

The Pursuit of Holiness

Our Identity in Christ

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1 Peter 1. We continue our exposition of this marvelous letter of Apostle Peter to believers in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. It's actually our 11th message in this book. We mentioned that the purpose of Peter, remember, is to prepare believers for a time of suffering and trial. They're already experiencing trials and difficulties as they have come to Christ living in a world that is increasingly hostile to their faith, and so they need to be strengthened and stabilized and this is his purpose, that they would stand firm. He mentions this at the end of the letter in 1 Peter 5:10, that they would stand firm in the midst of this opposition that is coming. And so his whole purpose is to strengthen them for affliction and trial and suffering, that they would be faithful.

We've noted that he begins his letter by laying a foundation of gratitude. He's telling them how are you going to stand up, how is your life going to stand through the storms that are coming? Well, you need a strong foundation and the foundation he lays in the first 12 verses of this epistle is gratitude, the stabilizing power of thankfulness. We looked at a series of messages on this part of the book, looking at what God has done for you in Christ and actively thanking God for that is so important to your life. We noted that in the first 12 verses the dominant mood, grammatically the mood was indicative, that is, God was telling us facts. The mood is changing in verse 13 to the imperative, that is, commands or instructions. So the first 12 verses we need to know what God has done, the indicative, the facts of what God has done, and then on the basis of that now God issues commands. This is this consistent pattern of the gospel and the New Testament. The focus of the gospel is on what God has done for us in Christ, the finished work of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit, all of these things, those are the indicative statements, and then on the basis of that now you're to live, we live on the basis of what God has done.

And so we turned the corner in verses 13 to 25 to the imperative mood, that is, the mood of command, instruction. We noted that there are four major commands in these 13 verses, actually in the original, there are really only four commands. The translators to make it flow into English often translate a number of times words that are not really commands in the in the Greek, strictly speaking, but that they borrow the impair title force from the main verb they're associated with, they're participles that are translated. And so there are four main commands that are going to be our four main points that we're looking at over four weeks. Last week we saw that the first true imperative is "fix your

hope," we'll read it in a moment in verse 13. Today, we're looking at the second imperative which is "be holy." Then the third imperative we'll look at, Lord willing, in verse 17, which is to "conduct yourselves in fear." And then the fourth imperative is in verse 22, "fervently love one another from the heart." These are the four major commands that he's building which you can think of as pillars built on that foundation. The foundation is gratitude for what God has done. Now, last week he said "fix your hope on the grace to be given to you at the revelation of Christ." Now he's saying this morning we're looking at, "be holy." And so the title of the message this morning is "The Pursuit of Holiness." The pursuit of holiness. The command that we're going to look at is "be holy for I am holy."

Let's read God's word together beginning at verse 13 of 1 Peter 1.

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 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. 22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for the eternal word of God. As we come this morning to the Scriptures, we ask that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit might illumine our minds, our hearts that we might see and understand wonderful things from Your law that we might repent, that we might trust more fully in Christ, and that we might be changed into His image. For the glory of Your Son in whose name we pray. Amen.

So the pursuit of holiness. The second pillar that he wants us to build upon that foundation of gratitude is that we must actively pursue holiness. We must actively hear

the command "be holy yourselves." This idea of holiness is one of the most important words in all of Scripture, one of the most important concepts, yet it's one that we, if I were to ask you define holiness, you might find that difficult. It's a concept that actually is very distant from modern American life. That is one, as I said, one of the most important words in Scripture. 600 times in the Bible "holy" or that root is found in its various forms. 600 times.

And one thing that I've mentioned before when we talked about this, and I want to remind you of, is that in English we have trouble translating the word "holy." I mean, we translate it with two different roots and it can hide the fact that these are the same words. In English we have the word "holy" and we have the word "sanctify." Holy is an adjective and sanctify is a verb. Sanctify means "make holy," but we don't have a word that says like holify would be something like, you know, the same root idea. Ho-l, we don't have that. With sanctify we have holy. It's just the blessing of the English language, so many different languages have contributed to English. But in Hebrew the word the adjective "holy" is "kadosh." The verb "make holy" or "sanctify" is "kadosh." In Greek they don't have the problem either. The adjective is "hagios" and the verb is "hagizo." You see how you hear in those languages that this is the same word. In English whenever you read sanctify, think holy. Same word. Same idea.

So when you put all the times that the Bible says "sanctify, sanctified, sanctification, holy," you come up with 600. It is a key concept in Scripture. It essentially means "to be set apart." I said it's elusive for us in modern-day America because it is language of the temple, language of religion, and so as the the country is becoming increasingly secular, these things are even more distant to most of us. We don't hear these words or concepts. We don't see them as we go about in our lives. But we are called to be holy. It relates to, we're going to see that this word "to be holy" is so fundamentally important that we're to pursue it, that we're to live lives of holiness, and what we're going to see is that this is rooted, for the Christian, the person who has repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ, the person who has been given the gift of new life in Jesus, you are holy already, and that you are called to see yourself as holy and then live consistent with who you really are.

This passage is really about identity again. We saw this in the beginning the first couple of messages we preached here in this book were about our identity that Peter wants us to know who we are, and this is, again, coming back to that key theme which is so important if we're going to be faithful in our lives, is to know who you truly are. And what we're going to see is you are not, contrary to what the world says, you are not what you desire. You are not the combination of your internal heart desires. That is not who you are according to Scripture. It's not true of any single human being. Every human being was made by God for his purposes. That's their identity. They're the image of God. They're created male and female, to be a male, to be a female, regardless of your feelings. But listen, as Christians it's even more important for us because we've not only been created by God, we've been redeemed by God, made new by God, and you have been made holy. You don't feel holy, you feel a lot of other things, which we're going to see in the passage. You feel desires that are completely inconsistent with who you truly are in

Christ, and the Christian life is learning to live on the basis of who God says you are, not what you feel like. And you do that by the power of the Holy Spirit in union with Christ, trusting in all that he has done for you. He has made you who you are and when you believe the word of God against your feelings, what happens is the Spirit of God empowers you to walk consistently with who you truly are, and as you do that, then you come to understand and experience, "Yes, this is who I truly am." And more and more and more, we live out lives of holiness as we believe that we have been made holy.

In fact, just to show you this, one of the favorite terms, you know, I've thought about this, it's interesting, you know, how does the Bible describe the believer? You know, it has different words. A believer is one of the ways the Bible describes what a Christian is. The Bible uses the word Christian only once or twice in the whole Bible, Christian, follower of Christ, disciple, "in Christ" is one of the key concepts. But one of the key words the Bible uses to describe the Christian in the New Testament is the word "saint" or "holy one." Sixty times in the New Testament Paul refers to believers like you and me, if you believe in Christ, if you've come to Christ, he calls you a saint. Saint is not a term for those who are at the head of the class. Roman Catholicism has confused the world over this. No, saint is anyone who is truly united to Jesus Christ by faith. You are a saint. You are a holy one. Remember saint, sanctify? Same deal. Saint means "holy one." That's what it means in the Greek. Hagios, holy; hagioi, saint.

I said 60 times. It's interesting, Jesus doesn't call people saints when he's talking as he's moving about his ministry; only one time in the gospels does he use the term when he's speaking about, actually it's after Jesus has risen from the dead and some saints also rise from the dead. Remember that interesting thing in Matthew 27, that part of the glory of Christ's resurrection that some other people were raised from the dead, went into Jerusalem after Jesus was raised and testified? Amazing. That's the only time it occurs before Pentecost. After Pentecost, it occurs 60 times talking about the saints in this town, the saints in that town. Paul's favorite way to begin a letter is to say, "To the saints in Corinth. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the holy ones in Corinth." And when you read 1 Corinthians, you see that took some faith to even say that about the Corinthians; they were really struggling. But he's saying it doesn't matter, if you are in Christ you are a holy one. That is your identity.

So what we want to do this morning is unpack that a little more because Peter gives us clear instruction on how to live to make every part of our lives consistent with who we truly are in Christ. And what I want us to do is we're going to outline this text like we did last week, actually same three major points, explanation, then we'll go to illustration and application. Explanation is going to take the most time and then we're going to illustrate and apply. So explanation, illustration, application, are the three main points. Number of sub points under that first main point, explanation.

So now our first point: explanation. We'll consider two questions, explain two questions here. First, the question is what does it mean to be holy? And I said already it means to be set apart or separate. It means to be devoted to spiritual purposes, to be devoted to the sphere of the sacred. It means literally to move from one sphere of being to another. This

is this is the application of it as you see it, as you read like particularly through Leviticus. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, you see it, but particularly in Leviticus, that something is made holy when it is taken from the realm of the common and ordinary and it is removed from the realm of the common and ordinary and set apart to the realm of the sacred, to the holy.

So holy means to be set apart from that which is common unto that which is devoted to God for his use. Give you an example. Like if you had, you know, a smith, a blacksmith is making instruments out of metal, brass, and he makes censers, you know, or fire pans. Let's say fire pans, you know, where you, we don't have to use these nowadays, but in the old days when fire was precious, you didn't have matches, you didn't have, you know, a lighter, you wanted to keep your fire going because it was hard to kindle a fire. And so what you would do when you had a fire going, if you wanted to take that fire and light another fire, you would take live coals, put them in a fire pan and then carry it to another place to light a fire. Yeah, that's a lot. They had to work so hard back in the old days. We have it so easy. We think we have it hard, but you start thinking about the stuff and you just think about trying to fix a meal in the old days. I mean, pluck the chicken, kill the chicken, pluck the chicken. I think you should kill it before you pluck it actually. But just building a fire so a fire pan. Imagine that, so you have a fire pan and you're carrying coals from one place to another. Well, a blacksmith makes a fire pan, he makes two, and one he sells to common people for common use around their house, and another he devotes to the temple, and they use it and it now when it is devoted to the temple, it becomes holy. It moves from the realm of the common to the realm of the sacred. It moves from the sphere of the common to the sphere of the sacred. It actually, if we could really see things as they are, it's like it moves from earthly to heavenly. It moves from the realm of where things are just, you know, normal, common, and then, of course, in this world, dirty and sinful, and it moves to that which is holy and spiritual and pure to the realm of God.

So now think about the two fire pans. Okay, so what he's saying is when you got saved, if you know Christ, the moment that you were saved, you were moved from the realm of the common to the realm of the sacred. You were translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son. You were set apart. In fact, we talked about this in the second message in this series or the third message, because about verse 2, if you look back at verse 2 of chapter 1, he's telling us who our identity is. He says at the end of verse 1, we are chosen, and look at verse 2, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit." There's that word sanctified. That's the word holy. And that phrase, "sanctifying work of the Spirit," translates a noun form *hagiosmos*, which means "the result of sanctifying work." It doesn't mean the work itself, it means the result, the end result of sanctifying work. And so when I preached that passage, I said he's not saying that it's ongoing sanctification, that's talked about other places. Here he's saying you have been chosen, set apart, you've been chosen by God according to the sanctifying work of the Spirit where he took and sets you completely apart. This is positional sanctification, not progressive, ongoing sanctification. This means you have been set apart from the world. That's what Peter is saying in verse 2, and he's coming back to that now in verses 14 to 16 to say remember who you are. You've been set apart by the Spirit for God's specific purposes, now your positional sanctification

of having been removed from the world of the realm of the common, placed over for God's purposes, that's positional sanctification, one state to the other, you've moved from the realm of the common to the sphere of the sacred. Now, he says your progressive sanctification is your call to live consistent with who you really are, with what God has done. If he sets you apart from the common to the holy, live like it. That's what he's calling us to in verses 14 to 16. He's saying, "Be holy yourselves in all of your behavior." This phrase "all of your behavior" speaks of all of your actions. Now, holiness starts in the heart, it does, but what God is saying it doesn't just stay there. Holiness must be translated into every part of life. Our words, our deeds, in every part needs to be brought into conformity with God's new identity that he's given us.

So what it means to be holy is to be set apart, think about it this way, set apart from the world unto God. It means to be holy, to be set apart from sin unto God's righteous purposes. That's what it means. You have been removed from one realm to another and so to be holy then means to try to in my life live that out, to let go more and more and more of sin and to live lives that are more and more consistent with God's holiness and righteousness. So that's the question: what does it mean to be holy? Set apart from the world and sin to God, devoted to God. Now the second question that we're going to spend most of our time on is: how do we pursue holiness? So this is 1B, explanation 1B. Second question: how do we pursue holiness? And we're going to really now exposit these verses more precisely. Verses 14 to 16, tell us how do we pursue holiness, how do we actually translate who we are in our essential core of our being into our lives. So we're on 1B technically. There's four sub points under 1B. So I'm kind of an outline junkie, I like to keep up with where I am, 1B 1, 2, 3, 4, and then we're going to go to point 2. So we're saying, how do we pursue holiness? There's four things that this text tells us about it. So there's four points.

How do we pursue holiness? First of all, we adjust our motive and we understand the true motive. That's what he deals with here. "As obedient children," that phrase that Peter leads with, "As obedient children not being conformed to your former lusts but like the One who called you is holy, be holy." That main verb is "be holy," and so all of these other participles and descriptive phrases are contributing to what it means to be holy. How do we be holy? What he says, it's interesting, he leads with "As obedient children." It's actually surprising. As obedient children. That's not a word that went in the Old Testament with holiness, children. The priests were holy, the people were to be holy, they were a holy nation, but to be the child of God is something decidedly New Testament gospel related, Jesus has accomplished. He's saying that your pursuit of holiness on this side of Calvary, on this side of Pentecost, that you're to be holy by remembering that your pursuit of holiness is to be done in the context of a relationship. It's not something you're doing in yourself to please God who's not really happy with you. It's easy to fall into that trap. It's kind of a performance-based pursuit of holiness that, "God will accept me if I..." No, that's not it. You already have the relationship. You already are loved by God. If you have come to Christ, he loves you as if you lived Christ's perfect life. That is your record of righteousness. That's how he sees you. That's the gospel. It's not what you and I have done, it's what Christ has done. He took our sins out of the way, nailing them to the cross, and he's given us his perfect record of righteousness, and therefore we cry, "Abba,

Father." So he sent the Spirit into our hearts and now we know God, the Holy God of all eternity as our Papa, our Daddy, our Father. And he's saying, "Don't forget who you are in your personal relationship." "As obedient children pursue holiness." Not out of, I mean, he's going to talk about there's a place for the fear of the Lord. He's going to come to that next. But he said, "Don't forget for you the fear of the Lord is still in the context of a loving relationship with the God who treasures you because of what Christ has done." Not because of who you and I are but because of what Jesus has made us through his blood.

So he says understand the motive. The motive for holiness is love. Because you love God you want to be holy. Now how do you love God? If you're not loving God what's the problem? We love him because he first loved us. If you want to grow in your love for God, reflect on his love for you. Understand and receive and bask in his love for you. And remember his love for you is not based on how wonderful you and I are because if that were the case, we have no hope of being loved. We would only be hated by God because he sees the filthiness that is truly in our hearts. But while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. That's the love of God. Look at how the love of God has been made known to us by Christ. While we were yet sinners, while we were helpless, Christ died for us. And to be now not only pardoned sinners, that would be wonderful, that would be amazing to know that we deserve to go to hell and now we're treated righteous in his sight forever, now his servants, that would be wonderful, now his priests, that would be wonderful. Those things are true of us but it goes beyond that. You not only have been made a holy priest in the kingdom of God, not only a holy servant in the kingdom of God, if you are in Christ, you have been made a precious child to your heavenly Father. John says this in 1 John 3:1, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us." What is that manner of love that he says, "Behold, look at it"? That we should be called the sons of God and such you are. Behold that love and then you see now love him back by being like your Father. That's the motive of holiness.

So the motive, but then he goes to the process. So 1B2, the process. "As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lusts." Here's a place where it looks like an imperative but really it's a participle in the Greek and would better be translated, the King James actually gets it best here, it would be better translated "not being conformed." The King James says, "not fashioning yourselves." You hear that participle, the "ing" ending? It's a verb with an "ing" ending, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts, is what the King James says, and I wish the New American Standard, ESV, and the NIV also said that. They don't but anyway, literally, "As obedient children not being conformed to your former lusts." That's the idea. Not being conformed.

So he what he does, he's going to tell us the process. You know, it's your identity, you have to have the right motive but you have to get engaged in the process. God does not just make you holy. It's not just let go and let God. You must actively exert your will and effort to be holy. It's all by, now listen, it's all by grace in the end. The only way that you can actually exert effort is that God gives you grace. So you've got to be praying as you work. There's no working on the front side of salvation. You're saved by faith apart from works. By faith alone, apart from works. But you are saved unto good works. Read

Ephesians 2:8 to 10. So we now work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Philippians 2:12, knowing that it is God who is at work in you. So work knowing that God is working in you.

So there's a process and there's a negative and a positive part of the process according to this verse. The negative is there in that participle, "not being conformed." To actually pursue holiness, the process of pursuing holiness is to actively resist the conforming pressure of your sinful desires. He says your lusts, which were your former lusts, that is, that were a part of your life before you were sanctified, and they were yours in your ignorance. When you didn't know any better, you just lived by your lusts. But the reality is now if you're in Christ, you know better. That was who you were formerly. Now you are holy but, listen, just because you're holy doesn't mean you still don't have to battle those lusts. That's why he's saying this. The Scripture makes clear that the Christian life, you have been radically transformed and yet this new man, this transformed heart dwells in the midst of a sinful heart as well. Your thinking still needs to be cleansed. Your affections still need to be transformed. Your will still needs to be brought into obedience. Those are the three components of the heart biblically, the mind, the affections or emotions, and the will. And so he says, "Listen, these lusts are still there in your heart." So here again, "Don't live by the lust in your heart. That's not who you are." You say, "It feels like it." Well, it doesn't matter what it feels like. God tells you if you're in Christ, you are a new creature.

I love how he makes this clear, this idea of sanctification, in fact, turn to 1 Corinthians for a minute right after Romans. 1 Corinthians. In fact, we're going to go to 6, but just listen to verse 1, "Paul, called as an apostle," this is chapter 1, verse 1, "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus." Past tense. Have been sanctified. Have been made holy. Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, "saints by calling." So, he says, "Those who have been made holy in Christ, holy ones by calling."

Now turn to chapter 6, verse 9. Paul knows they're struggling with temptation and sin, and he reminds them of what they formerly were, and he tells them, "Listen the true Christian, though he battles with sin every day until he dies and is possible to fall at any moment, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall," yet the true believer is being led by God over time out of sin. It's a progress that sometimes it's three steps forward, two steps back, but there is some progression in the life of a believer. That's the normative evidence of grace. So you can't say you're a believer and still live completely sold out to your lusts. This is for the person that says, "I'm a Christian, but I live as a homosexual. I'm a Christian, I live as a serial adulterer. I'm a Christian, but I live as a complete drunkard all the time but I'm trusting in Jesus." Paul says that's impossible. You can't stay there. You may feel like you want to stay there because you're listening to your lusts, but the true believer God will not allow to stay there because he will discipline you to the extreme. Hebrews 12:5 to 11, whom the Lord loves he disciplines. You got that bent and you really belong to God, you better get ready for a serious spanking. But listen,

the way of Scripture is don't think about going that way. Believe who you really are, not what you think you want.

And so he says in verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 6, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" He's saying over time true believers will become more and more holy. "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." He's saying, "Listen, if your life is characterized by those things and there is no change, there is no battle, there is no war with the flesh, the Spirit within you is not working, you need to examine yourself to see if you're truly trusting in Christ."

So he says these kind of people who live this way and never change will not inherit the kingdom of God. But look what he says in verse 11, "Such were some of you; but you were washed." Look at these, these are all past tense verbs, "you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." So he's saying, "Listen, you still have those desires and you still have the possibility of living consistent with that, and you may still struggle and have some habits that you're fighting against and you need to keep fighting, and the reality is, though, you are not what you desire. You have been washed. You have been sanctified. In fact, when you live according to what you formerly wanted to do in your ignorance, when you are living according to that, you are living the most inauthentic life you could possibly live." The world tells you today be authentic, live by your desires. The Christian, the Bible says be authentic, live by the word of God. Do what God says you are. Be who God says you are. And listen, the world is going to hell in a handbasket because they're doing what they say. They say live authentic according to your desires and look at the misery they're bringing upon themselves. God made us. He knows how he made us. He knows he made us to live according to his design. And so it's our urgent need to be compassionate to these poor lost souls who are listening to the devil ensnared in his kingdom, still in the common realm that need to be made holy, and preach the gospel to them. The way of God unto salvation is a way of God unto the fullness of life. We know that there's nothing but misery in those former desires that were ours in our ignorance, don't we? And we still fight. Isn't it amazing how strong they still are, though? At times you feel how can this sin be so strong? It is and I think one of the reasons God doesn't allow us to get... well, I know one of the reasons he doesn't allow us to get sanctified in our experience quickly is because it makes us cling to him more and more and more desperately every day.

The process, you must say no to those things. Don't be conformed to your inner desires. It's interesting that word "not being conformed," that participle back in our text in verse 14, is the same exact word you find in Romans 12:2, "Do not go on being conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." It's the world's desire to force you into its mold. The world, that is, what's the world, what's that mean? It means the values of the ungodly. The beliefs about life. So Romans 12:2 is talking about the outside influences, wrong beliefs, wrong values, that try to force you into its mold and Paul says there, "Don't go on being conformed to this world but be transformed by

the renewing of your mind." Here in Peter, isn't it interesting he's not talking about what's out there, he's talking about what's in here. He's saying there's not just a conforming pressure from the outside, there's a conforming pressure from the inside. It's not just the enemy is upon me, the enemy is within me. These lustful desires that were ours in our ignorance are still there, and they seem at home and it seems like our oldest, dearest friend sometimes. It feels like that but the way of holiness, the way of victory, is to understand that that is a lie. You have been washed. You have been sanctified. You have been justified. That's no longer who you are. Believe that and be free.

So the negative, resist that, but then positively, we're still on point 2 of the process, I mean of the pursuit of holiness. How do we pursue holiness? Motive. Process. Positively says be yourselves holy or be holy yourselves. The language is emphatic that yourselves belongs there. It doesn't just say be holy. He adds that to it from what he's quoting from Leviticus 11, Leviticus 19, Leviticus 20, refrained throughout the book of Leviticus, "Be holy for I am holy." And the idea of "be holy" means to be separate. When you read those chapters, I encourage you to read that this week, it would be a great thing to do, to read Leviticus, particularly 11 to about 22. And what you see is that God has set the people apart. He chose them for himself. He took the nation, the people out of Egypt, from Egypt, he delivered them. He brings them to Mount Sinai. He's going to take them to the land of Canaan and he says, "Listen, be holy, that is, be like me, don't be like the nations. Don't be like the ungodly people around you. Don't give yourself to the kind of sexual sensuality that they give themselves to. Don't burn your children, offer your children on the altar to Moloch like they do. Don't even eat the same foods they do." This was part of what he was teaching them, the dietary laws. Leviticus 11 is where the first exhortation to be holy is. They were to only eat kosher food, you know, so many things that we eat.

Now the Lord changes this, actually, Peter in Acts 10 is told that he can eat anything now, and God declares all foods clean. He's saying, "Listen, it wasn't about the food itself. It was about holiness. That's why I told them to think about it." And what does that mean? Think about if you couldn't eat anything but kosher, some of you have diets that are like that, some of you have to watch out for, what, peanut butter? Peanuts. Nut allergies. Some of you, you know, some of you may be mistakenly vegans and the Lord's just going to sanctify you out of that. No, but some of you may need to do that for health reasons. I'm not trying to give health counsel here. But there is a better way actually. So you may have particular things that you do with your diet and you strain at that, you're careful about that. He's saying with the dietary laws he was telling the Jews, "Listen, to be holy means that everything that you do needs to be brought into the realm of the sacred, even what you put in your mouth." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God."

So he was teaching them that, "Be holy. Be separate. Be different. Don't try to conform to the world. Don't try to conform to the desires in your own heart, but actively be holy, separate, distinct, devoted to God." That's the process. Now the pattern. Verse 15, "but like the Holy One who called you." Before he gives the command, he says, "like the Holy One who called you." He gives the pattern. You're to pattern yourself after God, the one

who called you. He doesn't just say, "Be holy." He says, "No, look at God, look at His holiness and be like Him."

Turn with me to Isaiah 6. Neil alluded to this when he introduced that wonderful hymn, "Holy, holy, holy," this passage. Isaiah 6, this is one of the high watermarks in all of Scripture. You know, all Scripture is profitable, all Scripture is God-breathed, but there are certain passages that give us glimpses that are a little fuller into the glory of God. This is one of those. Look with me at verse 1, "In the year of King Uzziah's death," Isaiah 6:1, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke." Isaiah then says, "Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.'" This picture of the glory of God, he sees these majestic angels, the seraphim that have six wings. When the seraphim speaks, when they call out to one another, and they're apparently calling out to one another continually, you could also read Revelation 4:8 and following, where you see that apparently seraphim are in heaven continually saying, singing this same refrain, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts." This is what they sing to God. This is what they say about God, that in this truest sense, this is the quintessential attribute of God, his Holiness. He has every wonderful attribute in its perfection. He is goodness. He is righteousness. He is wrath. He is love. He is mercy. He is compassion. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. He is all of those things but his holiness is this quintessential attribute, the one that you could, as R. C. Sproul says, you could put as the adjective before every other attribute. His love is a holy love. His compassion is a holy compassion. His wrath and justice are a holy wrath and holy justice because remember what it means is to be separate and set apart. And in fact, what you see here is it doesn't just mean to belong to be separate and set apart, it means to be, when it comes to God, his distinctness and set apartness is infinite. He is so far above us that we can't even imagine.

And you see this in the seraphim. Now the seraphim, when the seraphim speaks and says, "Holy, Holy, Holy," what happens to the foundation of the temple? Now think about this. It's an angel with six wings. They're calling back and forth to one another and the sound of their voice now made known, Isaiah is in the temple literally. He sees this vision. Apparently nobody else sees it because he's not the only one there. God opens his eyes to see the unseen spiritual realm that is real and that is always there, we just can't see it. He opens his eyes to see it. The seraphim say, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and Isaiah sees that when they just say the word, the foundation of the temple trembles. This glorious massive building shakes when a seraph speaks. Now think about that. A seraph speaks. He's an angel. He's a holy angel. He's a lot greater than you and me. But look back at the text. The seraph has six wings. Why does he have six wings? He has two wings to fly. It's really all you need to fly. That's what birds have. He has four wings to deal with the holiness of the God he worships. With two wings he covers his face and with two wings

he covers his feet, and with two wings he flies. This great being that we could not imagine encountering cannot look upon the holiness of God.

This seraph is a holy angel. That's how it's described other places. The holy angels, they're completely other to us. They are set apart and devoted to God, and yet compared to God, God's holiness so far exceeds their holiness that they must cover their faces and cover their feet. It's God's exceeding glory. This speaks of his moral excellence is so far beyond. I mean, he cannot possibly do evil. He cannot conceive of doing evil. His ethical goodness, he only does that which is good. It's unthinkable to think that God would do anything less than the absolute best. So his moral purity, his ethical goodness, his spiritual majesty, his greatness of being, he is so far above what he has made. The distance between the Creator and the creation, the highest creation, the seraph, the angels are so far from God in his majestic glory. He is the one that we serve. He is the one who has stooped down to become your Father, to love you and to bring you into his presence. You and I who are unworthy could never have been made worthy in our own strength. Christ has made worthy and he brings us into his presence, and that is the pattern. You're to be like him and as you look at him and you look at his holiness and you see his beauty and his goodness and his glory, that even continues to motivate you.

That pattern becomes a motive again and the goal, fourthly, the goal. How do we pursue holiness? We have motive, the process, the pattern, and the goal. The goal is that it come into your conduct. Look what he says back in 1 Peter 1, "be holy yourselves also in all your behavior." The word means you're turning about. It's a word that actually the etymology means to be going one direction and turn to another. But Peter uses it to speak of conduct, in fact, it's the word he's going to use in verse 17 when he says conduct yourselves. Same root word. It means your walk, your life. It means wherever you go, wherever you happen to go, you go over here, be holy. You go over here, be holy. You go over here, be holy. You go over here, be holy in all of it. He says all parts of your daily experience need to be consistent with your essential identity. That's the calling of the Christian, to make every part of your life match up to who you really are, set apart unto God, devoted to him.

The second and third points we're going to get kind of quickly together: illustration and application. The illustration helps us with the application. If you think about an Old Testament priest, now this is one of the pictures that God gave us in the old covenant to prepare for what we are going to be. You're now a kingdom of priests. He says this in chapter 2, verse 9. We're a royal priesthood, kingly priests. Every Christian. You're not just a saint, you're a priest. The Old Testament priest had a priestly code. They had to be from the tribe of Levi. They had to be born into the right family, just as you and I have to be born into the right family. The right family is Christ. Everybody from every tongue and kindred who knows Jesus is born into his family. We're all one family. So the old covenant, though, as God's teaching, it had to be from Levi, it had to be from Moses' descendant. I mean, I'm sorry, Aaron's descendants. And the priest then would be set apart for a rotation. They lived their lives, most the time they were, you know, tending their business wherever they were but when it came time for them to be a priest, what they had to do was they had to do five things essentially. They had to be committed to,

first of all, abstinence. They had to abstain from certain things to get ready to go to Jerusalem to take part in their priestly duty. Among other things, they had to abstain from physical relations, husband/wife relations for a period of time as are getting ready to go to Jerusalem. They had to abstain from touching dead bodies or dealing with unclean animals. If they had to kill, if somebody had to kill a possum or something, they couldn't do it. "I'm getting ready to go to Jerusalem. I can't touch that filthy possum." Who wants to touch that filthy possum anyway, clean or unclean? But it was unclean, and so they couldn't do it. So abstinence, then separation, they've got to leave their home and their family and go to Jerusalem, to the temple. So abstinence separation. Then when they get down to the temple, they've got to undergo ritual cleansing. They had to bathe completely, immerse the whole body in water. Then after that go through ritual washing of their hands and feet. Then they had to go through anointing. Well, first of all, clothing and then anointing. They had to put on priestly garments that were just set apart for this duty and never wore them any other time than just when they went to the temple. And then they were anointed. And now they were ready to worship. Those five things. They were set apart and what they did from morning to evening, from sun-up to sundown was they were all about worshiping God.

Now, what does it mean to be holy? It means that you live your life like that. Let's think about this, this is application. You're going to abstain from certain things. You're going to no longer be conformed to your former lusts. You're going to say no to certain things for the purpose, you don't just say no because you just want to be clean, you don't like how you feel that way. No, you see, holiness, pursuit, laying aside sin is about more pure worship. Do you see that? "So the reason I'm laying this aside is I want to have a clearer vision of Christ, and I want to see him better and worship him more truly. That's why I'm saying no." So abstinence. Separation. I'm willing to separate from certain activities that might be otherwise allowable at times so I can worship the Lord, and sometimes I have to separate completely from that, separate completely from some relationships that are hindering my walk with God. If it's hindering your holiness, separate from it. That's what you're called to do. That's what it means to be holy.

Cleansing. Now we don't go through any kind of washings physically. We don't have to wash our hands or our feet or to take a bath to be clean, but this is talking about the fact cleansing in the Christian life if we want to live a life of holiness, is that you continue to confess your sins and you continue to cling to Christ and his blood. "If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive our sins and to," what? "To cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John 1:9. So we confess our sins regularly. If you want to be holy, you've got to make confession a regular part of your life. That's why we have one of the main reasons we have our confession of sin in the worship service is so that we can together confess our sins to God, acknowledge our sinfulness. "Again, Lord, we come needing the blood of Christ to cleanse us." We know that in Christ we are clean, but we come confessing our sins.

And then clothing in the righteousness of Christ. Whenever we confess our sins, you remember that you have the righteousness of Jesus, put on his garments. It's who you are in Christ, not what you just did. If you sinned and you're confessing it, it's under the

blood, he's washed you, now put on his righteousness, particularly put on whatever the opposite of that was and Jesus, whatever you did that was wrong if it was an outburst of anger, Jesus, his meekness, put on his meekness and go forward in that. Clothe yourself in his righteousness and go act it out and now go confess your sin to the person that you sinned against and ask God to give you meekness and gentleness and humility as you go.

And then the anointing, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit. "Lord, You've got to do what only You can do. Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord."

And so it's these things, it's seeing ourselves as a priest. It's seeing who you are. You are not what you desire and you are certainly not what the world says that you are. You are what God says that you are. If you're in Christ, you are a new creature, you are a priest, and you are here for worship and all of life is to be about worship. This is what holiness means. In all your conduct, in every area of your life, how can I make this an offering to God? How can I offer the way that I work on my yard to God? How can I offer to God the way that I work when things don't work like they should work to God? How can I offer to God the difficult relationship thing that I'm having to work on right now? How can I offer that to God? I need to separate. I need to turn away from the desires that I have, abstain from those things. I need to separate myself from anything of that and understand who I am. I belong to God. Confess my sins. Cleansing myself. Clothing myself in the righteousness of Christ. Looking for the power of the Holy Spirit and then moving forward to do what God has called me to do.

Holiness is about worship, praising and honoring him because he is worthy, and as we do that, as we see his holiness and what happens is it becomes clearer and clearer to us and we want it more and more and more, and this continues the process of growing in holiness. If you've been stuck in a pattern of sin and disobedience, God is calling you today to repent and to return to him, to turn back to him and know that you are not created for your sinful desires. You don't belong to yourself. What am I doing taking my time thinking it's my time? It belongs to Jesus. What am I doing using my members for my purposes, my pleasures? I belong to Jesus. I've got to devote myself to the one who bought me. He's worthy.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the glory of the gospel. Lord, we marvel at the wonder of what You've done for us in Christ. We ask, Lord, that You would create in each of Your people a deeper burning desire to be holy so that we might truly be able to bring every part of our life into Your presence and to enjoy all the blessings of life with an attitude of worship, to enjoy the blessings that You, our Father, have given us in Your presence, actively enjoying it and glorifying You at the same time. Make everything holy, Lord. May Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. For the glory of Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.