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Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter

(Part 12 – How the Hypocrite Violates the First Four Commandments)

September 25, 2016

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:15-16

Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:1- 26

1Pe 1:15-16 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Holiness is a very strange thing. It is, at its root and essence, "otherness." To be holy is to be as God is – "other." Not like this world. Holiness is so different and strange to human beings that it is a shock to be near it or to experience it.

Luk 5:1-11 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, (2) and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. (3) Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. (4) And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." (5) And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." (6) And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. (7) They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. (8) **But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."** (9) For he and all who were with him were astonished

at the catch of fish that they had taken, (10) and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." (11) And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

What in the world impacted Peter? Possibly even more so than the rest? I think we can conclude from Peter's words to Jesus that Peter knew he had come into the presence of the holy, holy, holy God and like Isaiah his own UN-holiness caused him to come undone.

Isa 6:3-5 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (4) And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (5) And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Holiness. The holy God rattles the foundations of our being.

Act 9:8-9 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

(9) And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Peter has written here in this first chapter of his letter that we are to be holy because God is holy. Christians are holy, in Christ, and therefore we are to live out that holiness. We must not be like this world. We must not continue to live as we used to live in the darkness of sin, loving this world and so on. No. We are now exiles here, sojourners, just passing through on our way Home.

This morning, I want to show you how false, hypocritical religion – specifically hypocritical “christian” religion is incredibly UN-holy and therefore particularly loathsome to the Lord. I also want to show you how very great the danger is to us all that we slide into such hypocrisy.

And I want to do this by calling your attention to the first four commandments of the Law:

Exo 20:1-11 And God spoke all these words, saying, (2) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (3) "You shall have no other gods before me.

(4) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or

that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

(7) "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

(8) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. (11) For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Warnings Against Hypocrites and Hypocritical Religion Given in Scripture

J.C. Ryle, in his book Warnings to the Churches, has a chapter on the

Pharisees and Sadducees, derived from Jesus' warning to us:

Mat 16:6 Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Here are some excerpts from Ryal's article:

"The doctrine of the Pharisees may be summed up in three words – they were formalists, tradition worshippers, and self-righteous. They attached such weight to the traditions of men that they practically regarded them of more importance than the inspired writings of the Old Testament.

They thought much of being descended from Abraham, and said in their hearts, 'We have Abraham for our father.' They fancied because they had Abraham for their father that they were not in peril of hell like other men, and that their descent from him was a kind of title to heaven.

They made such a great ado about the outward parts of religion, and such things as could be seen of men.

They thought much of having power, rank, and pre-eminence, and of being called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

The doctrine of the Sadducees, on the other hand, may be summed up in

three words, - free-thinking, skepticism, and rationalism. Their creed was far less popular than that of the Pharisees, and, therefore, we find them less often mentioned in the New Testament Scriptures. So far as we can judge from the New Testament, they appear to have held the doctrine of *degrees* of inspiration; at all events they attached exceeding value to the Pentateuch above the other parts of the Old Testament, if indeed they did not altogether ignore the latter.

They believed that there was no resurrection, no angel, and no spirit, and tried to laugh men out of their belief in these things, by supposing hard cases, and bringing forward difficult questions.

All this time, be it remembered, we may not say that the Sadducees were downright infidels: this they were not. We may not say they denied revelation altogether: this they did not do. They observed the law of Moses. Many of them were found among the priests in the times described in the Acts of the Apostles. Caiaphas who condemned our Lord was a Sadducee. But the practical effect of their teaching was to shake men's faith in any revelation, and to throw a cloud of doubt over men's minds, which was only one degree better than infidelity. And of all such kind of doctrine – free-thinking,

skepticism, rationalism – our Lord says, "Take heed and beware."

So in both cases you have people who were quite religious. They all claimed to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But they didn't. They were all hypocrites. Phonies. They took the religion revealed to them through God's prophets and twisted it to their own ends.

These were Jews. These were people who were bathed in religion all their lives. They lived in the capital of their religion and were the teachers of religion. And yet Christ's words to them were harsher than to any other group:

Mat 6:5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Mat 23:13-16 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. (15) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him

twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. (16) "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'

Now, as I mentioned, our goal this morning is to take heed to the Lord Jesus' warnings, and to carefully consider this matter of being holy as our Father in heaven is holy. Specifically now I want to show how dangerous and blasphemous religious hypocrisy is by showing that it is a very common and gross violation of the first 4 commandments (actually all of the commandments).

So hear the first and second Laws –

Exo 20:1-11 And God spoke all these words, saying, (2) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (3) **"You shall have no other gods before me.**

(4) **"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of**

those who hate me, (6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Fallen man is, of course, an idol factory. We know this from Romans chapter one for instance. He would rather worship a snake and call it his god, or cut down a tree and use half of it for firewood and use the other half to make himself a god, than to give thanks to and acknowledge his Creator whom he knows full well exists and to whom he owes his worship. All of this idol business is forbidden in the first and second commandments.

We must always be on guard against hypocritical religion. If you grew up in a professing Christian home, you must be particularly cautious that you are not merely playing an outward show and in fact you are not converted at all. And all Christians must be on watch against this trap as well. We are under much temptation to embrace a false god today. How many people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ have, in fact, re-created Christ in their own image to their own liking? Many.

Notice the very stern warnings (and kind promises of blessings for obedience) from the Lord in this regard. *God is a jealous God.* You have another stern warning in the third commandment as well:

(7) "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

I want us to spend some time thinking about how the hypocrite takes the name of the Lord in vain every bit as much as the pagan does who uses Christ's name as a swear word. And, once again, we are doing this because we must all be on guard against being caught up in a "christianity" that really has nothing to do with Christ but is based upon a false god created by man.

What does it mean to "take the name of the Lord your God in vain"?

We normally think of this as *saying* the Lord's name in a flippant or vulgar fashion. Profane curses and so on. And certainly such evil is a violation of this third commandment. It is spoken by people who care nothing about Christ, but who use His holy name as some casual exclamation or as a means of calling down a divine curse on someone or something. This kind of thing ought to cause the sinner to shake in his boots. *The Lord will not hold him guiltless...*

But there is a more subtle and deceptive means of violating this commandment which is very often

committed by people who pride themselves in never uttering a curse word. Let me suggest:

The person who claims the name of Christ, who professes to be a Christian and therefore a child of God, "takes the name of the Lord his God" to himself. For those who genuinely love Christ and belong to Him, this is right and proper use of the Lord's name because Christ's people do indeed bear His likeness and name.

But when a hypocrite "takes the name of the Lord" as his God, that hypocrite is taking that name in vain. His claim is empty. He stands guilty before the Lord.

Do you see then that this sin is one that is typically committed by someone who is a church member, perhaps a real "pillar" in his or her church? And do you see that it is a sin particularly dangerous and tempting to people who have grown up in the church, surrounded by and immersed in Christianity all their lives?

This is why we must regularly be reminded of Jesus' words to Nicodemus – *you must be born again.*

Here are some examples from Scripture of hypocritical religion

violating the third commandment – taking the name of the Lord in vain:

Isa 1:11-20 "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (12) "When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? (13) Bring no more **vain offerings**; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (14) Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

(15) When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

(16) Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, (17) learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

(18) "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as

white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. (19) If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; (20) but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

What do we see here? People who claim God's name for themselves, people who claim to be "Christians" to put it how we would in the New Covenant, people who are quite religious –

- They make multitudes of sacrifices
- They kept holy days
- They prayed to the Lord

And yet in their lives they –

- Had hands covered with blood (they oppressed the innocent even to death)
- They were characterized by evil deeds
- Evil, injustice, oppression of the helpless were their habitual actions

As a result, their "worship" of the Lord was:

- A trampling of His holy ground by the unholy feet of people who held the Lord in derision

- They mixed their iniquity right into their “solemn assembly”
- Their offerings were vain, empty, and worse than empty. They were an abomination to God and aroused His wrath
- Their prayers were disgusting to the Lord
- Their “worship” then was so repulsive to God that He could not endure it nor look upon it nor hear it

Pretty serious consequences, this taking of the Lord’s name in vain has, right? It was all a big phoney show! All this was pretense. The whole thing. These people had no intention of obeying the Lord. They had long since broken the first two commandments so that the god they worshipped was an idol fashioned by their own hands who allows his people to do whatever they want. Yet they called this god “Yahweh.” THAT is the height of taking the Lord’s name in vain, you see, and it is a widespread sin in the visible church today.

How many Christians in church buildings today might be singing something like this –

Hear our prayer, O Lord.
 Hear our prayer, O Lord
 Incline Thine ear to us,
 and grant us Thy peace

Whenever I hear those words, I immediately am taken back to my high school years when I attended a liberal Baptist church and sang in the choir. (I didn’t want to, my mother made me). The whole thing was orchestrated in the order of service so that at the close of the pastor’s prayer the choir would chime in with these pious words, a choral call to the Lord to hear our prayer.

But I doubt that the Lord heard any of those prayers, such was the condition of that church in reality.

We must all take care always that we never yield to the temptation of hypocrisy and end up taking the name of the Lord in vain.

1Pe 1:15-19 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (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, (18) knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Here are some more examples of religious people taking the name of the Lord in vain in this manner-

Eze 20:39 "As for you, O house of Israel, thus says the Lord GOD: Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter, if you will not listen to me; but my holy name **you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols.**

And again -

Isa 66:1-3 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? (2) All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (3) "He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations;

Pro 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the

prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

Jer 7:21-23 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. (22) For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. (23) But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'

Let me close with this final warning. At some point, known only to the Lord I suppose, the path of the hypocrite who regularly and consistently takes the name of the Lord in vain through his false, counterfeit "Christian faith," reaches a point of no return. The hypocrite becomes so hardened, so blind, so accustomed to his sin that he is beyond repentance. It is incredibly dangerous to disobey the Lord's commandments, and taking His name in vain is in some ways one of the most wicked in His sight. YOU must not ever go there, and if you ARE a hypocrite, NOW is the time to flee to Christ asking Him for mercy and that He would grant you repentance and give you a new heart that loves Him.