

1 Peter 1:13-16

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[0 : 0 0] The Aberdeen manager, Craig Brown, has finally decided that it's time to put his feet up and enjoy retirement. Now, whether he was jumped or whether he pushed, well, that's another matter. Of course, for the club, the priority now is to secure a new manager.

And maybe even this week that will be achieved. I want you to imagine as the board are trying to identify a suitable manager and maybe are able to interview somebody they think would be ideal for the job. Imagine if the candidate was informed that the demand of the board upon him was that within a couple of years of taking on the task, he would have secured the Premier League title and follow that up with a run in the Champions League right through to the knockout stages.

That's the demand that the board are placing upon him. This is what you must achieve if you're going to be the manager of our club. I think anybody who has any even passing knowledge of the reality would say that that is a big ask. That would be a huge demand, an unreasonable demand. But imagine if in addition to placing that demand on this new prospective manager, the board were to say, and we're not going to provide you with any funds to buy new players or even to develop the youth.

You're not going to get that. There's no money. But nonetheless, this is what we require of you. This is what we demand of you if you aspire to be, if you're going to be our manager.

I think in those circumstances, again, we would all agree that the demand is altogether and alarmingly, laughingly unreasonable. There's nothing wrong per se with a big demand, with a big ask, but it has to be accompanied by solid reasons or grounds that justify the demand that is being made.

[2 : 1 7] As we turn to the verses that we want to consider in the first chapter of 1 Peter, we are confronted with a God, our God, who is a demanding God. In these verses, in verses 13 to 16, there are a series of demands that are placed upon us as His people. But we will also discover, as we always do in the Bible, when God demands of us, that these demands that are great demands, they are onerous demands, we might say.

They're a big ask, but they're accompanied by good reasons for these demands being made, and good reasons for us embracing the demand that is placed upon us.

And in our passage, in verses 13 to 16, we can identify three demands that God makes of His people, of His elect, as He calls them at the beginning of the chapter, of His strangers in the world, as we've also described in the verses that introduce the letter. These are demands that are placed upon us, you and me as Christians. But the demands that He makes, He does not make without reason. His demands are graciously and reasonably accompanied by the grounds upon which the demands are made.

And that's what we're going to look at this evening. We're going to look at, we're going to identify three very explicit demands in verses 13 to 16, but also notice how each one is accompanied by a reason, by the grounds upon which the demand is reasonably being made by God. What I'll do is very quickly identify the demands that we have, simply noticing them in these verses, and also the grounds upon which they're made. And then having done so, which hopefully will give you an idea of the structure and where we're going and in what direction or in what order, we can then proceed to think of each of them in turn. If this will help you visually, imagine you've got a table, and you've got on one side three demands, and on the other the three grounds, and we'll just fill in the gaps. And if you have that image in your mind, I think it will help you as we continue.

The first demand in our text is in verse 13 at the very beginning of our passage, prepare your minds for action. Be self-controlled and set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Just to complicate our task a little, this first demand is a threefold demand, but we'll come to that. But this first demand, prepare your minds for action, and then what follows. But this demand is married to a reason, and the reason is implicit in the very first word of verse 13, therefore, which points us back to all that God has done. In the light of all that God has done, this is how you are to behave. This is how you are to live. This is what you are to do.

[5 : 50] So, there's a big ask, there's a big demand, but it's grounded in what God has done. That's the first thing. The second demand we find in verse 14, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. Very clear demand on the part of God. Don't conform. Don't go with the flow. Don't live conforming to the evil desires that you were part of and that enslaved you previously. Don't do that.

That's a demand. On what grounds is this demand made? Well, I think the grounds are found at the very beginning of that verse, 14, as obedient children, which I think is pointing to, and we'll develop it a little more fully in a moment, is pointing to our identity, who we are. Because of who we are, we are to live in a certain way. We are not to conform. Why? Because of who we are. That's the reason we are not to conform. And then the final demand we find in verse 15, but just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. This is a very big ask. It's a very big demand. Be holy in all you do. On what grounds? What reason is given? Well, immediately we find a reason in verse 16, for it is written, be holy because I am holy, pointing to who God is. So, you'll notice it's, I think, interesting and helpful how we find that these three demands are grounded in three reasons that in turn point to what God has done, to who we are, and who God is. And of course, it's true that each of the reasons, the grounds, can be applied to all of the demands. But in the manner in which Peter lays out his material here, you have helpfully each demand accompanied by its own particular reason or ground. So, that's the outline. Let's now think of each of these in turn.

The first demand in verse 13, prepare your minds for action. I've already warned you, I suppose, if that's the right way of putting it, that to just give us a little bit more work, this first demand has three elements to it. And let's just notice what they are. And this will have to be rather brief in terms of the amount of comment we can make. But the first element of this demand we find there at the beginning, prepare your minds for action. Now, those of you who have in your mind the language of the older version of the Bible may remember or certainly are familiar with the idea of girding up the loins of your mind, which is the language we have, I think, in the King James Version. And that language, though it's difficult for us to understand, which is why the version we're using chooses to express the idea in a different way, the older language is more accurate in the sense of translating what it is that Peter actually says. And what Peter is doing is he's painting a picture that would have been a very vivid one for his readers. And the picture is one that we can only appreciate, this picture of girding up the loins of your mind, we can only appreciate what is being said when we visualize the clothing worn by Peter's readers. An ankle-length cloak would have been a normal and regular form of clothing. And so, this cloak that would go right down to the ankles would be what people would wear.

And of course, if you can imagine, if somebody was wearing a cloak of that kind and they needed to run to get somewhere quickly, it would be very difficult to do so with that kind of clothing.

It would impede them. Or if any kind of manual labor, perhaps not any kind of manual labor, but many different kinds of manual labor would be difficult with the cloak. So, what would people do?

[10 : 00] Well, what people would do is if they were going to run or if they needed to do something that would be impeded by their clothing, they would pull up their cloak in between their legs and tuck it into their belt. They would gird up their cloak, and that would give them freedom to do what they had to do. They wouldn't be impeded in this way. And what Peter is doing, he's taking this very familiar picture, this very familiar image, and applying it to the matter of our minds and the need to prepare our minds for action. Prepare your minds for action. Gird up the loins of your minds.

And in this way, Peter then focuses on the importance for us as Christians of preparing and focusing our minds. The question really that we leave for you to think about and we don't develop is, do we do that?

Or are we lazy in this matter of preparing our minds, of cultivating our thinking with regard to what the Bible says and teaches and ensuring we have a biblical worldview that allows us to live effectively as Christians in this world? Or do we just go with the flow and do the best we can without ever really giving the time and the effort that is required to prepare our minds? Notice also the language is very demanding or very intriguing in the way it speaks of preparing our minds for action. There's a very clear purpose in doing so. It's not an end in itself to prepare our minds, but we prepare our minds for action. And of course, these two elements are necessary. The preparing is necessary, but of course, it must be accompanied by acting. What's the point of preparing our minds, of having a sharp, biblical mind if we don't use it, if it doesn't inform the way we live and what we do? Well, what are we to do? What is this action that we are to be prepared for? Well, we're to speak the truth with discernment and conviction. Live the life with care and commitment. Win this world for the glory of God. And so much more we could say, but we haven't got time to do that. But this is the first element of this first demand.

Prepare your minds for action. But Peter goes on. The second element of this first demand. You'll be glad to hear that the other demands don't have three sub-points to them, but this first one does.

The second thing that Peter says is that we are to be self-controlled or sober. We remain there in verse 13, prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled. The Christian life requires clear thinking and a disciplined mind. As somebody has rather cleverly put it, the Christian living involves order as well as ardor. It's not all about passion. Passion's good, but there needs to be that order, that disciplined, sober thinking as we confront the challenges that life throws at us.

[13 : 20] The importance and purpose of this self-control, or certainly in some measure or certain aspects of the purpose of this self-control, is actually further developed or stated very clearly by Peter subsequently in the latter. Let's just notice very quickly where he uses this language of self-control in the context of very particular demands. We notice in chapter 4 and verse 7, in due course we'll look at this more carefully, but notice what it says there. The end of all things is near, therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled. Why? Why? So that you can pray. Peter's saying if you're going to be men and women of prayer, then you need to have this self-control. You need to be sober so that you are careful and disciplined in giving the time and the priority that is needed to pray as you want.

In the following chapter, in chapter 5 and verse 8, we read, Be self-controlled, be self-controlled, be sober and alert. Why? Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for whom to devour, resist him, and so on. Why be self-controlled? Because if you're not, you will be easy prey for the devil. And so there is this demand that Peter presents to us, God through Peter gives to us. Prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled. And then he goes on, the third element of this first demand, Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Now this third element of the first demand, certainly in the manner in which we are presenting it, overlaps with the grounds for embracing the demand. The what we are to do merges somewhat with the reply, we are to do it. And so for the purposes of this evening, we're going to pass by without further comment this element of this first demand, this element of setting our hope fully on the grace to be given us. And rather move on to the grounds for this. This is the demand. What are we to do? What is it we are to do? Well, we are to prepare our minds for action. We are to be self-controlled and sober. Fine, that's what we are to do. But why? Why? For what reason? On what grounds? Well, we had already suggested that the answer to that is to be found in the word with which the section begins, therefore. Therefore. Just one word, but a word in context brimming with significance and content.

This is the why that justifies the what. The word, therefore, refers to all that has gone before, as Peter has outlined all that God has done for us. You see, in the previous verses, Peter has reminded his readers of what God has done for them. And having reminded them, having outlined for them all that God has done, the Christian living hope that they enjoy, the salvation that Christ has secured for them, the inexpressible joy that is the inheritance of the Christians, of those who love and trust in Jesus, having been reminded of all that, then Peter says, therefore, for this reason you are to do these things. You are to prepare your mind for action. You are to be sober. You are to be self-controlled.

You are to be self-controlled. You are to be self-controlled. You are to be self-controlled. You are to be self-controlled. You are to be self-controlled. Why? Why do it? Why obey? Why embrace this demand? In the light of and because all that God has done.

In commenting on this particular demand, John Calvin hints at what we might call the reasonableness of the connection between what God has done and how we are to live in this way with these words.

[17 : 21] From the greatness and excellency of grace, he draws an exhortation. The exhortation, the demand, is born. It flows from the greatness and excellency of grace. Or in perhaps more surgical but succinct language, somebody else has put it in this way, the indicative of what God has done for us precedes the imperative of what we are called to do for him. I think that does capture what is going on here, I think, quite well. Why should you prepare your mind for action? Why be self-controlled and sober because of all that God has done and is doing for you in Christ? But moving on to the second demand.

That's the first demand and the reason that accompanies it. But the second demand we find in verse 14. Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. Now, in these words that we've just read, in addition to the demand itself, which is our primary concern, the words also point to a past reality and a present struggle for those to whom Peter is addressing. Regarding the past reality, the language used by Peter does suggest that his audience is largely, not exclusively, but largely Gentiles who have been brought to faith from a pagan culture and lifestyle. When he speaks of the evil desires, and particularly what then follows, you had when you lived in ignorance. Now, it's true, or it could be understood that even Jews who were careless regarding the knowledge and the light that they had might have lived in this way. But the language certainly does suggest that those being addressed largely were Gentiles. They had been brought up in a pagan culture, had been immersed in a pagan lifestyle.

And Peter, in the demand that he places upon them, points to that or hints at that past reality. But as well as helping us have an idea of this past reality of the readers, there's also an indication of a present struggle. And what I mean by that is simply that Peter is refreshingly honest in recognizing that though they are now saved, though this time of ignorance is past, yet they still struggle. You see, there would be no purpose or no reason to ask them, to call them, to no longer conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance if these desires no longer had any power upon them. Clearly, they still do. They still struggle with temptation. They still struggle with living the Christian life as they ought. There is a present struggle for those that Peter is addressing. Yes, they are now believers, but though they are believers, everything is not plain sailing. Still tempted, still struggling with evil evil desires. And we too struggle. We are tempted, tempted to satisfy our evil desires, to pride, to dishonesty, to sexual sin, to greed and gluttony, to sloth and selfishness. We struggle with these things.

We are tempted by these things. That is our present struggle. But of course, along with a recognition of the present struggle, we have what primarily concerns us, and that is the demand. What is the demand? Well, the demand is clear. Do not conform. Do not conform. Don't succumb to these temptations. Don't just go with the flow. Everybody tells white lies. Well, not you. Everybody looks after number one. Not you.

Everybody sleeps around. Not you. Is it easy to be different? It's not easy. Why then struggle with temptation when succumbing is so much easier and seemingly much more fun? Why? For what reason should we embrace this demand?

[21 : 54] For what reason should we say, yes, this is something that I am going to do. I'm not going to conform. Why? Well, we have a reason given. And the reason given introduces the demand there in verse 14. As obedient children. The reason we have here for obeying this demand, for not conforming, is who we are. We noticed previously that the first demand is grounded in what God has done. But here, the demand is grounded in who we are as obedient children. Peter grounds his demand in our identity as children of God. And the language that Peter uses in the original that is lost somewhat in translation is very telling. What Peter literally calls his readers is children of obedience. Now, we have it translated, and it may seem almost just exactly the same, but it's not exactly the same. We have it translated as obedient children. As obedient children don't conform. But what Peter actually says is, as children of obedience. And the distinction, which I think there is, and I'm certainly suggesting, is that the term that he uses is not intended by

Peter to be a description of current behavior, children who obey, but rather it is a description of their God-given identity, children of obedience. Peter isn't saying, you know, you are children who obey, though that no doubt was true of many of them. He is saying that is who you are. You are children of obedience. This is your new identity. It's as though obedience is presented as their parent, and as our parent, and as evidence of our new identity. We are to be characterized by obedience.

Let's not forget that at the very beginning of the letter, as Peter introduces his letter and greets those he is writing to, he speaks of how they have been chosen for obedience. We notice that in verse 2, who have been chosen, and then if we just continue on through to the end of the verse, for obedience.

We are children of obedience. Why are we not to conform to evil desires that we struggle with and that surrounds us and are so difficult to resist? Why? Because of who we are. We are children of obedience. You are a child of obedience. To disobey is to despise your God-given identity.

It is to give a lie to who you are. And so, that is something that we cannot do. We are who we are. We are who God has made us. Ours is a great status as children of obedience.

[24 : 52] So, we have this second demand. Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. We have the reason given for not doing so. But that brings us to the third and final demand that we have in these verses.

And the third one is, be holy in all that you do. They had at the second half of verse 15. Be holy in all you do. Of the demands, this is, I think, comfortably the most demanding of all.

Those that have gone before are very demanding. But this one is particularly demanding. It's the biggest ask. And the one that we might even, in bemused reverence, imagine to be unreasonable.

We might say, well, this is just too much. To be holy in everything we do, it's just too big an ask. How could we be asked such a thing? Before we look at the reason that is given, we do need to just think a little bit more about, well, what actually is being asked? What is it that is being demanded of us in these words, be holy in everything you do? In order to understand that, we need to remind ourselves just very briefly of how the word holy, when it is attributed to Christians, is used in two ways, two related ways, but in two distinct ways.

There is a sense in which we are all holy in the sense that God, by the action of God, by the sovereign action of God, He has separated us for Himself. And in that sense, all of us are equally holy.

[26 : 41] If you're a Christian, you are holy. And in that sense, you can't be more holy or less holy. If God has separated you for Himself, that's what He's done. And He's done it. You can't make it bigger, and you can't make it less. It's just who you are. It's what God has done. He has made you holy. He has separated you.

But that's not the way in which the word is being used here. It wouldn't make sense. It wouldn't make sense to exhort somebody to be holy if the response would be, well, I already am. God has already done that.

Here the word is being used more in the sense of how one who is holy, one who has been separated, lives a life that is righteous, lives a life that is committed to fleeing from, to shunning evil and sin, and doing that which is good. Holiness in the sense of the life that we live, a life that is pleasing to God.

And in that, of course, it is possible to be more holy or less holy. And it is this matter, I think, that is being addressed by Peter in this demand. Even the way he uses the word, be holy in all that you do. It's about what you do. It's about the life that you live, the words that you speak, the actions that you take. Be holy in all that you do.

Understanding it doesn't make it any less of a great demand. Be holy in all that you do.

[28 : 19] As we, in a measure, understand what is being asked of us, we are even more persuaded that it seems so big an ask, so impossible for us to respond to in any meaningful way, or at least that's how we might imagine. Be holy just as He is holy. How can we possibly respond to that demand? If we have any sense of our own sinfulness, any grasp of the righteous demands of God, any conception of God's holiness, we can only stand dumbstruck in the face of such a seemingly unreasonable demand. Be holy just as He is holy. Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all that you do.

John Calvin also has something interesting to say about this, that in a way, I find it interesting, because it's almost as if, you know, I warm to his own sense of, well, this is such a big ask, and he's almost wrestling with his own incredulity in the face of this demand. And as he wrestles with it, this is the conclusion he comes to, or at least in part, this is what he says in response to this demand, that we are to be holy in all that we do just as God is holy. This is what he says, in bidding us to be holy like himself, that is God in bidding us to be holy like himself, the proportion is not that of equals, but we ought to advance in this direction as far as our condition will bear. Now, it's interesting what he says, and no doubt there's great validity in what he says, but it's almost as if he's trying to make it a bit more manageable.

Is he? I don't know. I don't say that he is, but is Calvin diluting the demand or trying to make it more achievable? See, I'm not sure that God intends that we should ever see this demand as achievable.

We should always see it as unachievable in one regard. But though that is true, it is also true, and with this we close, it is also true that this demand is accompanied by a reason or grounds for making it. It's a big ask. It's a big demand, but it also is accompanied with a reason as the previous two have been. What is the reason? Let's turn to that to draw things to a close. Well, the reason that Peter gives is found in verse 16, and it is explicitly presented as the reason. We read from verse 15, but just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written. Why?

Because. Because of this. For it is written, be holy because I am holy. The previous grounds identified for embracing God's demands were what God has done and who we are. This demand is grounded in who God is.

[31 : 26] He is holy. Now, the question that emerges there is, why would God's character, who God is, serve as grounds for His demands upon us to be holy? We can understand how what God has done produces in the believer gratitude, and it serves as a reason. It serves as grounds for doing what He demands of us.

We can also understand how our own identity as children of obedience provides a good reason for embracing and struggling with God's demands upon us. But what about God's character as a ground for His demand upon us? Why would that be a good or effective reason for doing what we're being told to do for embracing this demand? Well, I think we can identify two related ways in which God's holiness serves as a ground or reason for us to be holy, for us to endeavor to be holy, for us to seek to be holy in all that we do. Two related reasons. One is that He is our Father. God is our Father, and as His children. It is right and good that we should be like Him. Why be holy? Because our Father is holy. We are His children, and as His children, it is right and proper and reasonable and good to be like Him. And so, as God is holy, so we too, God's children, ought to be holy and indeed would wish to be holy, to be like Him. And this idea of wanting to be like Him takes us on to that second very related idea. As God's holy character is beautiful, and as it is desirable, as it is something that the regenerate mind and heart and soul can look on and admire and say, what a beautiful thing it is,

God's holiness. To look and say, what a desirable thing. So, we who are His children want to be like He is. Not some burdensome duty, oh, how difficult that is, and what a burden it is to be holy like God's holy, but rather, what would I want to be more than that? What greater desire could I have than to be holy like God is holy? His holiness, so perfect, so beautiful, so desirable. That's what I want. I want to be like Him. And so, His character, who He is, serving as a motivation, as a reason, as grounds for us embracing this demand, difficult though it is, demanding though it is, such a huge ask, and yet, because He is holy, and because we are His children, and because it is such a beautiful thing, so we would wish to be like He is. So, three demands, big asks that God makes of us His children, but graciously and reasonably accompanied by these reasons that God gives us. Our God is indeed a demanding God. No question. No question. And any attempt, any foolish attempt to make

God less demanding, and imagine that that will make Him more attractive. That's our temptation, and we don't need to point to other churches or other traditions and say, oh, other churches do that.

We are tempted to that as well. Let's make the gospel a little bit less demanding. Let's make being a Christian a little bit easier, and maybe more people want to be Christians. Well, we're not doing justice to the gospel that we have been given, and that we simply are responsible for keeping and for announcing. Our God is a demanding God. No question. But His demands are good. His demands are dignifying.

[35 : 42] His demands are reasonable. And so, I would urge you, Christian friend, embrace His demands in gratitude for all that He has done for you, in recognition of who you are by grace, and drawn by the desire to be like your Father, who is altogether and beautifully holy. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to You, Lord. We acknowledge You as the God who is holy, and we pray that You would produce in us a greater sense of appreciation of the beauty of Your holiness, that it would be something that would be desirable for us. Lord, we do thank You for all the demands that we have considered and read and given some thought to in these verses of Peter's letter, and we ask that You would help us to take them seriously, that we would know what it is to prepare our minds for action, that we would know what it is to be self-controlled, to be sober, to be disciplined in our thinking and in our living. Help us to be those who with decision and with energy seek to live lives that are different, that we would not conform to the evil desires that we had when we lived in ignorance. And we pray very especially that by Your Spirit, You would help us to embrace this great and dignifying demand to be holy in all that we do, just as You are holy.

And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to close our service this evening by singing in Psalm 119. We'll sing the first section of this psalm. In Sing Psalms, you'll find that on page 157. Psalm 119, verses 1 to 8, and we'll sing these verses to the tune, Warrington. Blessed are those of blameless ways who live according to God's Word.

Blessed are those who keep His laws, who with their whole heart seek the Lord. Psalm 119, the whole of that first section, we'll stand to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[38 : 48] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. On your covers, I will not fear disgrace or shame.

I'll raise you with an upright heart, as your just thoughts are led by me.

All your decrees I will obey, do not forsake the uttering.

[40 : 43] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and always. Amen. Amen.