

Holy As God Is Holy

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Let's turn in our Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 1. We'll read the chapter and then focus our attention on verses 15 and 16.

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. 10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. 13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. 17 And if ye call on the Father, who without

respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: 18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

So far we read God's holy inspired word.

Now verses 15 and 16,

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

People of God, the church has repeatedly struggled with the problem of worldliness. In the weakness of their faith, the saints of God have a tendency to conform their lives to the pattern of this world. Very easily, they slip into the practice of talking the language that the world talks and following the fashions of the world and the entertainments of the world and doing business as the world does, even running their homes and their marriage as does the world, and when that happens, the church of Jesus Christ defiles herself with the sins of this world and that becomes the ruin of a church. That was a problem in the churches to which the Apostle Peter addressed this first epistle of his.

Notice verse 14, the verse previous to ours, he says that they must be "obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." The churches addressed here in this letter were predominantly of Gentile pagan background. They had come out of the darkness of idolatry. They were controlled by sinful lusts, lusts that they acted upon, lusts that determined their culture and their lifestyle, and even though they had been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, the work of grace was not finished in them and so they tended to fashion themselves, patterned their life after their former lusts and the ways of the world around them and Peter says, "as obedient children, stop doing that. You fashioned your life according to your former lusts when you were in the ignorance of unbelief."

The problem that was found in the churches addressed by Peter have plagued the churches of God throughout the ages and also today. In our culture here in this

community, we don't live among pagans, we live in what's been called by many a post-Christian society. We live in a society that was dominated by Christianity and that's slowly fading away. But idolatry dominates our society, it's just in a more sophisticated modern form than was found in the days of the apostles and is found even today in Third World countries like Singapore and India and China. And all too often, members of the church pattern their lives after the lusts of the world around them and defile themselves in their homes, their marriages and their lives, and we are admonished not to do that.

The contrast is found in the verses we consider this evening. Don't fashion your life and yourself according to these lusts of the world, "But as he which has called you is holy, you be holy. You be holy and be holy in all manner of conversation." Why? "Because God has said," and more than once, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." It's the positive idea of a call to holiness that we consider tonight and this is a very very important truth and call that we must hear repeatedly as God's people. "As he which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation," in every part of your life. The theme is: holy as God is holy. Let's notice, first of all, the meaning; secondly, the calling, the call to be holy; and finally, the possibility.

You are the called ones. We'll call attention to that more specifically in the third point and it is brought out more in chapter 2, but someone called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. That's God. And we are told here in this passage that he who called you is holy. In fact, it's rather interesting that of all the various attributes the Bible ascribes to God, holiness stands out in a very prominent place. God is loving, he's kind, he's merciful, he is Almighty, he is everywhere present, but the Bible emphasizes again and again God is holy.

What does that mean? Well, the word "holiness" used in the Old Testament and the New Testament both mean the same thing: that which is set apart; distinct and unique from everything else. And so you have over here everything which is common and ordinary, this which is set apart is holy, special. If you take that which is holy and treat it like it were common and ordinary, you profane it. That's the idea. So we are told in the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." God set aside that day as a special day to be observed in a different way. You have the other days of the week, do your work. Do your work. On this day, it is to be observed differently. God set it apart as a holy day. He sanctified it.

Well, in the same sense God reveals himself as the Holy One, the one who is set apart, and the Bible applies that in especially two different ways. First of all, God is holy in that he is set apart from all that is sinful. The world in which we live from the very beginning fell into sin. All of mankind, much of the angel world controlled by sin. Sinful man has developed his own culture, his own lifestyle. God is the one who is set apart from all that, pure and undefiled. 1 John 1:5, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." You don't find the darkness of the world in him. Job 34:10, "far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity." God stands apart from all the wickedness of this world. Holy.

But that idea of standing apart is even applied to the very being of God. He's not part of this creation. He is the Creator, the Owner, the Ruler, and even though he is everywhere present in this creation, nevertheless there is a certain sense in which she transcends it. There is none like him. There is no other being that is like him. He is infinitely exalted above the whole creation. That's also God's holiness and so we read in Isaiah 40:25, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One." No one is like me. I am the one set apart.

And from this it follows that God is totally consecrated and devoted to himself and to his glory. That's also his holiness. You know, I'm sure you know people who are seeking their own glory. They want people to heap honors upon them. They are glory hungry and we say, "How vain. How empty. How inappropriate." And especially we see that in light of Scripture. Who are we that we should boast about ourselves? Who are we to receive glory and honor? Of course not, but for God that's quite appropriate. He is the Holy One, the One set apart, infinitely exalted above the creation. The God who is light in whom there is no darkness at all, all honor, all glory, all praise belongs to him and he seeks it in all that he does. In fact, this very creation exists and you and I exist only for his glory. That's his holiness.

Now the word of God speaks of us being holy as God is holy, to have and display a holiness that is patterned after God's holiness, that reflects God's holiness. What is that holiness? There are two parts to it. First of all, a holiness that is patterned after God's holiness is obviously a spiritual separation from this world, to live undefiled. That's part of God's holiness, isn't it? And our holiness is neither do we, then, partake of the sins of this world but remain pure and undefiled. Now, that's not to be understood in the physical sense, that we somehow separate ourselves physically from the world. That's not the separation we are to seek. The monks and the nuns in the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the Middle Ages when they lived behind walls in their convents and monasteries, they had it wrong. That was not the separation God wants. The Amish really separate themselves from society, don't they? They don't live in the mainstream of life. They turn the clock back to the 1850s. That's their separation from an evil world. That's not what God wants. He says, "I put you in this world. I want you to be in the mainstream of life. And as you do so, however, and make your way through the mainstream of life, spiritually you are to remain distinct. You are to do so in such a way that you do not take part in the sins of this world. That's your holiness."

Now as we develop that, let's understand, first of all, that that may require in some cases a physical separation. If you're going to be undefiled and not partake of the sins of the world, there are certain groups that you can't join, there are certain people you can't have as friends. In fact, the Bible warns against that, "Don't become the friend of the world." If you're going to live in close friendship with the ungodly, you're going to do it on their basis and you will be defiled with their sins and so there has got to be some separation there, doesn't there? The same thing is true of certain businesses and relationships. If you're going to maintain your spiritual purity, there are certain business relationships you simply have to avoid, even certain professions. I have a son-in-law who plays a cello pretty well, he found out that if he's going to keep the Sabbath day holy and not defile his

life with the violation of the fourth commandment, he's not going to be able to use that instrument at a high level. He simply isn't. He's got to avoid it.

And there are many things also that we can't use of the world. You know, our Canons say that the fallen man retains a glimmering of natural light so that he understands the things around us in the creation, and he even understands what is right and wrong, and he even has an outward regard for virtue, not because he loves virtue but because he understands that if there is not certain moral standards, all of life will degenerate into chaos. So he has an outward regard for virtue and much that the world produces comes out of that remnant of natural light which we are able, to use the expression of the Scriptures, to sanctify for the Master's use. We can do that. Much of the literature, some of the music, other things that the world produces in their sinful way, we are able to sanctify for the Master's use, but there are other things the world produces, especially in culture, that are so vile that we cannot use them to serve the Lord. That includes much of the music today, the way the world parties, the way the world dances. Much of the entertainment of this world is so vile that if we're going to remain undefiled, we must simply turn our back upon it and walk away and refuse it. Let's be careful we don't defile ourselves in the way we use what the world produces but make sure we sanctify it for the Master's use. But if we're going to live spiritually separate and undefiled, that will require us that we live quite differently from the world even as we are in the world. The songs we sing, the parties we have, the entertainments that we enjoy, the education we provide for our children must not have the stamp of the world upon it but must have the stamp of God's covenant so that it's different.

What the world does, it does to satisfy its own lusts. That's what Peter wrote here, the former lusts in your ignorance. Everything we do must be done not to satisfy the lust of our nature, our sinful nature that we still have, but it must be done to the glory of God. And that's the second part, then: stay away from the world spiritually, even though you pass through it, be separate, be spiritually distinct but in everything you do, seek to glorify God. That's, after all, also God's holiness, isn't it? The honor is not ours, the praise is not ours, a life devoted to our comfort, our enjoyment, our pleasure, is not a life of holiness. A life of holiness is a life devoted consciously to the glory of God, to the praise of God and, of course, that requires that you order your life according to the law of God. What does God say in his law? His great commandment is, "Love me with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. Take that love and show it to your neighbor. Now everything I say no to, make that a demonstration of love. And everything that I require of you positively, make it a matter of love so that you are serving me in love. And when you do that, you will reflect my goodness and my perfections in your life and that's what glorifies me." That's holiness.

Peter began this letter by addressing the saints as strangers, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." They were strangers. That means they were spiritually strange to the pagan communities and even to the Jewish communities. They were different. Everything about them had the mark of the covenant upon them, not the mark of the world. The world looked at them and said, "You've become something pretty strange to us. Something

pretty strange. We don't know you anymore. You've become something different." That's what we must be. I once catechized a young man who was dating a girl of the congregation, he came from a non-church background, worked in an area, an establishment here, Spartan stores, and as his life changed under the grace of God, he told me his coworkers and his friends said, "Hey, what happened to you? What happened to you? This is pretty strange what we see here." And he was not an oddball. He wasn't put on. He had changed. He was a stranger to the world. Are you? If you're going to be holy as God is holy, you've got to be spiritual strangers here.

Well, let's go to the second point: we are called here to this holiness. Now, as I'm going to point out in the third point, we are holy but we are called to this holiness right here, "as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." All manner of conversation. Be holy. There are three points I've got here. The first is that "all manner of conversation." Now, the conversation that Peter is talking about isn't just our speech that we have with one another and others. That's part of it but the old meaning for conversation which is the meaning here is your whole lifestyle, your whole manner of living. All manner of conversation therefore includes such things as your home life, and your life at school, and your life at church here, and the life in the workaday world, and the life in this community. Your whole life. It includes your work as well as your recreation and entertainment. It includes the behavior that you show to your spouse, the behavior toward your family members, your parents, your siblings, the behavior you will show to others at school, the behavior towards each other in the church. What is your behavior at work? What is your behavior even toward the ungodly? It's all included here.

In all our behavior, we are called here to be holy. That's a pretty timely admonition. It's very easy to be content with holiness in one part of our life, at least outwardly, but in other parts of life, not so much. There are people who perhaps show a holiness in their home and in the church, but when it comes to the business world, it's a whole different matter. Not a whole lot of holiness shown there. No difference between them and the world in their work, in their business. Then there are those who show a holiness when they are in the eye of everyone else but when they are home, that's a different matter. That holiness just sorts of just melts away. Those are the people you are familiar with, those are the people you know will accept you and get away with things. Do you know that the way you are at home is the real you? That's the real you. Then there are young people who can be very holy when their parents and teachers are around, when there is an eye upon them and they are accountable but, boy, when that's gone, that holiness is gone too. Then there are those who are holy in much of their life but not in their sexual life. And on and on we could go with examples. Very easily we allow ourselves to be content with this kind of departmentalizing of our lives and convince ourselves it's okay, for the most part we are holy. And, of course, the question is, for the most part what is that holiness? Is it really just a sham? You're content not to be holy in other parts of your life? We are commanded to be holy in every aspect of our life and if we examine ourselves in which we always must and conclude, "Look, there is a certain part of my life that I'm not really so holy," then we must pay attention to that. "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation."

That's the first thing about this call to holiness. The second is: you must be holy in all your conduct no matter what others are doing. Sometimes the people of God excuse unholy behavior in certain aspects of their life because others in the church, others in the community are doing it. Businessmen can easily excuse unholy business practices because, well, that's just the business climate. You're going to make a living, you're going to have a business, you simply have to do it. It's okay. Young people, although it's not just young people who do this, but young people will say, "Look, everybody else is doing it at school. Everybody else is partying this way. What's wrong with me? What's so bad about them? What's so bad about me?" The word of God here will have none of that. There is an emphasis found in the original Greek that is not expressed here in the King James in the English, and perhaps can't be. The word "you, Be ye holy." Well, there you have that emphasis, "Be ye holy." That's placed first in that clause. "You. You be holy." And that's a special word there which means, "You on your part." It's often used to identify you in distinction from others. You, distinction from them. "You be holy." Don't be looking at other people to excuse unholy behavior.

That's the second thing, the third is: the word of God here expresses the idea of decisiveness. Decisiveness. Again, that's not reflected in our English language and really can't because of the different kind of languages between English and the original, but the construction is such that it has the idea of decisiveness. It could have expressed the idea, "Now continue to be holy." That would be another construction but this is decisive, "No, not waiting until New Year's comes and making a New Year's resolution. Not partial change in your life. I'll change this but I'll hang onto that yet." No, it expresses the idea of decisiveness, "Now, every part of your life be holy as God is holy."

And that then brings us to the reason for the exhortation, "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Be holy as God is holy because of what's written and what is written is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." That's found repeatedly in the book of Leviticus. The book of Leviticus contains the laws of God which were to govern Israel's religious and civil life. There are the ceremonial laws, the religious laws, and the civil laws, the laws that govern them as a nation in Israel. It contains the laws of their covenant God and explains how they are to live as covenant people in their religious life, in their worship, and in their civil life, and the idea of holiness is one of the main themes of the book of Leviticus. That book emphasizes the holiness of God. Jehovah, Israel's covenant God, is a God of holiness and therefore in that book, Israel is called to holiness because of the holy character of their God.

Just two examples, Leviticus 11:44 and 45, "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." I brought you here so that I would be your God and live in covenant friendship and fellowship with you. I am the holy God, now you be holy. That's the emphasis there.

Leviticus 19:2, "Speak unto all the congregation," this is what the Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy." By quoting these expressions here in the passage, the Apostle Peter is doing a couple of things. He's impressing, first of all, upon the church the need for holiness. This idea of being holy as God is holy is not some minor part of the Christian life or of the revelation of God that is sort of an appendage. No, it's a major major thing, emphasized by the Lord centuries before the theme of a book of the Bible. This is an important matter. "It is written, Be holy; for I am holy."

Secondly, it gives us the reason for us to be holy. Why are we called to be holy? Because our God is holy. Don't forget that. Your God, my God who we claim to be our God, is a holy God therefore we, his people, must also be holy.

Then finally, it all comes up to this: if Jehovah, our covenant God, our God who will live with us and dwell with us is holy, well, if we're going to enjoy that kind of covenant relationship, we have to be holy. We can't expect to enter into the intimacies of God's covenant friendship and live with him in friendship being defiled with the sins of this world. We must be holy as God is holy.

The final point: the possibility. It's quite a tall order, isn't it? Is this attainable, to be holy as God is holy in all manner of conversation? Paul reminded the members of the church in his day of their former lusts. There was a time they were ignorant of the Gospel. They were completely controlled and dominated by the lust of their fallen nature. They weren't holy at all. They were defiled with every sin imaginable and they were not devoted to God. They were devoted to self and to idolatry and all the pleasures and all the abuses that went with idol worship. That's the way they were by nature. We're no different, are we? Even though we are born into the church, into the covenant, by nature we are no different. Completely unable to be holy. We aren't holy. Even the beginning of holiness is unattainable to us left to ourselves.

But the God whose holiness we are to reflect has called us. Notice, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy." The holy God has called us. That's the saving efficacious call of the Gospel to faith and salvation in Jesus Christ. Let me explain. The call of the Gospel is the command. It's not an offer, it's not a plea, it's not an invitation, it's not Jesus getting down before you and begging. It's not that at all. It's the command of God through Christ to all who hear, "Repent and believe. Turn to Christ. No one has the right to continue in sin. Repent or perish." The promise of the Gospel is, "all those who repent and turn to Christ shall be saved." That must not only be preached on the mission field, obviously, but that call has to be repeated in the church. I'll get to that in a moment.

But what happens when the Gospel call comes up outside the church and covenant? It most often falls on deaf ears, doesn't it, because it falls on the ears of the reprobate, or if they are the elect and God isn't ready to make it efficacious and powerful, not yet at that point, and so instead of repenting, turning to Christ, believing, clinging to the promise, they are hardened and we see that. It's sad to say sometimes that happens in the church, doesn't it? Especially to the carnal reprobate seed that are born and raised in the church.

That happens. But when that Gospel call comes to the ear of God's elect, it is made powerful, irresistibly powerful by the work of the Holy Spirit who applies it. When they hear the call, "Repent of your sins," the Holy Spirit smites them with that word and they humble themselves before God and they confess their sins in shame, sorrow. And when the call comes, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," they turn to him and they go to the cross pleading for forgiveness and reconciliation. They do that as that word is made powerful by the Holy Spirit. Then when the call comes and says, "As forgiven sinners, go and sin no more to serve the Lord," it is made powerful by the work of the Spirit so that they do that.

Chapter 2, verse 9 speaks of the call in that sense, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar," or special, "people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." There you've got the call. There is a chosen generation, that's election, isn't it, that are powerfully called out of the darkness of their unbelief and sin into the light of faith and salvation in Jesus Christ.

The church in the original language is literally the called out ones, those who are so called out from unbelief to faith, darkness to light in Christ. That's what we are. And the result of that call is holiness. Holiness. Notice again, chapter 2, verse 9, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood," notice, "an holy nation." An holy nation, that's what you are, "as those who are called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God." You're not just a chosen generation, the elect, you are, you are a special people, you are, but you have been made a holy nation. Holy. Sanctified. Consecrated by God. Delivered from the power of sin.

That's what God calls us. That's the power of the call to make us holy. We are those who are called, aren't we? Have you heard the call? Have you been led by the call to Christ? I don't question that, I don't challenge that, but that's our profession, isn't it? That's who we are and our children too, and our grandchildren, and even though they are too young to understand that, sometimes we're looking for that because we expect that. That's the way God works.

We are a holy people but here's the final part: that work, that marvelous work of God in Jesus Christ who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light to form us into a holy people, that work is not finished yet. That is not finished. It has only begun. You know that. It was only begun in the saints to which Peter addresses this letter. Yes, they were strangers spiritually in the world but those former lusts in their ignorance, oh, too much of their life was still fashioned according to that and so they had to be called, "Be holy. In every part of your life, be holy." There is an urgency about this. "Don't put this off. Be holy."

We have to hear the same thing, don't we? That's the call of the Gospel. Acknowledge your sins. Bring them to the cross. Find forgiveness. In the power of Christ. Renew your service to the Lord in holiness. And that's what God uses to preserve us in holiness and to move us forward in holiness. You know, sanctification, that's what we're talking about,

isn't it? Sanctification means to make holy. This is God's work we are talking about. That's God's work in us and through us but how does he accomplish that? He accomplishes it through the call. He calls you to be holy and that call is powerful and it is irresistible and that's how we are able to maintain our holiness and grow in holiness and be warned against the failure that is often ours to be unholy. Did you hear the call? I preached this last Sunday. I heard it then. I'm hearing it again. Sometimes it pinches. I've got to follow it. So do you by God's grace. Amen.

Father in heaven, we ask thy blessing upon us. Thou art our holy God. We are a holy people. O Lord, one day in heaven we won't have to be called, "Be holy, be holy," but now we do. Lord, sanctify this word to us, give us to be a holy people more and more, consecrating ourselves unto thee in service. We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.