

Shaped by God - 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

The shape of our lives has been transformed by the Coronavirus. We behave differently, and in some ways even think differently, as a result.

In this passage Peter writes that Christians should be shaped by their new relationship with God. Now they have a future hope, are freed from sin and have God as their Father their lifestyle and thinking should be transformed.

Re-Shaped by Covid-19

Our lives have been radically re-shaped by Covid-19.

There have been temporary changes that are only just beginning to change, such as most children home-schooling, most people watching church online and so on.

There are also ongoing changes that may not be so temporary, such as not being able to sing in church, having to wear masks on public transport, queuing to go into shops, social-distancing in most public spaces.

And there may be permanent changes as a result of Covid-19, for example some businesses going bust, many more people working from home and perhaps a greater appreciation of Key Workers.

In many ways, Covid-19 has forced us to re-shape the way we live our lives.

Being forced to re-shape the way we live is stressful and tiring, but positively it can help us to reflect on what shape of life is good or appropriate.

Was it necessary to spend so much time travelling for meetings, when they could have been done by Zoom?

Did I need to eat out as much, when I've been quite happy not doing that for the last three months?

Isn't it better that I now spend more time phoning family than I did before?

Covid-19 may have pushed us out of our comfort zone, into a kind of alien land. It may have made us feel like exiles in our own country (as we reflected last week), but perhaps God is using it to help us reflect more deeply on what shape our lifestyles take.

Scattered Refugees

Peter is writing to scattered refugees, small groups of Christians living out of their comfort zone in very unchristian cultures.

Last week we saw how he wanted to offer them words of comfort and encouragement by reminding them of the joyous living hope they have through Jesus.

Now he wants to start addressing how they should live as Christians in these very unChristian places. He will come on to some nitty gritty advice later in the letter, but in this section he wants to help them see the broad outline of what a life shaped by Christ looks like.

In doing so he doesn't move on from what God has done for them or their relationship with God. No throughout this section he uses three key aspects of God's grace as key forces to shape their lives:

Shaped by God's Grace - 1:13; 2:1-3

Future Hope - 1:13, 24-25

This is clear in verse 13, where Peter says, set your hope fully on the grace of God to be brought to you when Christ is revealed at his coming.

This is not a vague wishful thinking kind of hope. We saw last week that is a certain hope guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

As we face the struggles of living day to day as a Christian we need to do so with an eternal perspective.

In verses 24-25, Peter quotes from Isaiah 40, a prophecy that was written for Israelites in exile in Babylon. At the time it would have seemed to Israel, that Babylon was the future. Their power seemed unstoppable and Israel as a nation had been utterly crushed by them. Most conquered nations simply disappeared under their rule. But, Israel were different they were God's power.

And as Isaiah reminded them, people may come and go, even great powers may come and go, but God's word stands for ever.

600 years later, Peter is writing to Christians who probably felt that the power of pagan Rome was here to stay. Perhaps they were Jews kicked out of their homes in Rome and forced to live in these new colonies scattered around what is now Northern Turkey. Rome seemed to have all the power, Rome seemed here to stay in all its pomp and glory.

Yet, Peter says, people come and go, even Rome will come and go, just as Babylon did, but the word of God will last for ever.

2,000 years later, we live in a world that believes that God is an outdated idea disproved by science. Christianity in our culture at least seems on the wain, and the power of secularism seems unstoppable. But just like Babylon, and just like Rome, the culture of our day will pass, but God's word will last forever!

If we are to live as people shaped by God we need to remain focussed on the future.

Freed from sin - 1:14,18

In 1:14 Peter says, don't be conformed to the evil desires of the past and in 1:18 he reminds us that we were redeemed by Christ from the empty way of life handed down from our ancestors.

The Old Testament regularly talks about how Israel were redeemed by God from oppression. Isaiah promised Israel that they would be redeemed from their time in Babylon, but he was looking back to how God had redeemed Israel from their time as slaves in Egypt.

If you've been a slave and someone rescues you from your slavery, especially if they've paid a great price to do so, then the last thing you want to do is go back to your old ways.

When God sent Jesus to die on the cross he rescued us from a life of slavery to sin. Slavery to the corrupt and futile ways of a world that tries to live without God. The cost was immense.

The Son of God, who had existed from before the beginning of the world, became a sacrificial lamb without blemish, to die in our place for our sins.

If God has gone to such lengths to redeem us from our old life. Then surely our new life must be different to the old life. Being a Christian must re-shape the way we live. We have to flee all the old attitudes and behaviours that are out of step with God.

God that has to shape how we live now.

Fatherhood of God - 1:14, 17, 23

So, focussing on God's grace means being shaped by the fact that we have a future hope, and are freed from sin.

It also means being shaped by our new relationship with God.

In 1:14 we are called to be obedient children.

In 1:17 we are reminded that we call on God as our Father.

In 1:23 he reminds us that we have been born again.

Jesus has won for us a very special relationship with God. We are part of a new family and our relationship with him as our Father should shape our lives in all kinds of ways.

And in this section are three key commands drawing on the idea of the Fatherhood of God and the other aspects of God's grace that give us a **broad outline of the shape** our lives should take.

Be holy as God is holy

One well known phrase is 'like father like son'. Children tend to imitate their parents. Their lives are deeply shaped not so much by what the parents say to them, but by copying how they behave.

As Christians we are to see God as our Father and so we should become like him. As Peter says quoting from Leviticus: God says: "Be holy, because I am holy!"

To be holy is to be set apart, to be different to be distinct.

God is holy in that he is not influenced by the world. His character is not shaped by a desire to fit into the ways of any one culture. He is distinct, above and beyond the world, not just in power and awesomeness but in character.

We are to be like God in our character. In the way we live our lives, even though it means that we will stand out as different from the world around us and sometimes have to resist the pressure to conform to their ways and our old ways. To be holy means to live more like God, than like the world around.

- It may be worth asking yourself at this point if you consider yourself to be a Christian. In what ways is the shape of my life distinct from those around me? How do I live differently from most other people? Not just in religious activity, but in your normal day to day life. Give thanks to God for where you are living differently already and pray to God for those areas where maybe your life needs to be more distinct.

Live in fear of God as judge

In the Peter's world more than in our culture, children were expected to obey their fathers. The father in the household was in many ways the ultimate judge with power even of life and death over his own children.

Peter, however, says, that as Christians we need to remember who the ultimate judge is - it is our heavenly Father.

In one sense this is comforting, because we know that if God is our judge he is also the one who has sent Jesus to bear our punishment so we might be forgiven. But that is no excuse to live as though sin does not matter. It is even more reason to flee sin. If our sin cost that much to redeem shouldn't we be even more fearful of going against God?

Everyone's lives are shaped by what they fear. Those that fear being ridiculed for how they look, will go to great lengths to look good. Those that fear failure may work themselves silly to avoid missing the mark. Those who fear singleness will be desperate to find a partner to live with.

As Christians our ultimate fear must be God, because we know that he is the only judge that really matters. Such fear can release us from many other destructive fears to live the good and worthwhile lives God wants us to live.

It is also by having a right fear of God, that we will be able resist the forces of the world shaping our lives.

- As you think about the shape of your life, ask yourself are there things that you do because you are afraid of people or things other than God? If so consider again who is the ultimate judge.

Love as God loves

Finally, the Fatherhood of God should lead us to love other Christians. I grew up in a family of four children! Having a father meant that I had brothers and sisters.

As Christians we have one Father in heaven and we have millions of brothers and sisters, because we all share the same Father, we are all born of the same eternal seed - the word of God. It is natural therefore to love our brothers and sisters and so our lives should be shaped by a desire to love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Yet, we have also been born of this eternal seed, which is God's word and his word is the good news about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus's death is the supreme example of God's love. It is a sacrificial love given to those who do not deserve it. If this is the gospel that we have believed and found our living hope through, then surely we should love one another in that way: sacrificially and even when others do not deserve it!

- During lockdown we have not been able to meet with our Christian brothers and sisters as we would normally. For some that has led to deeper relationships as they have got to know others better through phone conversations. Others I guess have maybe become more isolated from their Christian brothers and sisters. How can you build up your love for other brothers and sisters in Christ through the coming months of the easing of lockdown?

Crave Christ

To be a Christian is to have a future hope, but it is also to be freed from sin and to have God as our Father, these are forces that if we let them should shape our lives, our attitudes and behaviours.

In particular we will want to live distinctive lives different to the world but like God. We will want to fear God more than anything in the world and we want to love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

All of this depends, though on keeping our focus on Christ.

Peter ends by saying be like newborn babies. Crave spiritual milk!!

What is the spiritual milk? In the next verse he quotes Psalm 34 and says if you have tasted and seen that God is good.

As Christians we know how great God is. Our response then should be to want more of God. To crave his gifts that will enable us to grow in our faith and have lives that are shaped in the way he wants.

Just as a baby has a single focus on drinking milk so it can grow up. So as Christians lets crave knowing more of God, that our lives might grow into the shape he wants for us.