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## DEVELOPING A HOLY LIFESTYLE

1 Peter 1:13-16

by

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1 Peter Lesson 5

## DEVELOPING A HOLY LIFESTYLE 1 Peter 1:13-16

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 burned into the thinking 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 (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:13). When we meet the Lord we will be perfectly sanctified, made completely like Him (1 John 3:2).

Dr. Ryrie illustrates these three aspects of sanctification 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 his faith was saving faith. Scripture says, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, NIV).

Peter shows us three ways that we can be developing a holy lifestyle as those who have trusted in Christ:

1. To be holy people, we must be focused on Christ's coming (1:13).

The Greek text has only two commands in 1:13-16: "Fix your hope"; and, "Be holy." The other action words are participles which are dependent on the main verbs. Thus the sense of 1:13 is, "Girding your

minds for action, keeping sober, fix your hope completely on the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Thus the command is to have a determined focus on the grace that will come to us when Christ returns. There are three aspects of this focus:

A. Holy living in light of Christ's coming begins in the mind.

"Gird up the loins of your mind" is a figure of speech stemming from the fact that the men in that day wore long outer robes which got in the way when they needed to run, work or fight in a battle. So they would tuck their robes into a belt so that they wouldn't be a hindrance. We might use the expression, "Roll up your sleeves." The idea is, be mentally prepared for combat or action in the realm of holiness. One commentator puts it: "We must begin to act as those who mean business" concerning this matter of holiness (Alan Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, Tyndale N.T. Commentaries [Eerdmans], p. 85).

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. If you are lusting after a woman (or man), deal with it instantly. Flee from it, both mentally and physically! As Paul put it, take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 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. There isn't anyone who ever committed adultery who didn't first entertain the thought in his mind.

You need to guard what enters your mind as carefully as you guard what you eat. You wouldn't think of eating garbage from the gutter because it would make you sick. If you feed your thoughts daily on the sensual, materialistic garbage on TV and in the other media and you seldom feed on God's Word, you will not become a holy man or woman. 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!

B. Holy living in light of Christ's coming requires spiritual alertness.

"Being sober" (1:13) is a favorite word for Peter (he uses it 3 of its 6 uses in the New Testament-- 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). It literally means "not drunk," but obviously has a spiritual application, meaning to be alert and self-controlled. It refers to clarity of mind and the resulting good judgment. The noun is used as a qualification of elders and women who serve as deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:2, 11, "temperate").

Peter uses it in 5:8: "Be sober, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." If a literal lion were on the loose outside, it wouldn't be wise to go for a stroll out there! You wouldn't be goofing off. You'd be on the lookout for any sign of it. You'd make sure your kids were indoors. You'd warn them sternly of the dangers. You'd take every precaution so that you wouldn't become his next meal!

The point is, we live in enemy territory. If you feed your mind on the garbage of the world and don't feed on God's Word, it's like getting drunk and staggering outside when there's a lion on the prowl. You're dead meat! You're not going to be a holy person. Maybe you're thinking, "This sounds kind of legalistic!" But notice:

C. Holy living in light of Christ's coming is motivated by grace.

"Fix your hope completely on the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." God's grace is the motivation for holy living. As I mentioned last week, the word here and in 1:10 is used as a synonym for our salvation. The "therefore" in 1:13 also points us back to the great salvation Peter talks about in 1:3-12. The present participle, "being brought to you" hints at the fact that we've already begun to enjoy what God is going to unveil completely when Christ returns. The word "brought" "underscores the sovereign action of God in bringing

grace to his people" (J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary 1 Peter* [Word], p. 56).

Why does Peter tell us to focus on the grace that will be brought to us when Christ returns rather than on the grace we've already received? I can't be dogmatic, but I think it's because his readers were going through intense trials. Peter is telling them, "You've already tasted of God's salvation in Christ, but you ain't seen nothin' yet! Just hang on through the trials and focus on the fact that God is going to bless you beyond what you can imagine, not based on what you deserve, but based on His undeserved favor!" That future grace should motivate us to live holy lives right now, no matter how much we suffer.

Thus the first aspect of developing a holy lifestyle is to focus on Christ's coming, being alert in our thinking, motivated by God's grace.

2. 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:

- A. 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 [there's that concept again!] 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 mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within ..."

Our past lifestyle was marked by our efforts to fulfill selfish desires. The word "lusts" (1 Pet. 1:14) refers not only to sexual lust, but "to all kinds of self-seeking, whether directed toward wealth, power, or pleasure" (Michaels, p. 57). It brings out the strong emotional tug of temptation and sin. These lusts have full sway in unbelievers because they are ignorant of God and His holiness and grace as revealed in His Word. But as Christians, growing in our knowledge of God, we don't have to be controlled by selfish desires. We make a break with the self-

centered living that marked us before we met Christ and now live under His lordship and for His purposes.

I think this explains much of the shallow Christianity of our day. People “invite Jesus into their heart” because they’re told that He will give them an abundant life. If they like what Jesus is doing for them, if they feel that their lives are happier now than before, they’ll let Jesus “stay in office.” But they’ve never made a break with their past life. They’ve never repented of sin or yielded to Christ as Lord. They’re still running their own lives, living for the same selfish desires they formerly lived for. The only difference is that now they’re trying to “use Jesus” to fulfill selfish desires. That’s not saving faith. Saving faith involves repentance. It makes a break with the past lifestyle and seeks to follow Jesus as Lord.

B. We must establish a habit of obedience.

“As obedient children” (1:14) is a Hebrew expression that means “characterized by obedience,” or “habitual obedience.” The implication is that God is our Heavenly Father whom we obey. His Word tells us how He wants us to live. We ought to obey God as a conditioned response. Such obedience is not legalism, but rather should characterize those under grace. Peter quotes from the Law (Lev. 19:2) and applies it directly to his readers under grace: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” We are not under the ceremonial or civil laws of Israel. But God’s moral law stems from His holy nature and is just as applicable under grace as it was under law (see 1 Cor. 9:21). As God’s children, we need to get in the habit of asking, “What does God’s Word say?” Then we obey it.

C. We must erase the distinction between sacred and secular.

“Be holy yourselves in all your behavior” (1:15b). The word behavior is another favorite for Peter (6 of 13 New Testament uses are in 1 Peter, with two more in 2 Peter). It refers to conduct or, what we would call “lifestyle.” That Peter here links “holiness” with “behavior” and adds the word “all” is significant because many pagan religions of that time separated “cultic holiness” from everyday life. Peter is saying that our separation unto God is to affect every area of life, both private

and public. There is no such thing as secular life that is not sacred for the Christian.

J. I. Packer, in his excellent book, *A Quest for Godliness* [Crossway], subtitled, "The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life," makes the point that the Puritans did a good job of integrating their Christianity into every aspect of life, from the most intimate aspects of married life to the most public aspects of political and social life. He writes (pp. 23-24), "There was for them no disjunction between sacred and secular; all creation, so far as they were concerned, was sacred, and all activities, of whatever kind, must be sanctified, that is, done to the glory of God."

That kind of integrated living eliminates hypocrisy. There's nothing that turns people off more than to see someone who professes to be a Christian, but whose lifestyle denies it. Kids read it loud and clear in their parents. This doesn't mean that you must be perfect. It means that you live with integrity, confessing sin when you blow it, making your Christianity practical in every aspect of life. We're the only "Bible" many unbelievers will ever read. Just as we can learn quite a bit about a father by watching his children, so the world learns about our Heavenly Father by watching His children. That means that we must learn to obey our Father in all of life.

Thus, to be holy people we must be focused on Christ's coming and obedient in all of life.

3. 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.

Both Stephen Charnock, in his classic work, *The Existence and Attributes of God* ([Baker], 2:112) and, more recently, R. C. Sproul, in his

*The Holiness of God* ([Tyndale], p. 40), point out that no other attribute of God is elevated to the third degree. The Bible never says of God, "Eternal, eternal, eternal," or "Love, love, love," or "Mercy, mercy, mercy." But it does say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3).

We are a bit flippant 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. John MacArthur tells about a well-known charismatic pastor who told him that sometimes in the morning when he's shaving, Jesus comes into his bathroom and puts His arm around him and they talk together. I like John's incredulous reply: "And you keep shaving?!" Every time in the Bible someone gets a glimpse of Christ in His resurrected glory, the person falls on his face!

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.

### Conclusion

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: To 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, condescends 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 (source unknown), "The greatest miracle that God can do today is to take an unholy man out of an unholy world, and make that man holy and put him back into that unholy world and keep him holy in it." He 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.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some practical ways to develop a holy thought life?
2. Is God's grace opposed to or coupled with human effort in the matter of growing in holiness? Cite biblical evidence.
3. Is it legalistic to obey God even when we don't feel like it? Why/why not?
4. Should God's holiness create fear in us? How can we be intimate with such a Holy God?

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