

Holiness: *The Underrated Quality*

February 27 & 28, 2010 o 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Intro:

Christians can be pretty weird. Your friends probably think so, and they have some reason for holding this view. Throughout history some notable characters have sought holiness through curious means. For many years, *asceticism* was seen as the path to godliness, that is, people punished and deprived themselves to achieve God's approval. One guy *ate only bread and water and never bathed or changed his clothes until he died at 105!* I'm not sure if God was close to him, but *no one else wanted to get close to him.* Some people became hermits, thinking isolation was the key to holiness. They hid in caves or cells. I guess they used to think that *living in a hole made you holier.* Simeon Stylites (*Sty-lite-tees*) lived on top of a pillar for 39 years. Though people have turned to extremes like these, the Bible does not advocate this kind of thing. Col 2:23 - *such practices with their false humility and harsh treatment of the body lack any value.*

Still, Christians have not stopped acting strange. A friend of mine was approached by a guy in a suit who held his lapels and said, *"This is holiness."* Then he touched my friend's sweatshirt and said, *"This is not holiness."*

When you hear *how people view holiness* and *how they've tried to achieve it*, it's easy to be confused and say, *I don't know what holiness is, but it's not for me.* But maybe we *should* know what holiness is because maybe *it is* for us. After all, in the passage we're studying today, we read that God says, **"be holy because I am holy"** (16). We'll cover **1:13-2:3**.

We just started this series last week. The opening verses tell us that Peter, one of Christ's disciples, wrote this letter to people who were living as strangers in a world that was not their home. This fits what the rest of the Bible teaches about Christians, that we are citizens of heaven and only temporarily here - but here with a purpose. Last week's passage emphasized that Christians are saved,

headed for heaven. That leads me say, *So, our future is secure, okay, but how are we to live in the present while we're here?* The answer in these verses we'll study today is that *we are to be holy.*

In this series I'm printing a section of 1 Peter on my outline sheet each week. I want you to follow along and jot down observations. Like I said last week, it will be like taking a walk, enjoying all you see, but stopping to pay particularly close attention to certain points. *Let's get going:*

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. *In light of the future God has in store for you, you've got to think clearly during your time on earth. You've got to focus.* It's wonderful to consider what we have reserved in heaven for us, but now Peter's talking about how we live right here in the meantime. Notice he mentions *action*. *Don't sit around doing nothing waiting for the end of the age. Stay active.* In a sense, Christians are activists. We're not to be so isolated that we aren't of any worldly good. But neither should we be worldly, or we won't be of any heavenly use. This leads Peter to elaborate on the idea of self-control: **14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.** He's just said we need to *prepare our minds*. Now he links ignorance and indulgence. When our minds are in the wrong place and we are operating without a full deck, then we'll just go along with any whim - driven by desires. That is not to be our way. *Remember who you are! God's children! So don't act like you don't bear his name and know his will.* The point is: **oLiving God's way requires getting your head on straight.** Holiness requires a disciplined mind. A mind that is ready for action will be self-controlled and rooted in the reality of what is and what will be. Think: *you are God's children; headed for heaven, so don't live like hell down here.*

We don't have to live as we did before we knew the truth, going along with every temptation. Instead of being conformed, we can be transformed! Rom 12:2. How important is your mind? Rom. 8:6,7 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. R.

We need to be ready, informed, equipped. *There's more power in right thinking than in any list of rules.*

How can you keep a dog in your yard? You have two choices. You either put up a fence or you train the dog not to wander. Wouldn't it be better if the dog *knew* to stay home, not to leave? *The same is true concerning our thoughts.* You can't build a fence so secure that you will be able to rely on it. You'll jump over or dig under it. A set of even very strong rules won't keep you safe. The alternative is to discipline your mind to stay at home. That's part of what the Bible means when it refers to holiness. *Prepare your minds, be self-controlled; set your hope on higher things than the stuff you used to do when you didn't have your head on straight. You're God's children; act like it.*

T - Now he takes this to the extreme. Look what he says: **15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do...** To be holy is to be different. Not being odd for the sake of being odd, but being pure, set apart for God.

When you read this verse, certain questions come to your mind: *To what extent are we to be holy?* The answer is right there: We are to be holy *to the extent* that God is holy! *How holy is he?* He is thrice holy (Is 6:3; Rev 4:8). *In what areas of our lives does this apply?* In all you do! Think of the different facets of your life: *your business, your body, the thoughts in your head, the attitudes of your heart;* you name it! Col 3:17 whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. We're to yield it all. Holiness is total dedication to God. *Here's a test for you, say: "I'd like to dedicate the follow thought or act to my Lord, Jesus."*

T - Another question may come to your mind: *Why? Why should we live holy lives?* God doesn't only provide the standard to live by, he provides the reason for holy living: **16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."** Lev 11:44. The command to be holy is based on God's character. God calls us to be holy because that is what he is like.

oLiving God's way means you become more like him. We're to follow God's lead, emulate his example. As his children we are to grow up to be like him - to take on his likeness, to manifest his image. Not that we do yet. I'm not sure many Christians make being godly a goal in life.

Look again at our title for today: **Holiness: The Underrated Quality.** We don't take holiness seriously. We think of it as an *optional quality*, not an *essential aspect* of our spiritual life. Actually, *we don't think of holiness much at all.*

If we do happen to think of holiness, we think of it as extra, a characteristic of the select few. *What we don't acknowledge* is that God calls *all his children* to holiness. This amounts to *being like him, being godly* - Christian in *character* and Christlike in *function* as well. In John 8:12, Jesus said - I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Then in Matt 5:14-16 he says this about his followers: You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. *Living God's way means you become more like him.* Jesus serves as the light as the world, and he's sent us to shine in the same way. God hasn't called us to blend into the background, but to be like Christ. Rom 8:29 (Rooted) - the purpose: that we're conformed to the likeness of Christ. 2 Cor 3:18 - transformed into his likeness. We are to be like him, not to

be just like the world in which we live. There is huge pressure to fit in, but we are to stand out. It's crucial we don't compromise. We must be distinct. People are looking for authentic supernatural living but finding hypocrisy in the church. If we are not *living God's way, becoming more like Christ*, then we'll have nothing to offer!

Next, Peter provides us with a reminder that the stakes are high. **17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 18 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 forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.**

Live with reverence for God, for he brought you into his family and you will be held accountable to him.

The use of the word *redeemed* reminds us that we were slaves to sin, unable to break our bondage, but Jesus laid down his life to set us free. For us he was beaten, mocked, tortured and executed. In agony he bore our sins on the cross. He took upon himself the consequence of our choice.

Notice that he calls the pre-godly life *empty*. That word typifies our contemporary culture. Living God's way contrasts with the hollowness of living without him: John 6:35 - I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. We can be full, not empty!

T - What else can we learn about Jesus here?

20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Because he came for our sake, we now live for Christ's sake.

21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. All this leads to another point to ponder:

oLiving God's way is empowered and motivated by Christ's sacrifice. *How and why do I live God's way?* It's all about Jesus. He came and died in my place. He paid what I owed. He took the death I deserved and I got the life he alone deserves. I find the facts of the gospel to be very empowering and motivating! God originally made us for himself but we rebelled and rejected him. So God did the only thing that could be done to provide a way for us to come back to him. These verses remind us of the price that was paid. It was more costly than even the most valuable material things on earth. He bought you for himself with the sacrifice of Christ's blood.

Let's read through the last section: 1:22-2:3.

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. Note here that *purity* goes along with being *loving*. Holiness isn't arrogant self-righteousness. *It shows sincere love, not superior disregard.*

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. *After all, Peter says, your new life is rooted in God's eternal Word. Since everything else is just for now, your lives should be different!*

Chapter 2:1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Don't act like there is no standard. You're not to be like everyone else. Instead: 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

T - *So, what do all these verses have in common? We see that...*

oLiving God's way means obeying God's Word.

Let's think about how this section fits together:

1:22 and 2:1 are two sides of the same coin. Holy living is going to involve loving others and means you won't intentionally hurt them!

1:23-25 and 2:2,3 are connected as well. First he's talking about the role of God's eternal word in our lives, and then about the importance of getting into the word, craving spiritual sustenance.

S: *The change in our lives involves God's Word, which will last forever. So we should selflessly love, not selfishly hurt others. We shouldn't live for little petty pleasures like putting others down, but desire spiritual nourishment - more than anything! We need to keep feeding on what makes us different. Sometimes you don't have an appetite because you've stuffed yourself with the wrong things. What have you been feeding on?*

Concl: The call to holiness may seem like an obstacle to you. Like a hurdle you can't clear. So you're tempted to give up. After all, you say, *God loves me just the way I am.* That's true, but he also loves you too much to see you stay the way you are. This last verse says you can **grow up in your salvation**. You can make progress. Tell God you want to live his way. Ask Jesus to take away your sin and set you free. Then feed on God's eternal word.

More Meat:

2 Cor 7:1 - Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

That's a pretty demanding command. We're finite and fallible. How can we live up to his standards?

Holiness is not just about renunciation.

OT concept: separate. Distinct. Cut off from the rest.

If we would be distinctive then people would see the character of God in our lives. That is the most powerful tool for evangelism. The evidence of a changed life, lived right out loud.

Holiness should translate horizontally into an attractive lifestyle.

14 - James 3:17; Gal 5:22; Phil 4:8

17 - You're allowed to address God as Father because of what Jesus did.

Peter also calls our attention to the fact that God is the will judge our works. There are several different judgments described in the Bible. This one is not a judgment with salvation at stake, but rewards. After all, judgment has already taken place at the cross. It can't be held against us. Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:9,10 - each held accountable for works.

Is 6. God reveals himself as holy. Isaiah's response is to offer himself to serve. Holiness has two facets: purity and being set apart for a purpose. Having encountered God's perfect purity, Isaiah wants to be set apart for a purpose, holy in the sense of being dedicated to God.