

“Growing Up”

1 Peter 1:14-16

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (ESV)

HOPE
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Introduction

There is a temptation to read the Bible as if it was all about us. Every passage suddenly takes on a deep and uniquely personal meaning. And while seeking to process the Bible and apply it can be a good thing, we must do so with its intended perspective, not the one we wish it had. It is somewhat akin to joining a conversation already in progress and saying, "enough about you, let's talk about me." We were confronted with the reality that the world as God made it doesn't revolve around us, but that he is the sovereign creator, savior and sanctifier; it is his acts that bring us to rejoice and worship the LORD.

Last week we hit the first of Peter's commands, HOPE. The hoping was a sober-minded and intentional focus on Christ. This may have seemed somewhat manageable and you could have said to yourself, "this is something I can handle." Our self-sufficiency is quickly stripped away though with Peter's second command, repeated with emphasis, BE HOLY. We must be confronted with the monumental nature of this task. This is like turning a bend in the road and finding that you've come to a mountain pass, there is no way around, just up and over. This is serious business, this command to be holy. God's holiness isn't simply a pleasant fragrant holiness, but an awesome and fearful one. The LORD is so separate and otherworldly, so transcendent and perfect, so beyond the things of this world that the angels themselves, heavenly messengers of God, shield their eyes before his holiness.

If you've got an idea that holiness is don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew gum, don't do this that or the other thing – really, is that the holiness you see in the God of the Bible? Is that the kind of holiness that scripture brings us to understand? I would say, no. The holiness of the bible is far more radical, far more perfect and far more awesome. That is not to say that our actions are not also to be good and upright in ways beneficial for us and for our neighbor, for they certainly are, but this occurs as part of the total giving over of ourselves to an emulation of divine holiness.

If we are to be Holy as God is Holy, we are not left with a list, but with a life. God's eternal nature and actions are wholly Holy, that is to say, he is perfectly Holy, and this is both in what he is and what he does. So divine holiness is whole holiness, both in being and doing – that is our model for what we are commanded to be like, our being (at our core) and our doing (in action) are to be perfectly, completely, wholly Holy.

Both being Holy and Hoping turn our eyes to God. There is not going to be any way to white-knuckle a life of holiness, depending on your own strength. The life of holiness begins and requires a life of hope. It requires a life that has turned to God for the provision of its strength. There is no pursuit of holiness without first the hope in Christ – and as the first twelve verses built us up to see, that hope occurs only within the knowledge of God's great works that bring us to rejoicing. We are left as a God-dependent people. Hoping and Holiness are pursued only with God's grace as found in Jesus Christ firmly kept in view.

Whole Holiness

One of the challenges of our contemporary life is that we live compartmentalized lives. The command to be perfectly holy demands that we knock down division in our lives. God must be present in every little nook and cranny of our lives as we wrestle with holiness. If there is an inch of our lives that we hold over from God we miss the fact that God's holiness, that holiness we are directed to be like, is a complete holiness. That means we live our lives, morning, noon, and night before God. He is our source, our strength, our end, our beginning, the root and sustainer of our joy, happiness, peace, and love. This is a process of becoming for us, for we were and

are sinners – but we have been saved by grace and enabled to pursue making this a reality in our lives. Let us unpack the text to see what we can see.

Firstly, let us see that Peter identifies those commanded as obedient children. The use of obedient, connected with the sense of a life that has been left behind, makes it clear that Peter believes that right hearing (which removes former ignorance) brings about informed people; transformed from disobedience to obedience. Obedience is brought about by God having chosen a people for himself and thereby choosing to prepare them for that calling. How does he make obedient children? We read in verse 2 that it brought about by God's gracious gift of God. Obedience is a gift given to God's children. There are no wholly disobedient children of God. Peter lets us know that the passions of disobedience are still there. We are at war with ourselves. We are at war between our former disobedience and our newly-given gift of obedience. We are obedient children in that we are called to be obedient children, because we are being made and conformed to be obedient children. We are, from birth until conversion disobedient. We are from conversion to death being made more and more obedient. We are in eternity wholly obedient. Peter's address as obedient children understands that the obedience is a gift, but one that needs to be realized, that is made real, by the battling with the old passions of disobedience.

Hinted at in that description of obedience is the fact that God has chosen for himself a people from among the nations of the earth. He has adopted them as sons and daughters as his children. There is no physical birth, but a status as children rooted in God's adoption. There is in addition to adoption, the language of being "born again" of God. Having a spiritual birth that follows your physical birth wherein you become a child of God, living a renewed life of faithful obedience to God. There is a last sense and I think there is a strong case to be made that it is the main sense of Peter's use of children, he wants them to know that they are still young and growing. Much like the apostle John's address to the church as children, so too here we see that. We were formerly disobedient, and as children receive instructions from their parents as to how to grow up, we too, in faith, receive instructions as to how to grow up in our spiritual childhood. We remember our old ways, but we must not be conformed to them, we have a new model to be shaped by – a new master mold that we are gradually being formed to be like. What mold is our spiritual childhood of increasing conformity being molded to be like? God. In particular, our holiness is to be like his holiness. Just woah. That is a pretty bold calling. How can we even hope to be like that? Hold onto that thought for a while. "How can we even hope to be like that?" there is an answer.

This passage quotes God's command to his people in Leviticus. That this is even being asked of a gentile group of Christians in Asia minor implies continuity with the ancient people of Israel. It is the church that is carrying out this command now. Though it was given to the people of God at a different time and place, it retains its effective authority for the people of God at all times and places. Our command to be holy is a universal command. For the OT believers the word had obvious connections to separateness, the ancient Israelites knew that they were to be a people set apart for God. The New Testament, brings a people separate and holy not by their ethnic distinctive, but by God's choice. He brings a people for himself to himself from every people group on earth. Our otherness and separateness is that we are taken from being children of this world and been born again. We are, as the some have summarized: in the world not of it. Our separateness is in our being called out of this world not in physical presence, but in spiritual renewal. We have become strangers and aliens. We have become separated by God's separating us.

This separateness is not simply an academic distinction, like moving from column A to column B, but one of radical change. To what are we being conformed to if not to our old selves.

Well, our old selves were as Adam had become through the fall – sinful and corrupted and not just corrupted but corrupters, spreading sin, pain, and death everywhere we went. So what does a separate holy people look like? It looks like Christ. In Christ, fully-God and fully-man we see what divinity looks when it takes on humanity. Instead of concentrating on the transcendent aspects of God's holiness (which are more than expressible in their awesomeness), for the sake of brevity and accessibility, I will concentrate here, on Christ. When the transcendent transcends the radical otherness of divinity and takes on humanity in Christ we see what holiness and humanity look like. You want to be holy as God is holy, look at Christ. He is righteous, he is justness, he is meekness, he is mercy, he is glorious, he is victorious, he is gracious, he is goodness itself, he is self-sacrificing, and he is selfless. He is God. Be Ye Holy as I AM holy. The I AM of Sinai is no more or less God than Jesus Christ. What does a Christian do to conform himself to holiness, he or she emulates Christ. So often we're tempted to get distracted by the transcendent, and feel overwhelmed. I can't be like that. NO, you can't. You're right. But in Christ you can see how to be conformed to that eternal holiness. It is into the image of the new Adam, not the old Adam, which is being wrought in the life of the believer. Christ is holy at Cana, where he turns water into wine; he is holy in the grainfields when the disciples eat the heads of grain; he is holy when he feeds the five thousand; he is holy when he drives the moneychangers from the temple; he is holy when he is scourged and beaten; he is holy when he is on the cross out to the Father; O church, he is holy when he rose from the dead and put death to death, defeated sin, and conquered Satan. Look to the word, Old Testament and New Testament, but most clearly to Jesus Christ, to see what is holiness in our conduct.

I mentioned before that God is holy in his being and his doing, well, we are being renewed in both. However, as far as we are accounted, as we are in Christ, he has made us to be counted as holy, righteous, and perfectly obedient. We are looked at as Holy and obedient because, believing in Christ, we are cleansed and made holy. It is this cosmic reality that our present doing, our present conduct and obedience, is gradually making clear in us, to us, and through us. In Christ, his church is counted as holy, is being enabled for a life of holiness, and will be in eternity a holy bride of Christ. So how can we hope to be holy? We look to Christ.

Conclusion

It is easy to be overwhelmed by even thinking about holiness. It is a thoroughly overwhelming concept. Perfect perfection, perfect otherness. However there are some things that can keep us anchored firmly so that we can take Peter's command to heart and live lives in accord with it.

Firstly, God chooses and equips his people, he empowers us to this task of holiness.

Secondly, God strengthens us to overcome our desires for disobedience, replacing them with new abilities of obedience by giving us the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, we who have been made holy and pure by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, that is his perfect atonement for our sins, can trust that it is by his perfect life and obedience that we are saved. We are free to be holy because Christ came, took on flesh, and triumphed over death, sin, and the devil.

Knowing these things, I'll leave you with this thought. We would never say to a little child, "you don't need to grow up any more." Well, I'm not holy as God is holy right now. I will be holy in eternity. Dear Christian, are you willing to grow up? You will be holy. You will be. For all eternity, but now, little children, is the time for growing up. Grow up and into your holiness. You have heard all that Christ has done for you so trust in it. Here again then, the words of our passage and take heed, take strength, and take hope:

[14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."