

**WHO ARE WE: HOLINESS**  
**(SUNDAY, SEPT. 9, 2012)**

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**Reading:** Leviticus 19; 1 Peter 1:13-16

**Introduction**

We continue in the series Who Are We and What Should That Mean? Today I would like to address the subject of holiness.

**Who Are We?**

We believe that God's Word gives the standard for holiness that all Christians must pursue.

**What should this look like?**

As a local church there should be clear evidence that we seek to live holy lives. We must be careful not to be legalistic but we also must not make the mistake of turning liberty into a license for sin or an excuse for not pursuing true holiness.

This is a very difficult area especially in light of the culture and time in which we live. It is very easy to be hypocritical in seeking to apply God's Word. It is also very easy to be lackadaisical.

I have chosen a passage from 1 Peter 1 that summarizes very well the duty of holiness. There are five main verbs which can be translated as commands in this passage.

First, I will briefly set the context of our passage. Second, we will look at each of these commands. Third, I will present several further points of application.

**1. CONTEXT OF 1 PETER 1:13-16**

If you look carefully at 1 Peter in your Bibles, you will notice that in verses 1-12, Peter does not give any commands, rather in these opening verses he emphasizes and shows the greatness of God's work of salvation! The essence of true faith and true religion is not what you do but what God has done. And of course there is a response. But first there is always the call of a Sovereign God. **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

Do not disgrace the work that God has done by forgetting the order of things. Yes, obedience and holiness are precious in the sight of God, but they are always and only a response and not the beginning or essence of true faith.

In the first 12 verses, Peter testifies to his readers the work of the Triune God in their salvation, the living hope and the future and glorious inheritance that await us, the purpose that God has for our trials and the present and inexpressible and glorious joy that they we should have in Christ. In verses 10-12 Peter writes that the prophets waited and searched for thousands of years to see the fullness of salvation in the sufferings of Christ and the glories of His kingdom. Things which angels desire to look into. This the incredible blessing that God sets before you today in the salvation found in Jesus Christ alone.

Starting with verse 13, Peter gives the first of at least 25 commands or imperatives found in 1 Peter. In verses 13-16, there are 5 main verbs, two which in Greek are direct commands, but the other three verbs depending on your translation can be translated as commands. We won't worry about all the grammatical details here; what we find in verses 13-16 are things you are to be doing and so I will present them as commands.

## **2. FIVE COMMANDS OR ACTIONS YOU MUST DO**

### **1) Gird up the loins of your mind.**

The opening words of verse 13 are difficult to understand in our translations. **Therefore gird up the loins of your mind.** Imagine that instead of what you are wearing this morning, you were instead wearing a long robe. If you suddenly needed to run or work on something, your long robe would easily get in your way, and so before you could do anything you would need to take the bottom portion of your robe and tie it up somehow. Typically this was done by taking that bottom portion of the robe, placing it between your legs and then wrapping it around your waist and keeping it tied up with a belt. This is what is meant by the verb, **gird up**. This word in verse 12, is used only once in the NT, but a very similar word is used in the Greek translation of Exodus 12:11. God instructed the children of Israel in how they were to eat the Passover Meal: "And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD'S Passover." The belt around the waist then meant that the robes of God's people could be lifted up and secured for quickly leaving Egypt.

Obviously Peter is speaking metaphorically. Gird up the loins of your mind. Another translation reads, “get your minds ready for action.”

What is the action that requires that your minds be ready? I think there are two main duties that follow in this section. Make sure your ultimate focus is directed to the triumphant return of Jesus Christ. The second duty requiring a mind ready for action is the duty of holy living. You must have an eternal perspective. With this eternal perspective a careful attention to holy living is also demanded.

The first command then is get your mind ready for action.

## **2) Be sober**

This verb is found six times in the NT and three times in 1 Peter.

The meaning is more than don't be drunk, but it certainly must include this. There is no end of sin and foolish consequences when alcohol is abused. On the other hand, just because you don't drink or you never get drunk, doesn't mean you have kept the full implications of this command. To be sober here means self-control and clarity of mind.<sup>1</sup>

For Peter it is a key quality in the midst of sin, suffering, and Satanic threat. The word is used later in 1 Peter 4:7 and 5:8 in terms of prayer and being watchful against the temptations of the devil.

Perhaps Peter also had in mind the command of Jesus and His failure to follow that command when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane and told to be watch and pray.

The command to be ready to think goes together with the command to be sober.

Think of all the distractions you face that in a real sense can lead to spiritual drunkenness. While it is nice to enjoy hobbies and it certainly is a blessing to be able to relax and enjoy other activities outside our work, we have to be very, very careful that we do not become distracted and irrelevant Christians. Just as wine can be a blessing when used wisely, the same is true for other gifts God gives to us. And just as physical drunkenness is an awful scourge on the family and a sin that some Christians commit, so spiritual drunkenness is a plague to God's people. How careful you must be to make sure that you are seeking to make the most of each day. How careful you must be that

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<sup>1</sup> GNT Key, s.v. 1 Peter 1:13.

you do not become distracted through sports, TV, and other amusements. We should frequently examine our schedules and make sure that we are not missing opportunities for service and value for God's kingdom.

### **3) Set your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

The grace mentioned in this verse is not so much the object of hope, but the basis for our hope. **Set your hope on the foundation of grace.** Peter was not saying that his readers lacked present grace, but rather that their hope, their trust, needed to be grounded in that fulfilled grace which comes with Christ's revelation, when hope becomes visible reality. It is this hope which will sustain them in the hard work of remaining faithful to Christ despite living in a difficult and hostile culture.

One of the most beautiful passages in the Bible which speaks of hope is Psalm 147.

9 He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens that cry.

10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

11 The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.

This command to hope is an important transition point in this first chapter. For if you like Peter's readers will first, fully appreciate and understand the great truth about your salvation, and then be able to patiently wait knowing that you are on a path of life leading to unimaginable heavenly reward, you will be ready to live as God's obedient children.

It should be noted that this is now the third time that Peter speaks of the final return of Christ and the end of this age. He mentions it first at the end of verse 5 and also at the end of verse 7. I don't we often have this as the focus of our hope as we should. Yes, we are rightfully optimistic about the long term future. We believe in the triumph of Christ's kingdom in time. But the ultimate triumph and hope is centered in Christ's coming in victory at the end of all time as we know it. It is this revelation or unveiling that should be our focus. This is to be the foundation of our hope.

What is the connection of being focused on the return of Jesus Christ and the duty of holiness which follows?

I think John Calvin gives a good answer to this question.

For the object of Peter was to call us away beyond the world; for this purpose the fittest thing was the recollection of Christ's coming. For when we direct our eyes to this event, this world becomes crucified to us, and we to the world.

William Gurnall in a similar way stated, "**The nearer to heaven in hopes, the farther from earth in desires.**"<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to know all the distractions and temptations Peter's original listeners would have faced. There was no shortage of sin and temptation for them. But I do think we must live in an age that is more difficult for us to give true attention to the return of Jesus Christ. We have far too many things to direct our attention to the earth.

What is the answer to the distractions of the age? Part of the answer is what is found in verse 13. Get your mind ready to think. Make sure you are spiritually and physically sober. Seek to make sure your life is being directed not just by earthly wants and wishes but your hope is set fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. What can you do to remove distractions and barriers that keep you from obeying what is presented here?

Stephen Travis stated, "The Christian hope is not a matter for tickling our minds, but for changing our minds and influencing society."

#### **4) As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance.**

The word ignorance is used only 4 times in the NT always referring to the time of our lives when we lived without saving knowledge of God. Before we came to saving knowledge of God, we lived in a sinful way not because we just didn't know any better, but because we were ignorant of God. It is not that we just lacked knowledge, but rather we lacked knowledge of God. But if you are now truly one of God's children, you should no longer be conformed to past lusts. Now that you have been given true knowledge of God, you should be able to see that your past desires though momentarily pleasurable, were not only displeasing to God but also produced only misery in your life.

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from Gathered Gold.

The word of God here indicates that a believer at times can be conformed by former lusts. Romans 12:2 uses the same verb. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Conformed means to be shaped by something else. One of the greatest deceptions of sin is that you can control it. But sin and lust end up shaping and controlling you if you do not actively seek to turn from them.

Peter calls us children not because children are always obedient. He also doesn't call us children simply because children are to be obedient. But rather, Peter is reminding His readers that they have been made a part of God's family. If you are a child of the Heavenly Father, how can you live in terms of the worlds lusts and sinful pleasures?

**5) But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”**

John Piper has given an excellent definition for God’s holiness.

God’s Holiness refers to the reality that God is **utterly unique and in a class by Himself**—nothing or no one compares with him. There is no other Creator, no other sustainer, no other final measure of good and evil. He is utterly set apart in a class by Himself, unequaled, unrivaled, totally underived, absolute in his being and perfection, without beginning or ending or improvement. In a word God’s holiness is the supremacy of his infinite worth in among all that is.

This is quite a grand definition. I think it is accurate, but perhaps this definition leaves you thinking, what does this have to do with who I am to be? How does God’s holiness in anyway relate to my own holiness?

There are not many commands in Scripture where you are called to be like God. You are not called to be omnipotent, omniscient, etc. This is a significant command.

A key to understanding this command to answer the questions I just raised is the word **called**. He who **called** you is holy. This is why you are holy and why you must be holy in your conduct.

Our holiness then is not identical to God’s holiness. Rather our holiness comes from God’s perfect holiness.

**Hebrews 12:9-10.** Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, **but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.**

We should never think of holiness apart from directing our thoughts to the holiness of God. Too often you can be motivated by what other people will think of you, either good or bad. Too easily our motivation can be even to impress ourselves and feel a certain amount of pride because of something that we have done or perhaps even a sin that we have resisted. But all of these are very weak motivations for true holiness in comparison to meditating and thinking on the holiness of God.

Before the children of Israel were called to be God's Holy people, they were brought before His mighty presence at Mt. Sinai so that they would see and know Him in His awesome power and holiness. When Isaiah was prepared for His mission, he wasn't given an inspirational talk, but rather given a glimpse of the holiness and majesty of God. It was this vision that both overwhelmed him and then prepared him to be a prophet and messenger for God.

**Psalm 96:9** Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.

The end of Hebrews 12 motivates us in a similar way. (Heb. 12:28-29) Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

A frequent prayer that you should then pray is that God would help you to truly know Him in His awesome majesty, power, glory, and holiness. This is in other words, the fear of the Lord. And when this is lost, so too is lost the proper incentive and motivation for holiness.

So what does it mean that we are called to be holy? What is holiness for the Christian? A simple definition is this: holiness is separation from sin and service to God, defined through God's Law Word, and accomplished through the working of the Holy Spirit.

At least 10 times throughout Scripture, the command to **Be Holy** is given. It must be one of the most repeated commands in Scripture. It is not just reserved for a special

category of God's people but for all those who believe and trust in Christ for salvation. It should be at the highest priority for every Christian to be holy in our words, actions, feelings, and thoughts.

The command that we be holy also is also not a purely individualistic command. Yes, it is something that we must do individually, but it also something that we do together. Individually and together we are called to be God's holy people. This is in part why Peter quotes these words from Leviticus 19. He was again emphasizing that his readers together were God's people even as Israel was called to be God's people, individually and together.

Our goal then should not be to "out-holy" each other, but rather to encourage each other to live as God's holy people. Let us not forget this corporate dimension and priority.

At the end of verse 15, Peter states, you also be holy in all your **conduct**. Peter uses the word conduct 7 times in 1 and 2 Peter. Conduct means the way that you live your life with an emphasis on the idea that you live according to what you believe. Every action then should be a reflection of what we claim to believe according to God's Word. Since Scripture speaks to all of life, there are no areas that escape the call to holy living.

### **3. FURTHER APPLICATION AND CONSIDERATION**

Christians have for many years thought about what it means to be holy. Entire movements in Christianity have begun over new ways to attain or maintain true holiness. Some of these movements have started because so many Christians are lax about the subject and show very little interest in seeking after holiness. There are two main dangers - legalism and compromise. Legalism sets up man-made rules and expects others to live according to those rules. Compromise is based on the idea that as long as I maintain some basic belief in God then I can live as close to the world as possible. Both errors negatively affect the church and are temptations for us individually.

We read earlier from Leviticus 19. Holiness there was defined with about 15 categories. It is interesting that the first principle in that chapter is reverence. "Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father." The second command, keep my Sabbaths. God is the one who owns us and our time. The third category, idolatry. Be careful that nothing takes the priority of God. Be careful that you don't start trusting in other



things. Then follow laws dealing with worship, and laws on how we deal with other people, including making sure that we encourage and help those who are poor. **Most of our questions concerning holiness I believe are answered nearly directly in Scripture.** For children and young men and women still under the direct authority of your parents, it is even more clear. Obey what you are told to do by your parents. That is the path to holiness. To resist your parents is to resist God, Himself.

But this is not to say that everything is explicitly answered in Scripture. Questions still may remain for example concerning entertainment, clothing, the outward appearance of our bodies, and similar questions. But even where we can't always turn to a direct verse, Scripture still speaks. Again, for those of you who are under your parent's authority, you must respect and follow their decisions in these areas. As adults we can look to the advice of other godly men and women on issues. And the question that we should be asking always is, do my choices and actions reflect a pursuit of holiness and service for the Lord? Do my choices in areas where I can't just look up a verse, reflect a desire to follow the Lord or simply what I want to do?

And it is also in these questions that we have to be careful to respect the decision that others may make. We also have to seek not to give offense needlessly to other people. We may not all agree in every area, and we have to be careful that we don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

For you younger men and women this is especially a challenge that you must take up as you are given greater responsibility. **Do your choices reflect the honest and fervent pursuit of holiness or simply your own pleasures?**

When it comes to drinking, Scripture is quite clear. Drunkenness is sin. There should absolutely be no place or tolerance for this sin in our lives.

**Ephesians 5:18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.

Dissipation is not a common word. A synonym would be licentiousness, the actions and desires that we would associate with a pagan lifestyle. If in your drinking you end up looking and living like the world, you clearly are not walking in holiness.

Entertainment is more difficult for there are so many choices and forms.

In entertainment I think one great danger is to say that what I watch or listen to doesn't affect me. But that is the wrong thing to say. If something didn't affect you, why would

you choose to listen or watch? We listen to music, we watch movies, because they do affect us! They bring some satisfaction to us. When we say they don't affect us, we mean, watching this movie or listening to this particular music is not causing me to directly go out and commit some sin. But is this the standard for what is pleasing and acceptable before God?

**Eph. 5:4** neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

**Phil. 4:8** Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

As a final encouragement and challenge to parents, let me state that the great challenge that we have is not just in setting rules, but in helping our sons and daughters see the beauty of holiness and the joy that comes in serving God.

## **Prayer**

### **Closing Hymn - 95**

#### **BENEDICTION - JUDE 24, 25**

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.