

## Week 5 - Live Holily - 1Peter 1:13-16

### Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:12-17

#### Introduction

I have a book on my shelves in my home office called “Garner’s Modern American Usage - Third Edition” that claims to be the “authority on grammar, usage, and style”

What the rather thick book does is trace the changes in the way the English language is being used today

And it’s an amazing book as it shows how the very definition of certain words and phrases have been changed through popular misuse

Take one of my pet peeves as an example:

You see and hear people use the phrase “that begs the question” all the time to mean “that invites the obvious follow-up question”

However, the classical meaning of “beg the question” is to base a conclusion on an assumption that is as much in need of proof as the conclusion itself -

Begging the question, therefore, should be used to indicate a specific breakdown in logic when making an argument - but you almost never hear it used that way anymore

In most cases, the metamorphosis of language isn’t truly harmful and only serves to irritate word nerds and sometimes confuse the understanding of modern readers who come across the words used classically in older literature

Sometimes, though, the meaning of words matters greatly and the changes society inflicts on them can have serious consequences

Take “holiness” for example

Our trusty Webster’s 1913 Dictionary defines holiness as “the state or quality of being holy”

That seems fair enough but leaves us with the question, “What does ‘holy’ mean?”

Webster defines “holy” as:

1. Set apart to the service or worship of God; sacred, reserved from profane or common use
2. Spiritually whole or sound; free from sinful affections; pure in heart; godly; pious; irreproachable; guiltless; acceptable to God

Garner doesn’t have an entry for “holy” in his usage manual but, if he did I suspect it might say holy = “nerd” for most people and maybe holy = “better than that other guy” in church circles

Sadly, we’ve largely lost connection with true holiness even in the church as there is little besides church attendance that differentiates us from the world around us - many surveys and studies have revealed that sad truth

As we look around and even as we look into the mirror, we could easily be said to be living as the people lived in the time of the Judges with everyone doing what is right in their own eyes

But Webster had it right and being holy means being the opposite of common or profane - to be holy is to be “separate”

By that definition, God is the most holy being there is as he is utterly different and distinct from all that he has created

Therefore, God sets the standard for what it means to be holy and being holy means to be like God

In the section of Peter’s letter before us this morning, Peter turns to the subject of holiness

And in verse 16, he quotes from **Leviticus 11:44** where God commanded, “*Be holy, for I am holy*”

Those words can't help but provoke a reaction because we believe what God commands us to do is impossible

After all, we know we are born with a sin nature - the Bible makes that quite clear - and holiness like God's seems unattainable for us because of our fallen nature

However the Bible also tells us that holiness has three different facets

In a legal sense, God has declared each believer holy at the time of their salvation by the imputation of Christ's righteousness making us **positionally** holy before God

And every believer will be made **perfectly** holy when we meet the Lord in heaven

But while we remain as sojourners upon this earth we are expected to become **progressively** more holy each day

It's that third aspect of holiness that Peter is addressing in our passage

Please open your Bible and join me in 1Peter 1 and follow along as I read verses 13-16 where Peter writes [**1Peter 1:13-16**]:

*Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

Whenever we see the word "therefore" in the Bible we should immediately ask, "What is it there for?"

"Therefore" signifies a causal relationship and in this case it refers to the great salvation blessing that Peter has just explained in verse 3-12

So Peter is saying because of the blessings that are theirs, his readers should do something and that something is that they should think and act in the way he is about to explain

And he gives three commands that, when obeyed, will lead a follower of Christ to develop a holy lifestyle

To be the holy people God wants us to be, we must live in **expectant anticipation**, live as **obedient non-conformists**, and live **like God**

Let's begin by looking at verse 13 where Peter says we must live in expectant anticipation of the second coming of Christ

## **I. Live in Expectant Anticipation**

Peter writes that this kind of expectant living requires three things:

First, says we must have a **grace-focused motivation** - the actual command he issues is "*set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*"

Holy living is therefore motivated by God's grace and specifically the grace that is to come when Christ returns

One of the things we saw last week that makes our salvation great is that it is according to God's grace

So that we know that God saves us not because we've earned or merit our salvation in any way but simply because he chooses to save us

Salvation is a free gift that cost God a great deal and it's a gift that we have already begun to enjoy here and now even though we won't experience it fully until Christ returns

We will be observing the Lord's Table later on this morning and we will read from 1Corinthians 11 how Jesus commanded this ordinance be observed in remembrance of him and what he has already done for us

So we do well to remember the grace that has already been extended to us but we also do well to anticipate the grace that God will bring to us when his Son returns

Living a life of expectant anticipation of what God is going to do makes whatever we go through as sojourners much more bearable and motivates us to continue to steadfastly live holy lives in spite of suffering

But to live our lives at this level of hopeful expectation requires us to have the right kind of mind

First, it requires a **prepared mind** - a Christ-follower must be mentally ready to serve God

Peter writes [**1Peter 1:13a**]: *Therefore, preparing your minds for action*

The Greek phrase translated “preparing your minds” literally says to “gird up the loins of your mind”

That’s an expression that is largely foreign to us today but back in Peter’s day, when all people tended to wear long, flowing robes, those robes were fine for just walking around or performing light tasks

But when a person had to do any kind of physical work or to fight or even to walk fast or run, those robes had to be gathered up between one’s legs and tied off to get them out of the way so as to free one’s legs for action

Today, a sort of parallel expression we might use is, “Roll up your sleeves”

The idea is, be mentally prepared for the task of holiness - after all holiness always involves effort and sometimes it’s a fight

God’s people must be mentally prepared and focused because holiness begins in the mind

There is an old adage that says, “You are what you eat” but it’s also true to say “How you think is going to be how you live” and we are to take every thought captive to obey Christ as Paul put it in **2Corinthians 10:5**

And just as having a healthy diet puts you on the path to a healthy life, so too does having a holy thought life put you on the road to a holy life

In **Philippians 4:8** Paul writes:

*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

We would never eat a diet of junk food expecting to have a physique like Charles Atlas but somehow we expect that we can feed our minds on the junk food of the world and not have it affect our holiness and that’s just plain foolish

If you want a mind that is prepared for holiness so that you can live a holy life, feed in on God’s Word and thereby train it to think God’s thoughts

The second kind of mind Peter says we must have is a **well-composed mind**

Being “sober-minded” means to be in control of one’s thoughts so as to avoid thinking irrationally

Far too often we lack vigilance and we allow our minds to wander into a kind of mental intoxication that inhibits our spiritual alertness

Or we can lapse into mental laziness and wander into sin through carelessness

Peter recognized just how difficult it is for a Christ-follower who is living as a sojourner to not lose their focus when surrounded by the things of this world -

We can easily fall into a kind of dissipation of the mind and become unfocused or begin to focus on the wrong things and hinder our holiness

So Peter commands the Christ-follower to be mentally prepared and to maintain control over their thought life and live in expectant anticipation of the glory that God will bring to them at the return of Christ

Next, Peter writes that if we want to be the holy people God wants us to be, we must live as obedient non-conformists

## **II. Live as Obedient Non-conformists**

That almost seems like an oxymoron like a jumbo shrimp or old news or a working vacation doesn’t it?

But Peter begins verse 14 by pointing out that we need to have a **recognition of our relationship with God**

How many of you, like me, were warned when you were younger not to do anything that would bring shame to your family's name?

I grew up in a relatively small town where news travelled fast and, frankly, there were family names in our town that had a bad reputation

So we were told to consider everything we might do in light of the reality of how it would reflect on our family

As Christ-followers, we are members of God's family and how we live reflects on our heavenly Father

We may not like it and we may wish it were different, but, when people discover we are a Christ-follower, everything we do reflects on God

That's why Jesus taught his followers in **Matthew 5:16** to *"let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"*

And Peter writes that we should be "obedient children" signifying that we can bring God glory by doing what God commands

Paul expands on that thought in **1Corinthians 10:31** - *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"*

As God's spiritual children we should want to please him and bring honor to his name and we do that by doing the things he wants us to do

And Peter says being successful in that endeavor, requires we **break with our past**

He writes in verse 14 [**1Peter 1:14**] *"do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance"*

The only other place that word, "conformed," is used in the New Testament is found in a similar passage, **Romans 12:2**, where Paul writes:

*Do not be conformed to this world...*

As a former Toolmaker who worked in the metal stamping industry, this idea of conformity brings up the image of a die stamping an image into a piece of metal

If you've ever had the opportunity to visit one of the U.S. Mints and see the presses pumping out coins by the thousands you will understand that concept

To be conformed means to take on the imprint of something else and, in the case of a life, to pattern one's actions after a pattern of behavior

And how Peter characterizes the wrong pattern seems at first glance to be more than a little harsh and insulting

But it is accurate

Again we look to the apostle Paul for expansion on this theme as he writes in **Ephesians 4:17-18**

*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*

I always say there is no shame in ignorance as long as one is willing to be informed because ignorance is nothing more than a lack of knowledge that can be fixed with education

Peter's first-century readers had been saved out of a culture that was steeped in the ignorance of paganism that was ignorant of God and his ways

And they were still living in the midst of people likely including friends and family who were still living in ignorance and the pull to return to those ways had to be quite strong - the same as it is for many Christ-followers today

The fact that Peter uses the passive voice in saying “do not be conformed” shows that we are, to some extent at least, acted upon by forces outside of ourselves trying to force us into their mold

Whatever is customary in our surroundings begins to seem normal and whatever is normal can seem to be right

The siren-song of former lifestyle is very real for many; however, the Christ-follower must recognize that pull for what it is and strive to not allow their lives to be influenced by those desires that are characterized by ignorance

Then, contrary to the way many followers of Christ try to live, this is a **whole-life remake** that makes no distinction between the sacred and the secular

A great many people live like Christians when people are watching, like on Sunday, but then they reduce their standards and live more like pagans the rest of the week

But in verse 15, Peter says that the followers of Christ are to “*be holy in all [their] conduct*”

Perhaps you’ve had the experience of having your church friends meet your non-church friends and felt a twinge of anxiety as you worried that getting the two groups together might not be such a good idea

We call that having worlds collide as we fear that the two groups might actually compare notes about us and discover that our lives aren’t quite what they seem to be

Holiness isn’t meant to be restricted to a specific sphere of our lives - like when we’re around our church friends - but a whole-life way of being that is who we truly are wherever we are

We must pattern our life after our heavenly Father, in other words, we need to strive to live like God

### **III. Live Like God**

After saying how we should not live, Peter writes about our pattern for living in verse 15 [**1Peter 1:15**] -

*But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*

Notice the reversal that is brought about by the pattern “do not...but”

Do not do x but do y

And then he gives the reason in verse 16 [**1Peter 1:16**] -

*Since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

Again, in verse 16 Peter quotes from **Leviticus 11:44** as he reveals why Christ-followers should be holy

And the reason is simple - it’s because “*it is written*”

That means it is written in Scripture making it relevant and binding

And God didn’t just command it once he repeated the command to be holy because he is holy three more times in the book of **Leviticus in 19:2; 20:7; and 20:26**

When God tells us to do something once it’s authoritative and he means for us to obey and he says four times that the basis for requiring us to be holy is his holiness

God delights in his own glory and in the things that reflect his glory

**And if we are going to mirror God’s holiness we need to understand all we can about God and his holiness**

God’s moral character is the ultimate basis for ethics and the final reason that some things are right and others are wrong and why there are moral absolutes in the universe is because of God’s holiness

God is utterly distinct from his creation - he is completely “other” in his being and separate

In **Isaiah 46:9** we see God declare: “*I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me*”

God is the holiest being there is and he is the most set-apart and morally pure being there could ever be

In **Isaiah 6:3**, when Isaiah saw his vision of the Lord on his throne in heaven he saw him surrounded by seraphim who called to one another *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts...”*

And in **Revelation 4:8**, John saw the four living creatures before the throne of the Lord endlessly proclaiming *“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come”*

We need to note that no other attribute of God is raised to the power of three in Scripture even though God is the ultimate embodiment of those attributes

While the Bible says God is love, for example, it nowhere says that God is love, love, love

Perhaps we’ve become too accustomed to things that should fascinate us because the technology that surrounds us makes what seemed impossible yesterday commonplace today

But, whatever the reason, we have largely lost our sense of awe about God

In my studies, I ran across a story that serves to illustrate that point:

Pastor John MacArthur told about a charismatic pastor friend of his who told John that Jesus often appeared to him in the morning while he was shaving.

MacArthur was rightly taken aback, so he asked some questions to make sure that he understood this pastor correctly.

The pastor assured MacArthur that Jesus Christ actually appeared to him often as he was shaving, put his arm around his shoulders, and talked with him.

And MacArthur’s final incredulous question was, *“And you keep shaving?”*

God is different, God is other, and God is devoted to seeking his own honor

God is also totally removed from sin he cannot abide sin and he will not tolerate it in his presence

The prophet Habakkuk described the character of God and God’s view of evil in **Habakkuk 1:13a** by saying – *You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong...*

And the psalmist declares in **Psalms 5:4** –

*You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.*

Likewise, our attitudes and actions must be different from those that characterize unbelievers

We must reflect God’s glory and be examples of God’s holiness and that will make us distinct from those around us

And we must, like God, see sin as the completely abhorrent thing it is and not only refuse to practice it but to flee from its presence

In so doing, our holiness will become progressively more like God’s and we will glorify God with our lives

The idea of holiness for God’s people includes a specifically moral sense of separation from evil and dedication to a life of righteousness - a pattern of life that transforms every day, moment, thought, and action to bring glory to God

## Conclusion

If you have grasped the lesson of today's message, you know how difficult the commands before us are

God's call to us to be holy isn't what many in churches today want to hear - they prefer to believe that God has called us to be happy rather than holy

But the thing we don't ever want to forget is that, as God's children, our happiness will be found in our progressive walk toward holiness because holiness is the preferred state of us as new creatures in Christ

It's only natural for a child to want to be like their parent - my grandson Will just this past week picked out clothes to wear so that he could imitate his dad

God wants us to be holy just like him and we should want the same thing

So we need to keep our focus on the return of Christ when we will reap rewards that will make all of our struggling and suffering of this life pale to insignificance

We must strive to live as obedient children who refuse to conform to the pattern of this fallen world and live lives that are distinct from those around us

So that we might be proper reflections of the holiness and glory of God as we grow in holiness to be like our Father in heaven

**Hebrews 12:12-17 (page 1009)**

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.