

SERMON NOTES

The Three Ways: An Introduction to the Spiritual Journey

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1 PETER 1:13-2:3	NOTES
<p>1 ¹³Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance.</p>	<p>Gird up the loins of your mind. (Roll up your sleeves and get to work.) Be sober. Disciplined awareness, focus. More grace in the future/obedience. Desires: see 4:3: licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels; also 2:11 "the desires of the flesh that war against the soul.</p>
<p>¹⁵Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."</p>	<p>See Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; Matthew 5:48. (Holiness Code: Lev. 19-26) Holiness is rooted in the nature of God.</p>
<p>¹⁷If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.</p>	<p>God judges all people impartially according to their deeds. Christians live in exile/sojourn Centrality of Christ, revealed, raised from the dead, glorified. Sacrifice</p>

<p>²²Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.</p>	<p>Purified [<i>hegnikotes/hagnidzo/</i> dedicated, in a cultic sense] your souls [<i>psychas/lives</i>] by obedience to the truth. (Waltner: Cleansing lives of attitudes and behaviors that destroy right relationships.) Love one another deeply from the heart. = out of a pure [<i>katharas</i>] heart</p>
<p>²⁴For “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵but the word of the Lord endures forever.” That word is the good news that was announced to you.</p>	<p>The word [<i>rhema</i>] of the Lord endures forever. Isaiah 40:6-8</p>
<p>2 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ²Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.</p>	<p>Malice, guile (deceitful practices), insincerity, envy, slander Pure [<i>adolon/unadulterated</i>], spiritual [<i>logikon/metaphorical</i>] milk Grow into salvation Taste—from Psalm 34:8: Taste and see—happy is the one who takes shelter in the Lord.</p>

Spiritual growth

Who is a spiritual person?

Someone who has had a dramatic experience of God—visions, hearing voices, feelings on the skin or in the stomach? Is conversion the high point of the spiritual life? Or is there more? Does one experience make you spiritual?

Throughout Christian history, many Christians have talked about the spiritual journey.

We are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 2:12-13). Salvation is past, present, and future.

1 Peter 2:2: newborn babies who need nourishment to grow up

What are the stages along the spiritual journey?

Some speak in terms of a ladder: steps along the way: Jacob's ladder

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) begin with "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Many spiritual writers have considered this poverty of spirit to be the first step on the spiritual journey.

Origen (3rd century, northern Africa): Commentary on the Song of Solomon

1. Learning virtue (Proverbs)
2. Reflecting on natural world (Ecclesiastes)
3. Contemplating God (Song of Solomon): analogy of love between God and the soul, love between man and woman

This becomes: purification, illumination, union. This threefold theory was developed in conversation between Christian theology and the philosophy of Plato, which spoke of the soul's ascent to God.

(However, this was not Origen's only understanding of the spiritual journey. Origen also had 42 stages corresponding to the various points of the Exodus along the way from Egypt to Canaan.)

Bernard of Clairvaux (12th century, France): Four degrees of love

1. Love of self for self's sake
2. Love of God for self's sake
3. Love of God for God's sake
4. Love of self for God's sake

Thomas Aquinas (13th century, Germany)

Beginners, proficient, perfect

Theologia Deutsch

Spiritual poverty

Gelassenheit

Abandoning the will

The German Theology, 14th century:

In this spiritual poverty and humility one finds and understands that all humans are bent upon and turned toward the self, evil practices, and wickedness. One also sees that because of this inclination, it becomes necessary and useful to have order, rules, law, and commands. Law and command make our blindness evident to us and constrain wickedness into order.

Were it not for this, people would be much more wicked and undisciplined than dogs and cattle. Many a person was drawn and turned to the truth through outward rules and order; without them it would not have happened.

Also, few people come to the truth who have not begun with the practice of order and rules; after all, they did not know anything different or better. Therefore, laws and commands, order and rules, are not to be despised and scorned in the realm of humble spirituality and spiritual poorness nor should those persons be despised who observe and follow them. ...

The first intention is that they abide by the rules and not turn to wicked things. But then the hope is also that they may be brought closer to the kingdom.

In sixteenth-century Europe, the Anabaptists, spiritual forebears of Mennonite believed that the grace and power of God could truly change people.

The Conversion of Menno Simons (1554):

The merciful Lord took notice of me, a miserable sinner, through the mild goodness of his great grace, touched my heart to begin with, gave me a new spirit, humbled me in his fear, taught me to know myself in part, turned me from the way of death and mercifully called me to the narrow path of life and fellowship with his saints. To him be praise forever. Amen.

Menno Simons, Foundation and Clear Instruction (1539)

The new birth is...a change in the inner nature which transforms people by the power of God through faith from evil to good, from being fleshly to being spiritual, from unrighteousness to righteousness, out of Adam into Christ.... The regenerated live out of the power of their new being, Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17, they crucify their flesh with its evil desires, Gal. 6:17. They leave the old Adam with his works, they avoid every appearance of evil, they are taught, controlled, and driven by the Holy Spirit.....

All who are born out of God are changed and renewed in their inner being, placed from Adam into Christ. They are ready to obey the Word of the Lord, and say with Saint Paul, Lord, what do you want me to do? Acts 2:37; 9:9; Luke 3:10; Matt. 28:19-20. They leave behind all human wisdom, even themselves, and order their lives according to the Word of the Lord without hate or resistance, Mark 16:15.

Teresa of Avila (16th century, Spain) wrote about seven mansions in the interior castle of the soul.

Puritans (17th century, England)

Union with Christ
Illumination of faith
Mortification of sin

Holiness movement

Entire sanctification/second work of grace

Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich: 6 stages

Recognition of God
Life of discipleship
Productive life
Journey inward
The Wall (time of struggle)
Journey outward
Life of love

Transformation (Paul Hiebert)

Change in behavior
Change in emotions
Change in habits and lifestyles
Change in beliefs
Change in worldview

**One of our identity statements as Mennonite Church of the Servant:
"Committing ourselves to radical and biblical spirituality."**

In connection with that statement, for the next three months, we will be looking at one way of understanding spiritual growth.

The threefold way: Origin, Augustine, Dionysius, much of medieval monasticism
Purgation: cleansing—of sin, of attachment to things, of the need to do things our way

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Illumination: Growth in conformity to Christ, discipleship, becoming more skilled at discerning where God is acting in the world

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Union/Communion: Being at one with God, putting ourselves completely into the hands of God, the direct experience of the presence of God, fleeting mountaintop experiences

Today we begin with purgation: What does our text today tell us about this first step on the spiritual path?

I. Growth and change are possible.

- A. 1 Peter 1:23 You have been born anew
- B. 2:2 Newborn infants that need milk “so that by it you may grow into salvation.”
- C. 2:22-23 Philos (familial love) becomes agape (sacrificial love)

II. This involves both grace and discipline (1:13)

- A. Faith and hope in God because of what God has done in Christ.
- B. God’s initiative—to ransom us, see us free from futile ways (1:18-20)
- C. Also, gird up the loins of your mind (roll up your sleeves and get to work); disciplined awareness, focus
- D. Be like obedient children

III. The goal is to be holy, because God is holy (1:15)

- A. Holy in all your conduct. Holiness is not having a halo and spending 24 hours a day in prayer. Holiness is being set apart.
- B. Holiness in Leviticus (Holiness code, Lev. 19–26). This is what it means to be a people set apart for God. Holiness and purity—clean and unclean. Not only does touching a dead body make you unclean, but stealing from your neighbor makes you unclean and unfit to be part of the community of God’s people.
- C. 1:22 You have purified/dedicated your souls/lives by your obedience to the truth
- D. 1:22 Love one another out of a pure [*katharas*] heart.

IV. A pure heart implies purgation

- A. 1:14 Do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance (when you didn’t know any better).
- B. 2:1 Rid yourselves therefore of
 - 1. All malice
 - 2. All guile (deceitful practices)
 - 3. Insincerity/hypocrisy
 - 4. Envy
 - 5. Slander, evil talk
- C. 2:2: Desire *pure* (unadulterated) milk of the word of God
- D. You are sojourning/living in exile/living in a foreign country.
- E. Elsewhere in 1 Peter
 - 1. 2:11 The desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul

2. 4:3: Licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels.
- F. Erland Waltner commentary: Cleansing our lives of attitudes and behaviors that destroy right relationships.
- G. Replacing old practices with agape love for each other and setting our faith and hope on God.
- H. Discernment (Charles Olson and Danny Morris) call this cleaning up process "shedding": Is there anything more important to me than doing God's will?

V. **Can we trust God?**

- A. Is this cleaning house really necessary in order to be a spiritual person? Do I really need to live differently, to clean up my act?
- B. Sin and unhealed, unforgiven hurts get between us and God. Our behavior has an impact on our spirituality.
- C. We have seen what God has done through Jesus Christ (1:18-21); we have tasted that the Lord is good.
- D. The Word of God is living and enduring. The word of the Lord endures forever. Isaiah 40:6-8. Everything else withers and falls. Our faith and hope are to be set on God. Nothing else is more important.
- E. Therefore let us roll up our sleeves, and get serious. Let us set *all* our hope on the grace of Jesus Christ, who empowers us to be holy in *all* our conduct.