guys, I’m not sure how to respond to the conversation. Everybody who works around me knows that I come here on Fridays, and I read during the day, and everybody knows. Okay, what I’m referencing was on the news. A girl that dug a hole in the sand, and she got buried. I don’t know if you saw this. She was on the beach,, and she was buried whole, and it collapsed around her—

Bruce: A sinkhole.

Participant: And so, yesterday we were talking about it again, basically with a bunch of people. A couple people turned to me and said, “Well, what do you think about that? How could that possibly be? (*Unclear.*) When you’re in a situation like that, how do you, how can you respond to that?”

Bruce: That’s a great question, because, basically that’s a smoke screen, because the real issue, what they’re basically saying is, “how would a loving god permit that?” What’s the best thing you can say? How are you going to respond to that? Let’s help him out; that’s a great question. How are you going to respond to that, when somebody says, “How could a loving god permit that to happen? You tell me that you’re a follower of Christ and God is a god of love. How can that happen? A little girl falls into a sinkhole and dies. How can God be loving? How are you going to respond to that? Yes, please?”

Participant: Ravi Zacharias says if you say that there is evil in the world, then there has to be good. If there is good, there has to be a Lawgiver. So how can you compare what is evil when you don’t have something good to compare it with?

Bruce: That’s a good response. Somebody else? Yes, please?

Participant: He takes the bad and turns it into good. Romans 8:28.

Second Participant: Yes, but that little girl is still dead.

Bruce: Listen. When you quote Scripture to somebody like that, that’s going to be like pouring a hand grenade into an ammo dump. (*Laughter.*) That’s just going to infuriate them more, because they’ll say, “Oh, you’re hiding behind that stuff.” We’ve got to give them a different answer. What’s a good, practical response? That’s a

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legitimate question. That happens to me all the time. I’ll give you my response in a moment. Yes, Ian?

Ian: Well, sometimes I don’t understand how good can come out of bad, but I know that He is the Author of good.

Bruce: Okay, that’s a good statement. It’s a general statement. I don’t understand how bad things happen, but I understand that God is the Author of good. Thank you for asking. And you do that with what? Gentleness and respect. That’s the response. Do it with gentleness and respect, not argumentativeness. You don’t have to defend your faith, folks. You just have to express it and live it out. Let them ask, “Why do you believe that?” Then you go into greater detail. Somebody else, please? Yes, sir?

Participant: Bad things happen because we’re living under a curse because of the Fall.

Bruce: All right, now that’s going to be another hand grenade in an ammo dump. (*Laughter.*) You’ve got to give them something where they will want to ask you the next question, not infuriate them and turn them off by the answer you just gave.

Participant: You can’t feed the fire.

Bruce: You can’t feed the fire, exactly! You don’t throw the hand grenade into the ammo dump. Yes, Ian?

Ian: It could also mean that the ache that we feel when we listen to the story of the little girl is the ache that God feels when He realizes that without some other plan, we’re going to be separated from Him for eternity. That’s the ache that we feel.

Bruce: Now let’s be very practical, men. You don’t want to fuel their fire. You want to put them in a position where 1 Peter 3:15 will occur. “Give me the reason for your hope. Why is that your response? How can you have that?” Yes?

Participant: For one thing, they’re assuming that this is bad.

Bruce: They can’t assume anything else. They cannot assume anything other than that.

Participant: If she’s in heaven, that’s even better.

Bruce: Well, they don’t know that. We don’t know that either.

Participant: Well, if that were the case, we should all commit suicide and go to heaven.

Bruce: (*Unclear.*) All I’m saying is this. You can’t deal with them on a spiritual level when they’re not spiritually minded. Those things are spiritually discerned. You have to give them some neutral response that does not fuel the fire, that puts them in a position to want to come back to you and talk to you more about it. But you’re not going to answer that question. Sometimes, my response, when somebody says something like that to me is, “You know, I have no idea. But that’s a great question.” All right (*Laughter.*)

Participant: That’s right. That’s a great answer.

Bruce: That’s all I say. Now, if they say, “Aren’t you a Christian?”

“Yes, I am. Then how can you say that?”

Then you get into greater detail. But I don’t infuriate them by flaming the fire by my response. But I just basically give something neutral, because I’m trying to set them up

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to ask me something, so I can get into greater depth at another time. But they are not going to be open to that at the moment of that discussion.

Sometimes, somebody else has said to me at work, (because I’m in the same situation you are), somebody says, “Well, what about this particular issue? How could people do that?”

And I say, “What do you think?”

“Let’s just take the thing about abortion,. Or homosexuality, or whatever it may be.”

My basic response is this. “That’s not the position that I hold,” because I’m waiting for them to say, “Why?” I want them to ask me why. And then I say, “Well, let’s go to lunch. We’ll talk about it.” But at that moment, you see, That’s just a smoke screen, because they’re basically saying this: “How can a loving God permit that?” You see, it’s a smoke screen. The real issue is, I would like to get to the point of saying, “What have you done with the person and work of Christ?” That’s why you want to cut through all those smoke screens. But you’re not going to do that at the moment of your response. Our response needs to be in gentleness, with respect. Put them in a position so they will want to come back to you and talk more.

But that’s a very, very difficult thing, and I appreciate the question, because that is very much where the rubber meets the road. We have to be careful not to inflame them by throwing something at them that’s going to fuel; their fire. Yes, sir?

Participant: That also gives me an invitation. By responding to “I don’t know,” the response will work to get them to try to find an answer.

Bruce: So all sorts of things can open up when you give them a neutral response that says, “I don’t know, but that’s a great question.” You see, we just don’t know what’s going to happen. Yes, Don?

Don: Doesn’t 1 Peter 3:15 come into play here?

Bruce: Absolutely. Give a reason, because I want them to ask me what the reason is for that. If they ask me the reason, it opens it up for m, and I now have the freedom to give them all the Scripture I want. It’s not my first response. I want to set them up to have a greater discussion, because I want them to say this: “What’s the reason for your hope?” Then we can have a different discussion.

Guys, this has been a great session this morning. Remember this. Remember this. God reveals His glory through our suffering, because we demonstrate His holiness. And may it be so, that part of our discipleship in Christ would be the willingness to suffer for Christ’s sake, and put His glory on display, whatever God chooses to do. I don’t have all the answers, but I do know this. God is holy, and God is sovereign. That means His sovereignty is a holy sovereignty. I just trust that and believe that.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You for the practical applications of Scripture, and thank You for these questions. We pray, Lord, that You would give us an open mind to understand how we can be responsive to those questions that the world would throw at us, but in a way that is respectful and gentle. Bring them in a position where they will want to discuss more, so that we can introduce them to the Person and work of Christ. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” (*Applause.*)