

1 Peter 1:7 in the Navajo Bible

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Nihe'oodla' daats'í bee nihidahonídzilgo bééhodooziį́ł biniyé nanihídahonitaah. Óola éi doo hool'áágóó hólóq da, nidi nihe'oodla' hool'áágóó hóló. Jó, kọ' bee óola baąh **hadoolyí'ígíí** biláhídi át'éego nihe'oodla' nabóhonitaahgo ilíigo bééhodooziį́ł. Áko Jesus Christ yá'aashdę́é' yit'íní í'diilyaago nihe'oodla' baa hodoo'nih áádóó il'nilí doo, ında ayóó át'ėii bidi'níi doo. (1 Peter 1:7)¹

These have come so that your faith- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may be **proved** [*dokimazomenou*] genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:7)²

Introduction

In this verse the Navajo clause *kọ' bee óola baąh hadoolyí'ígíí* ("gold refined by fire") uses the same stem (*-yíí'*) for refining gold that the New Testament uses in other places for holiness. Instead of "refined by fire" one might perhaps say "purified by fire." Another passage that we could study with this one is Revelation 1:15.

hakee' éi déédíłjah góne' béesh łitsoii **nídoolyí'igo** ániidí ánályaago bízdílidígíí nahalin, áádóó tó t'óó ahayóí hadah yiilí nahalingo hwiinéé' diits'a'; (Revelation 1:15)

His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. (Revelation 1:15)

There are some extra words in the Navajo, but the idea is that the bronze has been newly purified. Could we say a word more about this term "purified"? In English, "pure," "purity," "purify," "purified," and so on, all come from an earlier word for "fire." So holiness has to do with purity, and ultimately with burning. When something is holy we can also say it is "sacred." The main difference between these last two words is that "holy" is Germanic, while "sacred" comes to us from Latin. But what exactly is "purity"? What does it mean for something to be "sacred"? What is "holiness"?

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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The Meaning of Holiness

Holiness has to do with the idea of ownership. We are holy to God because He claims us as His own. Indeed, the relationship we have with God through Christ provides the only context in which the word "holiness" makes sense.

There is a most unusual illustration of this idea. I hesitate to use it, but it really is a good illustration. I once heard some men talking on the radio about race cars. One of the drivers was saying that women were taking an interest in the sport and were starting to drive. He then made the following remark: "Pretty soon we'll need to have 'his' and 'hers' restrooms in the shop area. Isn't anything sacred anymore?"

A restroom in the shop where people fix race cars? Sacred? This seems bizarre, but it's an entirely reasonable use of the term. What the man was saying is, "Doesn't anything pertain just to us anymore? This place used to be exclusively ours, and now it belongs to everyone." So there's the idea of ownership. But Peter is saying that holiness has to do with the idea of refining or purifying something. Is there a contradiction here?

There is no contradiction, because the refining process forces us to sort out what's important and who we really belong to. Do we belong to God quite a bit and to our worldly friends some too? Where do we belong? Whose are we? When hardship comes, we're forced to make choices. Thus, hardship, or refining, or purifying help us straighten out exactly what God means to us. They brush away (or burn away) everything in our lives that would keep us from belonging completely to Him.

It is important to get this right, because "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). If we belong to God some and to the world a little bit, to our habits as well, we are not holy. When our relationship with Jesus is complete and unshakable, that's holiness. He is holy in and of Himself. We only become holy when, and to the degree that, we tap into His holiness – something we can't do if we have no relationship with Him.

The Meaning of Perseverance

In this context, what shall we say about the popular theological idea that if we give up on Jesus we will still be saved, but just won't receive as good a reward? Where does that concept fit in Hebrews 12:14, or in 1 Peter 1:7? Well, it doesn't. Not for a moment. Our link to Jesus is our link to life. He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). If we had Him at one time and then lose interest, and think we're still saved, we're fooling ourselves.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11-12)

This is not about legal pronouncements. It's not that we come to Christ and God decrees our salvation and ever after that, no matter what our relationship with Jesus might be, we still have life, i.e., eternal life. That's not how John says it. What he says is, "He who has the Son has life" (vs. 12). The question is not, Are you saved? The question is, Do you have the Son?

There's a difference between "had" and "have" that we need to surround. You had a silver dollar, but someone took it. Do you still have it? No. It's gone now. It's possible to lose things you have. Looking at it another way, how could you lose something without having it? The idea of having and losing things brings us back to our starting point. We must have Jesus. He must have us. If we have Him, we have life. If we don't have Him, we don't have life. So the bottom line is, Come to Jesus and stay there. If being saved involves coming to Christ, staying saved involves remaining in Christ. He doesn't say, I give life – and then it's always yours after that. He says, I am life.

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)

Someone will say, This only has to do with bearing fruit, not with being saved. If I don't bear fruit, I'll just get a different reward. So that's OK. Is it? Read the next verse.

"If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." (John 15:6)

The issues we're dealing with are serious business. They are not to be taken lightly. I'm going to press the matter still further. If someone says, Christ's claim is authoritative, so when He says I'm His, I am, regardless what I might think or say about it. He's not asking me. He's merely carrying out His own will. Is this true? What does John say in the passage at the head of this section?

Actually, let's start with what he doesn't say. One thing he doesn't say is, He whom *the Son has*, has life. Instead it's, "*He who has the Son* has life" (1 John 5:12). The question is, who has whom? Is it enough for Jesus to have us? Not according to John. What he's saying in vs. 12 is that we also must have Jesus.

A second thing John doesn't say is, He who has had the Son has life. The quotation is, "He who *has* the Son has life" (1 John 5:12).

A third thing John doesn't say is, He who has the rules has life, or, He who has the behavior has life, or whatever else people like to recoil from theologically. We're not talking about works or anything else of human devising. Instead we're talking about Jesus – the Source and Object of all true Christian faith. Or has faith itself become a form of human endeavor? I hope it hasn't, because this is our link to Jesus. The bottom line is that we must acknowledge Him, place our confidence in Him, remain in Him for the long haul. Anything short of this could cost us our salvation, despite anything you might have heard people say to the contrary. This is not some strange new doctrine I'm outlining. Strange doctrine is when people tell you that as soon as Jesus saves you, you don't need Him anymore. That kind of teaching is very strange indeed. There's nothing biblical about it.

People don't like to state the matter as baldly as I have above, but when pressed to the wall, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, as popularly taught today, would have to go precisely this far. Once you're saved, that's the end of the story. It does not matter – at all – how you live or what relationship you have with Christ after that point. If that's the claim, I have a severe problem with it.

Conclusion

We started out talking about holiness, not perseverance. Holiness does not pertain to individuals. It's not something we have within ourselves, nor is it something that anyone has ever had within himself. Holiness pertains to people only as people pertain to Christ. If we gain Christ, we gain holiness. If we lose Christ, we lose holiness. If we lose Him, we also lose salvation. It is His ownership – His claim upon us and ours upon Him – that constitutes holiness and that confers life. Our holiness is in the relationship we have with Jesus. We are "holy" only as we remain in Him, i.e., when we belong to Him completely and continue to do so to the end.