

Prayer: Oh Lord, by the power of your holy spirit, enable me to live a holy life so I can represent Christ on earth. Help me walk with you in holiness so that I will fulfill my destiny and the purpose of my existence in Jesus name. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, Lord my rock and redeemer. Amen.

“Becoming a Fat Hog for Jesus - Holy”

A California driver’s license examiner told about a teenager who had just driven an almost perfect test. “He made his only mistake,” said the examiner, “when he stopped to let me out of the car. After breathing a sigh of relief, the boy exclaimed, ‘I’m sure glad I don’t have to drive like that all the time!’” (Reader’s Digest [1/84].)

That boy was like a lot of churchgoing Americans. They put on a good front when they know someone is watching, but the rest of the time they let down their standards. There’s not much difference between them and those in the world, except that they go to church a little more. The divorce rate among Christians is about the same as in society at large. In fact, the third highest divorce rate occupationally, after doctors and police, goes to pastors! Christians watch the same TV shows and movies for the same number of hours weekly as everyone else. Christian youths are involved in sexual immorality to the same extent as those not naming Christ as Savior. Many Christian businessmen have a bad reputation. It would seem that our Christianity doesn’t have much effect on the way we live.

I know of no text that needs to be seared into the thinking and hearts of American Christians more than 1 Peter 1:13-16. Writing to many who had come from pagan backgrounds, living in a pagan society where there was great pressure to conform, Peter calls his readers to holiness in light of the coming of Jesus Christ and the holy character of the God who calls us to salvation. He makes three points:

To be holy people, we must be focused on Christ’s coming, obedient in all of life, and growing in our knowledge of God’s holiness.

The word “holy” means to be separate. When applied to God, it points to His transcendence, that He is above and beyond His creation in such a way as to be distinct from it. Contained in the word is the notion of God’s purity, that He is totally separate from all sin. When God calls us to holiness, it means that we are to be set apart from the world unto God, separate from all sin. But since sin dwells in the very core of our being as fallen creatures, how can we ever hope to be holy?

There are three senses in which we are holy (or “sanctified”) as God’s people. The moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, we are positionally sanctified or set apart unto God. Then we must be progressively sanctified by growing in holiness. This process will not be complete as long as we’re in this body, but we must actively work at it (Galatians. 5:16; Romans. 8:13). When we meet the Lord, we will be perfectly sanctified, made completely like Him (1 John 3:2).

These three aspects of sanctification can be illustrated with a little girl with a new lollipop. She sees her friend coming and knows that she should share her lollipop, but she doesn’t want to. So, she sets apart that lollipop unto herself by licking it all over. Now it’s hers. Then she starts licking it to make it progressively hers. Finally, the process is over when the lollipop is completely gone. If we belong to God, He has set us apart unto Himself. He is progressively making us like Him. And someday we will be completely like Him.

Let me make it plain at the outset that you cannot get to heaven by striving to be holy. Good works cannot pay the penalty for our sins. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can satisfy the justice of God. We must put our trust in Him, not in our good works. But, if our faith in Christ to save us is genuine, it will result in a life of progressive holiness. If a person is not striving against sin and seeking to grow in holiness, it is doubtful whether their faith was saving faith. Scripture says, “Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrew 12:14, NIV).

Peter shows how we can develop a holy lifestyle as those who have trusted in Christ. To be holy people, we must be focused on Christ’s coming (1:13). The point is, holiness begins in your thought life. What you think determines how you live. One of the most practical things I can tell you about living the Christian life is: deal with sin on the thought level! Judge wicked thoughts the instant you have them, confess them to God and replace them with thoughts of Him and His Word. If you are envious of someone, judge it, confess it, and ask God to replace it with His love for that person. As Paul put it, take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). It’s on the thought level that your Christianity is either real or fake. You can fool everyone else, but God knows your thoughts. If you’re faking it and not cultivating a holy thought life, sooner or later it’s going to come out in the open in some form of sin that everyone can see.

Peter says that we must fix our hope completely on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Holiness begins in our minds as we think often of our

Savior and the gracious salvation we will fully experience when He returns and we are changed into His likeness!

To be holy people, we must be obedient to the Father in all of life (1:14, 15b). There are three things involved in such obedience: we must make a break with our past lifestyle. “Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance” (1:14). The word “conformed” is used only one other time in the New Testament, by Paul in Romans 12:2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Phillips paraphrases it, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within ...”

To be holy people, we must be growing in our personal knowledge of God’s holiness (1:15, 16). “Like the Holy One who called you,” and “You shall be holy for I am holy,” imply that we know something about who this Holy God is. The Christian life is a process of growing to know God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. This knowledge of the Holy One has a transforming effect on our lives. We can never be as holy as God is holy, since such absolute holiness belongs to God alone. But we can and must grow in personal holiness as we grow to know our Holy God.

We are a bit superficial and shallow in our knowledge of God in our day. Many Christians talk about God without any fear of the awesomeness of His absolute holiness. It was Isaiah who had that vision of God on His throne with the angels crying, “Holy, holy, holy.” As both A. W. Tozer (*The Knowledge of the Holy* [Harper & Row], p. 110) and Sproul (pp. 41-44) point out, it was an emotionally violent, personally disintegrating experience. Sproul writes (p. 45), “In the flash of a moment Isaiah had a new and radical understanding of sin. He saw that it was pervasive, in himself and in everyone else.” To whatever extent we gain insight on the holiness of God, we will gain equal insight on the magnitude of our sin. At the same time, we will revel in the amazing grace of God who saved us through the cross of Jesus Christ. That knowledge will make us more holy in all our behavior.

Today I’m probably speaking to some whom God is calling to repent of sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. I may be speaking to others who are faking the Christian life outwardly, but inwardly, you’re not living in holiness. You’re not dealing with sin in your thought life. It’s only a matter of time until you fall outwardly. I may be speaking to yet others who have fallen outwardly. Your life is not right before God, even though you profess to know Christ as Savior.

The solution is the same for all: turn to God from your sin and appeal to Him for a clean conscience and an obedient heart, based on the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for you. Listen to what God says in Isaiah 57:15: “For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” That’s good news! God, though He is altogether holy and exalted, stoops to dwell with those who humble themselves before Him! Like the father of the prodigal son, God joyfully welcomes all who turn back to Him!

Leonard Ravenhill has written, “The greatest miracle that God can do today is to take an unholy human out of an unholy world, and make that human holy and put them back into that unholy world and keep them holy in it.” God does it as we focus on Christ’s coming, as we’re obedient in all of life, and as we grow in our personal knowledge of God’s holiness. Amen.