

Christian Holiness

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[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So today, in today's passage from 1 Peter, we hear the call to be holy. God is holy. What does that mean and how do we do that?

I think when we're thinking on the topic of holiness, it might actually be easiest to begin with what we don't mean by holiness.

First, holiness is not the haunt and fear that someone somewhere might be enjoying themselves.

There's this tendency to think that Christian holiness largely has something to do with misery.

That holiness consists primarily of dreariness and drudgery. To be holy, then, of course, means that we never do anything fun.

[1:35] It's all about the things we aren't supposed to do. Now, this approach would focus on a long list of rules that we have to keep, things we have to avoid, all the fun stuff, of course, and would focus on properly beating ourselves up when we fall short.

Now, this approach to what holiness means is steeped in legalism. If we do that, we're establishing a righteousness of our own according to a law of our own making.

Now, as you probably know by now, I grew up in the Bible Belt, where a lot of churches and groups, fairly commonly, get caught up in this kind of thinking.

Holiness means that we don't do things like dancing or going to movies or watching TV. Now, there's a joke that in those circles, they believe that fornication should be avoided because it might lead to dancing.

There is some truth in that description.

[2:49] When you take a primarily rules-based approach to holiness, you end up with, at the very least, misplaced priorities, or you might end up denying the gospel itself.

Another related misunderstanding of what holiness means. Being as visibly righteous as you can while making sure that everyone else knows about it.

The holy person is the smug, self-righteous jerk. Who wants to be that guy, really? Remember my dad once describing the church that he grew up in, and he said that they were always trying to out-holy each other.

He described the attitude of Son in something like this. Well, I had to drag myself to church on my hands and knees in both directions, and you let your children watch color television.

That attitude can't be what the scriptures mean when they're talking positively about holiness.

Taking pride in our accomplishments, and of course making sure that everyone else knows about it, when we're supposed to be modeling and treasuring humility.

[4:05] It just doesn't work, does it? So what is holiness? Holiness is about being set apart.

Not through how awesome we are, but through how awesome God is. Holiness, in other words, is about being sanctified, about being changed, through the very power of God.

The Anglican bishop and theologian J.C. Ryle gave what I think is one of the best descriptions of holiness that I've ever heard. He put it like this, Holiness is the habit of being one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture.

It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word.

loving what is good, loving what is good, being one mind with God, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, which of course is sin, and living according to that love.

[5:22] And measuring absolutely everything in this world, in our hearts, and in our lives, by the standard of Holy Scripture. loving what is good, hating what is evil, living what we love, that is holiness.

Mother Teresa put it another way. She said, Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things. It consists in accepting with a smile what Jesus sends us.

It consists in accepting and following the will of God. On the same topic, she also said, Holiness is nothing other than Jesus who lives in you.

So that's what holiness is. But how do we get there? How do we actually be holy? Again, it might be better to start with how not to approach it.

So we've already seen we won't get there by merely following rigidly a bunch of rules of our own making. That doesn't always stop us from trying.

[6 : 36] Here's the problem with that approach. It doesn't go deep enough. If holiness is found in loving what God loves, as revealed in His Holy Word, then mere rules aren't going to cut it.

rules can't change our hearts from the inside out. Never met anyone who is so passionately in love with rules that it changed what he loves, what he desires, and how he lives.

But that's not all. Even if we're striving after loving what God loves, in other words, we're actually trying to keep the main thing the main thing, we have to be clear about something.

We cannot make it on our own effort. We can't pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Let's face it, the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the seductive and cunning grip of sin are stronger than we are.

If we could have overcome the power of sin through our own effort, we would not have needed the perfect, righteous Son of God to shed His blood for us.

[7 : 58] The power to grow in holiness in our hearts and in our lives to see increasing victory over sin must come from God Himself who can and does change our hearts from the inside out to love what He loves through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If we are to grow in holiness, we must ask the Holy Spirit to change our hearts, to change our affections, to make us love what we should.

So it isn't grim duty that drives Christian holiness. It isn't self-righteousness. It isn't even trying our very best. It is a heart that has been transformed by the gospel and set on fire with love by the Holy Spirit.

I think that's what Anglican writer J.I. Packer was getting at when he wrote, There is no holiness without a Christ-centered, Christ-seeking, Christ-serving, Christ-adoring heart.

In this, I think he was echoing the great theologian and evangelist Jonathan Edwards, who said, That which men love, they desire to have and to be united to and possessed of.

[9 : 23] That beauty which men delight in, they desire to be adorned with. Those acts which men delight in, they necessarily incline to do.

Holiness, properly understood, isn't about drudgery. It is about desire. It isn't about mere duty. It is about delight. The way of holiness is the way of joy for the Christian. It's the way of love. It is the way of ever-greater reunion with our beloved Lord Jesus Christ through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, usually, I would not have taken so long to jump directly into the text for today. But this morning is an exception because holiness is something that is so often and so easily misunderstood.

And this morning's verses, I think, require us to have a right understanding of holiness, to have a right understanding of what's going on in our passage. So with that disclaimer, let's look at it.

[10 : 38] Starting in verse 13. preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And we're instructed here to prepare our minds for action and set our hope fully on the grace of God and what He has prepared for us.

Now, some translations render the bit about preparing your minds as girding up your loins. That's not really a phrase that we use in contemporary English.

unless we're familiar with the phrase and what it means, girding up your loins sounds like something vaguely painful. But, in the days of biblical dress, it's what you would do to your garment to repair for battle or for hard work.

So we're to prepare for battle, to repair for hard work, because the way of obedience and the way of holiness is not for the faint of heart. Yet we set our hope fully on God's grace in Jesus Christ and confidence.

[11 : 57] Knowing that grace has brought us up to this point, that grace will lead us on and grace will be there to greet us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. We then go on into more specific instructions starting in verse 14.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also shall be holy in all your conduct.

Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And I think we could sum up what we see here pretty simply.

Don't live the way that you used to live before you knew the Lord. when you were a pagan. Instead, be holy as He is holy.

Thinking back on our working definition of holiness is loving what God loves. You can see here what Peter is getting at. He's telling us, you know, by your sinful nature, you used to hate the things that God loves.

[13:05] And you used to love sin, which God hates. But now, you have been claimed by the Holy One. So you are to be holy.

Loving what He loves and hating sin. Don't be what you were before. You're different now.

It's the same reminder that we see from Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 9, where he writes, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

[14:11] We're reminded, we are not what we were before. We've been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

We've been sanctified. We've been justified. Our sins have been forgiven. We have the certain hope of eternal life. And now we're called not to live the way we used to live, but to be holy as the one who called us as holy.

So Peter goes on to expand on that, starting in verse 17. And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Verse 17 here might throw us through something of a loop because it talks about conducting ourselves with fear if we're calling on God as father.

How do we reconcile that with the truth that we can come boldly before the throne of the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ? We need to remember that fear is often used in Scripture not to talk about absolute terror, but about respect and reverence for who God is for His holiness.

[15:51] holiness. We are to remember the holiness of the Father we call upon who calls us to be holy as He is holy. To remember that we are now exiles in this world, living not as the unbelieving world lives, living not according to the futile ways that we had inherited before we knew the Lord.

To remember that we were bought with something far more precious than silver and gold. bought with the precious blood of the perfect, righteous, sinless, spotless Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, bought with His blood.

Verse 20. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you, who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, think about the respect, the reverence, the love, the awe we should show to our holy God and Father who before we were ever born knew that He would send His only Son to die for us, to rise again for us, to bring us home, to cause us to be born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that is imperishable.

If that is not motivation to be holy as God is holy, to love what He loves, then I don't know what is.

[17:40] So with souls purified through obedience to the truth, that is found only in Jesus Christ, we love what God loves, which means, of course, that we love each other.

Verses 22 and 23, having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God.

We have, Peter tells us here, purified souls and pure hearts. How and why? Because we have been born again, not born of seed that will perish like we were the first time around, but by seed that will

But it is nothing short of the living and abiding word of God, which will stand forever. The living and abiding word of God and that alone can change our hearts, can purify our hearts, bestow on us the gift of eternal life.

[19:13] The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this is the word, is the good news that was preached to you.

Which has called us out of darkness into light, has brought us from impurity into purity, has brought us from death to light, and has set us free from the guilt and power of our sins.

So how do we do that? How do we strive to be holy as He is holy? Certainly, through a heart that has been changed by the gospel, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, through being set on fire with love for what God loves.

It has well been said, no man can expect to make progress in holiness who is not often and long alone with God. To put it simply, we will grow in holiness, grow in grace, become holy as He is holy by spending time with Him.

Those are the ordinary ways we spend time with God, ways God uses to cause us to grow in grace. Murray points us to one of them, prayer, long and often, as he puts it. We also include the word of God, preached, taught, personally studied, as well as the sacraments, which we gather to celebrate and worship week after week.

[22:27] Here's the thing, if you're anything like me this morning, you'll have to admit, you have not been holy as He is holy.

Then, cry out to God to give us hearts that burn with love for Him and for what He loves, to cry out to Him to make us holy as He is holy.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank
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