

Our Call: Holy Living

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. This is a reading from the first letter of Peter.

1 Peter 1.1 and 1.13-2.3 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. For it is written, be holy because I am holy. Since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

[1 : 22] For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you are redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him.

And so your faith and hope are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

[2 : 30] Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. This is the word of the Lord.

Good morning, Christ Church. Honestly, I don't know what I'm doing up here after Lindsay. I think we could just be done. Good job.

Thank you. We are in this letter of 1 Peter, and if you've been here the past few weeks, you know that it opens with this glorious doxology.

Peter's just praising God for the mercy that he's had on us in Jesus Christ. And really at this point, having celebrated the wonders of God's salvation by grace in Jesus, Peter now turns his attention, and he turns our attention, to describing the appropriate response in the lives of those who received God's grace.

He's describing what it means to live consistently with who we've been made in Jesus Christ. And so I want to focus your attention today on an unpopular topic.

[3 : 48] We're going to talk today about a topic that very few Christians and churches tend to spend much time focusing on, and that is the topic of holiness. Personal, individual holiness, collective, communal holiness.

Peter quotes this Old Testament book of Leviticus when he says, Be holy. The Lord is saying there, Be holy because I am holy.

What in the world does that mean? Well, that's what we're going to explore, and because I have a lot to say, we're just going to dive right in. Here's the thread I want to follow, is that the gospel creates holy lives, revering our God and craving His grace.

That's what the gospel creates. The gospel creates holy lives of revering our God and craving His grace. So first of all, the gospel creates holy lives.

Just follow with me in verse 13. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at His coming.

[5 : 05] As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. Peter's saying that if you're confident in Jesus' return, when He comes again in glory, and if you're confident in the hope that there and then, you're going to experience the fullness of God's grace that you already have here and now, then here are all the implications of God's grace for your life.

And he describes in verse 14, he says that when you were ignorant of the reality of Jesus Christ, before you came to know Christ, you were full of all these evil desires, full of all these self-centered desires that were in fact driving your life.

But now, he says, this God of grace is coming in and He's given you a new birth into a living hope. We talked about that in chapter 1, verse 3. He's brought you into this new reality.

He's made you a new creation. He's given you a new life in Jesus Christ. So, Peter says, you've got to abandon your conformity to all of those old self-centered desires.

And now, because of this new life, you've got to give yourself to that new life in conformity to the grace of God. Now, what does that mean? Well, Peter says in verse 14, it means this, be obedient children.

[6 : 32] Live as obedient children of your Father. If God has given you this new birth, if you've been born again through the imperishable seed of the gospel, as it says in verse 23, if you've been brought into this new relationship as a child of God the Father, then Peter says, the only proper thing to do is to obey your Father who's newly begotten you.

And what does it mean to obey our good and gracious Father? Well, to obey means this, like Father, like Son. Like Father, like Daughter.

That the character of the children is to reflect the character of their Father. And what is the Father like? Well, when Jesus prays in John 17, that great high priestly prayer, He calls God, He says, Holy Father.

That's how Jesus prays. Holy Father. And that's what Peter's picking up on here in verse 15. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

For it is written, be holy because I am holy. The Holy Father who called you and me to Himself, He is the pattern to which our character is to conform.

[7 : 56] Now, what does it mean when God says, I am holy? What does that mean when He says, I am holy? Well, the word holy means set apart. So God is saying there, I am separate.

I am distinct. I am different. I'm in a category of my own in terms of moral beauty and excellence of character. And just to try to illustrate this, when you go to the center point and the high point of the Torah, which is the first five books of the Bible, basic Bible, you find there this amazing moment where the people of God, they've just made the golden calf.

And Moses, the leader of the people of God, he's interceding for God to forgive them. And he says to them, to God, in his intercession to God, he says, God, show me your glory.

And God says, well, that's great, Moses, but you can't handle my glory. And so he says, I will hide you in this rock and I'll cover you with my hand and I will show you the backside of my glory.

I'll show you the afterglow of my goodness and my glory. And here's what happens in Exodus 34. This is what Moses hears. He hears, I am the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

[9 : 28] Yet I do not leave the guilty unpunished, but I punish the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generations, which means I'm just and I'm righteous and I'm holy.

Now there's a reason that that is the most quoted verse in the whole Bible. It's repeated over and over in the Old Testament because it definitively reveals our Father's moral beauty and his excellence of character.

It reveals his holiness. This is the God, the Holy One of Israel who dwells in the midst of his people. And so why does Peter now quote Leviticus 19 here in this passage, be holy because I am holy?

What does that mean? Well, God is saying to us, you are my people. You have been set apart by me and for me. You belong to me.

And so because of that, you've got to live no longer for yourselves, no longer for your desires, but you're to live for me and for my desires.

[10 : 39] And this is what Exodus 34, Leviticus 19, the whole of the Torah is really all about. It's to direct Israel in a way of life that's completely other than the way that all the people around them are living.

The people in whose midst they dwell, Israel, the people of God, are to have a decisively alternative way of life that's set apart from all of those other cultures.

And so when God says, be holy because I'm holy, he's saying, just as Abraham and his family were set apart from all the cultures of Mesopotamia and just as Moses and Israel were set apart from the culture of Egypt and the culture of Canaan, just as Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel and that whole generation were set apart from the culture of Babylon, I am telling you, Christian exile scattered throughout these five provinces of central and northern Turkey that you are to be set apart.

You're to be set apart from the culture of the Greco-Roman Empire. That it's within this cultural environment that is ignorant of the reality of Jesus Christ, this cultural environment that's full of evil and self-centered desires.

This is the place where you are to be holy because I am holy. The Lord says to his church, I've set you apart from this culture for lives that conform to my moral beauty and my excellence of character.

[12 : 16] Now what might it mean to live this set apart, distinctive, holy life in a practical way? Well, I want you to think about these Christian exiles that Peter's writing to.

Think about all the people in central and northern Turkey in the Greco-Roman Empire there and think about what people there believed. Think about how people there were living with respect to the gods of the empire.

People all around the church were saying, okay, mammon, mammon, the money god, is divine. And mammon rules our pockets so that making a profit trumps everything else that we could possibly value or be about.

And then they said, not only mammon, but Aphrodite. Aphrodite, the goddess of sex and love, she is divine. divine. And she rules our loins.

And so any hint that we should resist her just feels like it infringes upon our rights. Why would we ever say no to our appetites and to getting more pleasure for ourselves?

[13 : 26] And the people said, not only mammon and Aphrodite are divine, but they also said Mars. Mars, the god of power, the god of war, is divine. And he rules our relationships. And so the way we engage our lives, the way we go about our relationships is through merciless competition and conflict.

And ruling over all these cultural gods of mammon and Aphrodite and Mars was Caesar, who they also thought was divine. And they said, you know, in his empire, money, sex, and power just reign unchecked and unchallenged.

And so when Leviticus 19, be holy because I am holy, is spoken to these Christian exiles, what in the world does that mean in this cultural environment?

Well, these Christian exiles whom God had set apart, they refused to give allegiance to all these prevailing gods. They said, we refuse to be conformed to all the desires and all the customs and all the practices that are accepted as normal by our society.

And they were holding fast to their risen and exalted Lord Jesus, at whose name they believed every knee would bow, including the knee of Aphrodite and Mammon and Mars and Caesar and all the other gods.

[14 : 52] These Christian exiles had embraced a holy way of life that made them instantly suspect by the people around them because they were living by different beliefs, different values, different priorities that were at odds with their cultural surroundings.

And that's why, as it says in verse 6 of chapter 1, they're suffering grief in all kinds of trials. It's why it says in verse 7 that they were going through a fiery furnace that was testing their faith because our Holy Father had called them and our Holy Father calls us to this set-apart, distinctive, alternative, non-conformist, counter-cultural way of life, which is a life as obedient children who are becoming more and more like our Holy Father.

You with me so far? Trying to give you some practical examples of holiness. holiness. If we are bending our knees to mammon and money as God, if we're bending our knees to Aphrodite and sex as God, if we're bending our knees to Mars and power as God, if we're bending our knees to Caesar and politics as God, if we're bending our knees to anything other than the true and living God, then we're not being holy as the one who called us is holy.

None of these many gods, none of these deified ultimates of our culture have any claims on the life of the people of God. We have one Lord and we've been set apart by Him and for Him and He's separated us out to this different and distinctive life so that we, as I said before, we're no longer living for ourselves and for our desires.

We're living for Him and for His desires. The Christian life, if it's about anything, it's about deliverance from sin. Jesus died for our sins so that sin might be overcome, it might be resisted, it might be nullified as an influence in our lives.

[17 : 05] And the Christian life means orienting our entire lives around this Holy Father and allowing the beauty of His image and the excellence of His likeness to be reflected by us and through us into the world so that when people are looking at the character of the church, when people are looking at the character of our lives, what are they seeing?

They're seeing the character of our glorious God. So I have to leave this point because I have other things to say, but I'm going to leave you with, first of all, with a quote and that is from G.K. Chesterton and he said, the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried.

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it's been found difficult and left untried. And this apostle of Jesus, Peter, is saying, go ahead, try it, try to be holy.

But don't try it without this prayer and it's a prayer that I've given you before from Robert Murray McShane and it goes like this, Lord, make me as holy as it's possible for a saved sinner to be.

Lord, make me as holy as it's possible for a saved sinner to be. And if you want to follow up on this, I encourage you to go home this afternoon and Google the word holiness and then you can Google the name J.I. Packer and then you can watch the first video that pops up for you there and that'll be helpful, I think, in terms of applying the meaning of this text.

[18 : 52] But the gospel creates holy lives. It creates a holy people. And one of the ways that that holiness gets expressed is through reverence.

The gospel creates holy lives of reverence, of revering our God. And so Peter continues on in verse 17. He says, since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

Again, that word foreigners, he says, you're exiles, you're following the way of Jesus and that means that you're a counterculture within the dominant culture.

And he says, as exiles, I want you to live out your time, I want you to conduct yourselves in reverent fear, reverent awe. And he contrasts this in verse 18 with what he calls an empty or a futile way of life handed down from our fathers.

What Peter's saying is that your holy and gracious Father who's caused you to be born again by this imperishable seed of the gospel, verse 23, your Father in heaven has handed down to you a very different way of life than the empty and futile way of life that you receive from your fathers.

[20 : 14] It's a new life. It's a new way of life that's marked by reverent fear and reverent awe. And Peter's point is that to live or to conduct ourselves in any other way without this reverence, without this awe of our holy Father is to cheapen his grace.

To continue to live in any of the empty or useless ways of idolatry and immorality that were handed down to us and that's being practiced all around us, Peter says that's to implicitly deny the value of what our Father has done for us.

And here's what he says in verse 18, he says, for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors but with the precious blood of Christ a lamb without blemish or defect.

See, in the first century everybody who heard that word redeemed, they would have had a very specific image come to their mind. If you were a Greco-Roman pagan you would have this image of slaves or prisoners of war who in order to be freed had to have a ransom price paid for their redemption.

Or if you were Jewish and you heard this word redeemed you would think about your people's bondage and slavery in Egypt and how the Lord God himself had to move heaven and earth to deliver his people and Peter's saying I want you to think about what God the Father was willing to do when you were slaves in sin.

[21 : 55] When you were in bondage to death when you were prisoners of dark spiritual powers what was the price that God was willing to pay for your freedom?

Did the Father give something perishable to get you out of that old empty useless way of life? Did he give a large sum of silver and gold for your freedom?

Did he pay a price of relative value for your redemption? Peter's talking about money because he wants us to see that none of us if we even wanted to could redeem ourselves.

I mean at our best if we tried to redeem ourselves all that we could offer is just perishable things like gold and silver. silver. Right?

And how much of that do we even really have? You know if we took all of our bank accounts and mutual funds and 401ks and we pulled all that together this morning could we redeem one eternal soul?

[23 : 00] No. Peter's saying look your money is useless in this realm of redemption. It's not enough to ransom a single soul. what had to be given was not silver and gold what had to be given was a life.

What had to be given to liberate us from our captivity to sin and death and the devil was a life. And here's the most wonderful thing that the world has ever heard is that God gave that life.

God gave that life that was most precious and most infinitely valuable. God our Father our gracious Father gave his only son Jesus. And God the son gave the highest and the best that he could give.

He says in Mark chapter 10 verse 45 I've not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.

He laid down his life for us. He paid the ultimate price to redeem us. And again in verse 19 Peter says it's with the precious blood of Christ the lamb without blemish or defect that you were redeemed.

[24 : 14] He's saying here think about all those sacrificial lambs in the temple of God. Think about how they're offered on behalf of sinners every morning and every night day by day week by week slaughtered in the place of sinners as a substitute to atone for their evil and self-centered desires.

Peter says that's what Jesus came to be for you. That's what the eternal Son of God is for you. All of our sins have been laid upon this pure and perfect one Jesus who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And Peter is telling us that you can't measure the value of this. It's beyond silver and gold. It's beyond the highest standards known to human beings.

Think about what it took for you to be redeemed, for you to be ransomed and set free, Peter says. It was the precious blood of Jesus.

That's the measure of the love that God the Father has for you. And here's his point. To live in a way and to conduct yourself in a way that's inconsistent with the gravity of this cosmic reality of the ransom price that God paid for your redemption is to presume upon God's grace, is to cheapen his grace, is to deny the value of what your gracious Father has done for you.

[25 : 54] If your new life was secured by nothing less than the precious blood of Jesus, which is of infinitely greater value than anything that can be secured with silver or gold, then each and every one of us is called to recognize the value of our new status by living our lives, conducting ourselves with what Peter calls reverent fear, reverent awe.

The Apostle Paul is making a similar point in 1 Corinthians 6 when he says you are not your own, you were bought at a price, therefore honor God with your bodies.

What these apostles are saying is how could we live carelessly? How could we live self-indulgently? How could we give free reign to our self-centered desires?

How could we allow money or sex or power or any of the other gods that are out there to rule over us as if we were our own, as if we did belong to ourselves, as if we had not been bought with this great price, as if we were not in fact accountable to our Father who Peter says is going to judge all of our works impartially?

See, becoming obedient children of our Holy Father means that we leave behind the empty way of life that was handed down to us from our unholy fathers.

[27 : 34] And having Jesus as our Redeemer means living in ways that are appropriate to the precious and measureless price of our redemption. We've seen that great hymn, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

It's the degree to which you see how Jesus gave himself for you, and that is the degree to which you will be willing to give yourself for him.

The degree to which you value the price that he paid for you is the degree to which you will live as if no price is too high, no cost is too great to honor him.

reverent fear, reverent awe. Peter's asking us, is that the attitude, is that the posture that we have before our God?

Is that the way that we're living our lives and conducting ourselves? The gospel creates holy lives of revering our God and craving his grace.

[28 : 47] And I just want to close briefly with this. The gospel creates holy lives of revering our God and craving his grace. There's so much in this passage and a lot to leave on the table.

But I do want to close with Peter's final imperative to these Christian exiles. He says in chapter 2, verse 2, like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation now that you've tasted that the Lord is good.

Now this is a lovely text because we have so many newborns in this church. And so we don't have to look very far to think about what this means.

to think about the single-mindedness with which those newborns yearn for the milk that alone will nourish them. That milk is the very sustenance of their lives.

And as some of you parents know painfully well, any delay at feeding time creates this powerful reaction from this tiny little person. For the infant, milk is not a fringe benefit.

[30 : 04] It's not just like a nice to have. It's a need to have. And Peter is urging these Christian exiles, he's urging the church to have an infant's desperate desire for their appropriate nourishment.

And he's saying as babies crave milk, so you must crave the goodness and the grace of God that alone will sustain the vitality of the new life you've been given in Jesus Christ.

God is going to do it. And so Peter's saying you've got to put off. You've got to put behind you, you've got to abandon all of those old desires, all of those old cravings of your former life.

And because of this new life you need to begin instinctively desiring new things, eagerly and incessantly craving God and the grace of God.

God, like a sensible baby, do not be satisfied with anything less than this. Cry out for it and if you don't get it, cry more.

[31 : 14] Let your desire for God, let your desire for the grace of the gospel, Peter says, to be as fervent and as constant and as unrelenting and as tenacious as a hungry newborn.

If you make God's regenerative word and His satisfying grace and His life-giving presence your desperate desire, then this is the spiritual nourishment that will enable us to grow up in the salvation that we've been given.

This is the thing that will enable us and nourish us and strengthen us to be able to be the obedient children God's calling us to be, to be the holy children God's calling us to be, to be the reverent children our Holy Father has made us and called us to be.

So as we prepare to come to this table of grace, my question for us is, how hungry are you? How thirsty are you for our holy God?

What are you desiring? What are you craving? It is your deepest desire to know more and more of the goodness and the grace of the God, the holy God who's called us to be holy as He's holy.

[32 : 49] In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen. Amen. Amen.