

Holy Preoccupation

In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 2

1 Peter 1:15-16

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

For the Christian, holiness is a matter of conforming to the unchanging character of God, recognizing that he is their standard for holy living.

Discussion Points:

We tend to think about spiritual leaders as being called into the ministry, set apart for a special purpose by God. In contrast, we tend to see ourselves in a second-class type of status, outside of a special calling, making them less important in God's eyes. In 1:15-16 Peter tells his readers that they are all called by God to live a holy life.

- How do you view your calling? What does it look like to live in a way that could be called holy?
- How does this calling to a holy life cause you to view your responsibilities to your family and employer differently?
- It's important that we remember who has called us. The urgency of our obedience is related to the fact that God is the one who has called us to this life. Take some time to reflect on who God is and how his authority adds weight to this calling.

In verse 15 Peter reminds Believers that the scope of their calling leaves no area of life unaffected. The comprehensive nature of the call requires a thorough examination of all of our activities. We can no longer segment our time by what we consider sacred and secular. All of life is to be holy.

- Many of us find it easier to order our lives when we have a concise list of things we should do and should not do. While there is comfort in having a list, Peter makes this an impossible task. We are called to live holy in all things.

Discussion Guide cont.

- We could be easily discouraged by the impossible nature of this calling. In life, in our own strength, we are never strong enough, smart enough, or consistent enough to be holy in all things. However, this calling invites us into a relationship where we can rely on God who is himself completely holy.
- Do you view God as a resource to help you pursue a holy life or as more of a task master who shows disapproval when you do not measure up?
- What are some ways that you can become more familiar with God's holiness? What resources has God given you to help in this work?

Gospel Connection:

The calling to live a holy life in all things is impossible for us to accomplish in our own strength. And yet, we spend many of our days trying to do exactly that. The reality of who God is should permeate our thoughts and give life to our efforts to be holy as he is holy. Our focus needs to remain on our relationship with him and not on our ability to perform well for others.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Remember that you are called by God to live a holy life. Spend time reviewing the scope of this calling and who it is that has called you.
- Pray:** Pray that God would renew a desire in your heart, in your family, and in your church to be holy.
- Do:** Examine your life for any areas that you have segregated from your calling. Identify sinful thoughts and habits that you need to confess and repent of. Find godly people who will keep you accountable in areas where you are weak.

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In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 2

I Peter 1:15-16

Around 175 years ago, there appeared briefly, like a meteor in the sky, the life and ministry of a young man in Scotland. His testimony continues to impact lives nearly 200 years later.

He entered the pastorate in 1836, at the age of 23, but he would only serve in the ministry for six years. He died in a typhus epidemic when he was only 29. Still, his brief life influenced thousands of people throughout Scotland and beyond, to surrender their lives to the mastery of Jesus Christ.

If you read much of Robert Murray McCheyne's life, you come away with the clear impression that he was preoccupied with God.

- He was preoccupied with the glory of God.
- He was preoccupied with the grace of God.
- He was preoccupied with the word of God.
- He was preoccupied with the preaching of the gospel.

He delivered these words in one particular sermon where he challenged believers – and I quote – “Remember, you are God’s sword, His instrument – a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talent that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus Christ. A holy [Christian] is an awesome weapon in the hand of God.”ⁱ

The Apostle Peter would say amen to such dedication to pursue the likeness and holiness of Christ.

If you were with us in our last discussion, we asked the question – how do you become and stay clean in the middle of an unclean culture? How do you pursue holiness in an unholy world?

We focused on four steps in our exposition of *I Peter chapter 1* – let me invite you to take your copy of the New Testament, and turn to Peter’s first letter where we’ve arrived at **chapter 1 and verse 13**.

Since today continues that discussion with point number 5, let me review quickly the first four.

1. The first step to being clean is simply this: Get a handle on your thought life.

Peter writes in *verse 13*, **Therefore prepare your mind for action** – literally gird up the loins – gather up the loose fabric of your thoughts and tuck them in so they don’t get in the way as you run the race. Get a handle on your thought life.

2. The second step to staying clean is: Get a grip on your emotions

Peter writes next, **keep sober in spirit** . . . that is, internally, don’t panic . . . don’t get carried away . . . stay levelheaded.

3. The third step to staying clean is: Get focused on your future

Peter writes again in *verse 13*, **Fix your hope – pin your expectation – completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ**.

In other words, Christians are to live in the future tense – like an engaged couple who saves up money and a bride in waiting fills up that hope chest – they are determining every action and making every decision in the present tense, in light of the future tense and their lives together.

We the bride of Christ should be making our decisions and our plans in light of the fact that our bridegroom is coming soon and we will soon enter the glory of His heaven and our union with Him.

4. And then, step number 4 is simply this: Get rid of old habits

Peter writes in *verse 14*, **As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance**.

The word for lusts is simply a summary of the sinful, self-centered, immoral, corrupt desires that drive the children of disobedience – Paul calls the unbeliever, in Ephesians 2:2.

And I made note of that very encouraging comment by Peter that for the believer, these are former lusts. These habits can be broken.

And he doesn't mean that a believer will never lust again – he means that the believer is no longer choosing to pattern their lives as children of disobedience, but as children – he writes here – of obedience.

And with that, we were out of time. I promised you that, God willing, we would cover two more points today. But since I had more time to study this text, I came up with 5 more. And if I had another week, there's be more, right?

Don't you find that to be true about this Book? As you study a passage – or even read a passage; there's something new to taste and to savor every time you break open this loaf of bread. You never reach the bottom.

For our study today, I will give you two more steps to becoming and staying clean in an unclean culture – and what I'll do, for the sake of sanity, if fit the other points in as sub-points to my second point.

So here is step number 5 in how to stay clean.

5. Get serious about your calling

15-16 But like the Holy One who called you . . .

Don't miss that . . . pause here for a moment. This is a favorite concept of the Apostle Peter.

Most people think that only pastors are called by God; that there is no special calling for all the other Christians in the community of believers.

That's exactly what the Devil would love for you to think:

- For one, it discourages what you do in life as second-class to any kind of eternal significance;
- But worse is that perspective that lets you off the hook. "Hey, I'm not called . . . God hasn't called me to anything special." That's for pastors and elders and missionaries – they get called by God.

Peter is writing to all the believers, scattered throughout Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia . . . scattered throughout 750,000 square miles. You've all been called by God to serve Him there.

In fact, Peter uses this concept of "calling" often in his letters:

- Here in **verse 15** you're going to discover a unique calling to holiness;
- In **chapter 2 and verse 9** Peter writes that every Christian has been called out of darkness into a marvelous light;
- In **chapter 2 and verse 21**, we have been given a calling to model the self-control of Christ in the face of suffering;
- In **chapter 3 and verse 9**, we all have been given a calling to inherit a future blessing;
- And one day, we're going to be given a calling that will include deliverance to God's eternal glory, **1 Peter 5:10**
- Even in his second letter, Peter almost immediately that the Christian has been given a special calling to a life of godly excellence in whatever they do (**2 Peter 1:3**).

Beloved – you have a calling from God! And the calling Peter emphasizes here is a calling to holy living.

So get serious about your calling – **verse 15 again – but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.**

Part of staying clean, is understanding, that God has called you to pursue holiness. You're going to have to get serious about it because without decisions and disciplines, it isn't just going to happen.

D. A Carson, who has preached for me in this pulpit in the past, said in an interview a few years ago – [Christians] do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish indiscipline and call it relaxation; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have escaped legalism.ⁱⁱ

So the believer fights against the gravitational pull of our fallen nature and our fallen world – we fight against the undertow of worldly pressure – we refuse to drift along in the current of moral compromises assuming there is not a Niagara Falls ahead.

Get serious about your calling.

6. Step number 6: Get the honest truth about holiness

Get the honest truth about holiness. You can ask a 100 people to tell you what holiness is and you'll come up with 100 different answers. Peter is about to make it really clear. And what I want to do here is break down step #6 into three sub-points as Peter describes holiness.

Here we go:

a. **First, holiness is comprehensive**

Notice again *the latter part of verse 15 – in all your behavior*. You can render the phrase, *in all your conduct*. In other words, in all the different areas and all the different activities and all the different concerns of daily life. This is comprehensive.

Now this doesn't mean that you wear a starched shirt and a necktie to the grocery store or that you try to read your Bible while you're changing the tires on a customer's automobile.

And it doesn't mean you've written out a long list of things you won't do today. In fact, holiness is just as much about what you do as it is about what you don't do.

But keep in mind that if holiness is only about a list of do's and don'ts, then you've actually missed your special calling. You've missed the object of your holy preoccupation:

- the One who calls you to be in relationship with Him as Lord and Savior;
- the One whom you desire to model after and imitate and love and follow and obey.

In all your pursuit of holiness, don't run past Him! And as you genuinely pursue Him, Peter makes us aware that everything will belong to Him.

Comprehensively – which means you don't talk one way in church and another way on the golf course or in the cubicle at work or on the weekend camping trip.

We're a few days away from an election. I'm sure you didn't know that already. And you need to vote, by the way.

And don't do what one of my seminary students did when he voted early – he told me that he wrote in my name. I said – you didn't! He said, "I did." He's now attending another seminary.

Vote! Exercise your privilege as a citizen of this country and vote. And keep in mind you're not just

voting for a person, you're voting for a platform – for a world view – for future justices who, we pray, will uphold our constitution.

But you know what the problem is in this election year – and every year, I've voted, by the way in my entire adult life. It's always the same problem.

It doesn't take long for the public to discover that the candidates have compartmentalized in some way, their integrity and their honesty and their sense of right and wrong.

It isn't long before so many of the candidates are delivering speeches that effectively tell us:

- You can trust me in this area, but never mind about that area;
- You can respect me for what I said over here, but try and forget what I said over there;
- I'm honest about this issue but just don't shine the spotlight on some other issue.

And it isn't long before we have to hold our noses. What an election year this has been. Beloved, this happens to be a great year to demonstrate the contrast in the lifestyle of the believer.

Integrity and honesty and purity doesn't just show up in this area or that area, but in *every* area of life. There are no closets . . . no dark corners . . . no secret business deals . . . no filthy conversations . . . no dishonest posturing in order to gain the approval of man.

Our passionate preoccupation happens to be comprehensive holiness, for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel.

When Justin wrote his Apologia – his defense of Christianity in the second century, sometime before he was martyred – hence the name Justin Martyr, he wrote specifically to the Roman Emperor. Not only did he give the normal arguments for the truth claims of Christianity, but he also challenged the emperor to examine the lives of Christians and observe their purity.ⁱⁱⁱ

Can you imagine that argument being used today? Can you imagine writing the President of the United States, or the Chancellor of NC State, or the CEO of the Bank of America and saying to them, "Listen, I just want to validate the truth of Christianity for you – and all you'll need to do is examine the lives of your citizens or your employees or your students and you'll come to conclusion that

because they are so uniquely pure, Christianity must be uniquely true.

The point is, this should still be the argument. The apologia of the faith.

Does that mean that true Christians are perfect? No . . . that's not what holiness means.

The word Peter uses here is the common word – *hagios* – for holiness, which at its core means *separate* – or – *different*.^{iv}

- The temple was considered *hagios*, not because the bricks and mortar were somehow mystically perfect, but because this building was different from other buildings;
- The Sabbath was holy, for the Israelite nation, because Saturday was treated differently by them from all the other days of the week;
- Likewise, the Christian is *hagios*, not because he's perfect, but because he is different from non-Christians around him.^v

We use that same concept today when we refer to marriage as holy matrimony. Is it holy matrimony because you married a perfect woman? Well, in that case, yes – I did . . . I've got to watch these illustrations.

No, of course not! It's called holy matrimony, because you and your wife, though imperfect, are in a relationship that's different from any other relationship.

You have in your lap a Holy Bible – *Biblion*, which simply means Book – but it's holy because it's different from any other book.

And just like these believers in the First Century, a believer in the 21st Century has a fantastic opportunity to reveal their differences – which is this overarching preoccupation with the Holy character of God – and it shows up everywhere.

One New Testament scholar, writing on this phrase, said – There should be no part of our lives which does not savor the fragrance of holiness.^{vi}

Holiness is not compartmentalized, it is comprehensive.

b. My second sub point is this: holiness is not only comprehensive, holiness is not something new

Notice the ending of *verse 15 again – be holy yourselves also in all your behavior* (why?) *because*

it is written. This isn't something Peter came up with. He didn't just think it up one day that it would be a great idea if people pursued the holiness of God.

He's actually quoting here from the Book of Leviticus – where all the pages in your Bible probably stick together.

The word "holy" will show up more times in that Book than any other Book in the Bible.^{vii} And in that Book, God is revealing through Moses all the dietary laws and all the ceremonial commands and all the prescribed rituals and customs and regulations and laws that the people of Israel were to follow.

And at the core of it all was God's desire that His people distinctively reveal their covenant relationship with Him to the nations around them.

But what Peter does here, rightly so, in this New Testament dispensation, is drop out any mention of ceremonial or dietary or Sabbatarian, custom, festival or sacrificial requirements and he simply repeats the core command.^{viii}

And this core command is just as relevant in the dispensation of grace as it was in the former dispensation of law.

Be holy just like God is holy.

And he prefaces it by saying, "Listen, this was written down a long time ago – but *this* hasn't changed . . . so don't argue with me . . . argue with God!"

Holiness isn't compartmentalized. Holiness isn't something new. Thirdly,

c. Holiness isn't something you create

Peter repeats this core command – notice – ***You shall be holy, for (as) I am Holy***"

Holiness isn't something you create – it's Someone to whom you conform. Your calling is to pursue conformity to the character of God – which He then works in you, to will and to do of His good pleasure – because you belong to Him and you are His child.^{ix}

Children should grow up modeling what they see in the lives of their parents. The last thing you want is your children to start acting like other children, right?

Growing up with three brothers, I never once heard my mother say to any of them, "Boys, you

need to start behaving like Stephen. Start acting like him.” That would have been life-threatening. But what she often said was that we ought to grow up and become more like our Dad.

You see, this is part of our problem. We’re following the wrong model; which means that as Christians – we’re setting our sights way too low. We’re creating our own self-made standards.

One church father, writing in the second century got it all wrong. He was asked by a young man who wanted to live a holy life what that meant. Unfortunately, this church father rolled out all the rules, and missed the point.

He wrote back to this young man these words:

“Forsake colored clothing; remove everything in your wardrobe that is not white (how do you do that in the second century before dry cleaning was invented?) Remove everything in your wardrobe that isn’t white (he continues) no longer sleep on a soft pillow or take warm baths (in other words, you can’t enjoy any comforts if you want to be holy; he continues; and if you are sincere about following Christ [in holiness] never shave your beard, for to shave is an attempt to improve on the work of Him who created us.”

Listen, this spirit is alive and well. Where I grew up, people in leadership thought it was sinful for a man to *have* a beard – and this guy is saying that it’s sinful to *shave* your beard.

The truth is, we pander to manmade rules for the sake of manmade approval – and Peter here draws our focus back to a relationship.

Holiness isn’t self-created, it’s the fruit of a calling – and God has given us a calling to Himself . . . you belong to Him . . . in ***His great mercy He caused you to be born again to a living hope***; He’s given you an inheritance that will boggle your imagination.

And with that kind of foundational relationship between Father and child, Peter effectively tells us to grow up and act – not like each other – but like our Heavenly Father.

And the truth is, we don’t know if God has a beard or not? We model after Him – not the color of His clothing or the softness of the cushion on His throne – if He has one – but His character and His attributes and His disposition and His grace and His love and His glory – *He* becomes our holy preoccupation.

And when that demonstration takes place, the world recognizes that we, like Him, are unmistakably *hagios* – different.

J. Allan Blair, now with the Lord, told in his commentary about a meeting that took place between a Christian leader he knew and David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel and a leader in the formation of the modern state of Israel. He was born in 1886 and died in 1973.

The Christian statesman took advantage of the private conversation he had with Ben-Gurion and began telling him of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Ben-Gurion asked, “Are there any Christians in the world – like the ones I find in the New Testament. I’ve read the entire New Testament and am deeply moved by what I read there. I have even read it entirely in the Greek language. The teaching and the standard is wonderful, but where are those who live up to it? Are there really those who are living the Christian life today? Can this Book produce that which it sets forth?”

This Christian statesman responded, “It can indeed, Mr. Ben-Gurion” and he then told his own testimony regarding the change in his own life through Jesus Christ. “But are there others like you?” asked Ben-Gurion. “Yes, millions more,” the Christian affirmed. “Where are they, then?” “Well, they are all around the world.”^x

Can you imagine – “Are there any real Christians in the world? And where are they?”

And to this, God is calling you and me to answer that question.

- Called out of darkness into a marvelous light;
- Called to imitate the excellence of our Creator God;
- Called to model the self-control of Christ in the face of tribulation
- Called to demonstrate the distinctiveness of a holy life, in the midst of an unholy world

That’s our calling . . . that’s our calling! Are there any real Christians out there answering the call?

I found one in an unlikely place. On a preaching and ministry trip to India, we would travel to several states, preach in a number of rallies and churches. It was a long and busy trip. In one city where we stayed for a few nights, I was to preach in a rally to well over a thousand believers. My preaching was

preceded by 2 hours of music – with guest choirs from numerous churches and every choir was uniquely decked out in colorful matching outfits. I’ve never seen anything like the exuberance of that rally.

I spent the morning and early afternoon in my hotel room studying and preparing my sermon. The maid came in and cleaned my room and I could sense what I could only describe as a sense of joy. She did an outstanding job in her cleaning – very careful and polite in her broken English.

The next day, she was in the hallway again and I greeted her – once again marked by her diligence and a quiet sense of joy.

The following day as I was leaving – pulling my suitcase down that long corridor, she was standing by her cart of supplies. I stopped and asked her a question that could have caused some difficulty for her if we were overheard, but I wanted to ask her anyway, “Ma’am, the excellent way in which you cleaned my room – and the look of joy on your face – I have to ask you – in a world where you are surrounded by Hindus, antagonistic to everything about Christianity, do you belong to Jesus Christ?” And she immediately beamed and said, “Oh yes,” she said, “I am a Christian.”

What did I have to go on?

- An attention to excellence in her work;
- And her countenance, which in that line of work, and in that world of great poverty, wasn’t the most conducive thing to a joyful spirit.

It struck me later . . . she will probably never deliver the gospel to hundreds or thousands of people . . . she may not be known to a large body of believers . . . but she cleans hotel rooms and you can tell it is a demonstration of her preoccupation with the holiness of God – with the pursuit of the character and the glory of her Savior and Lord – who was in fact, making her hagioi – uniquely different.

Are there any Christians in this part of the world? Where are they?

Let’s answer that tomorrow . . . when we show up . . . and take these steps in our desire to become and stay clean.

Like Robert Murray McCheyne, let’s become awesome weapons in the hands of our holy God – not because of great opportunity or great talent, but because of a great likeness to Jesus Christ . . . our gracious, redeeming, holy God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/06/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from, “[The impact of Robert Murray McCheyne](#)” by J. Harrison Hudson (originally published in the January 1987 issue of Life and Work, the magazine of the Church of Scotland.) & [Holman New Testament Commentary](#) (Holman Publishers, 2000), p. 444

ii Adapted from D. A. Carson, quoted in “Reflections,” *Christianity Today* (7-31-00)

iii R. C. Sproul, [1–2 Peter](#) (Crossway, 2011), p. 46

iv Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, [Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament](#) (Regency, 1976), p. 748

v William Barclay, [The Letters of James and Peter](#) (Westminster, 1976), p. 188

vi D. Edmond Hiebert, [1 Peter](#) (BMH, 1984), p. 96

vii Michael Bentley, [Living for Christ in a Pagan World](#) (Evangelical Press, 2009), p. 47

viii Adapted from John Phillips, [Exploring the Epistles of Peter](#) (Kregel, 2005), p. 69

ix Adapted from Hiebert, p. 97

x Adapted from J. Allen Blair, [Living Peacefully: 1 Peter](#) (Kregel, 1959), p. 31