

When Holiness Becomes Obvious

In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 10

1 Peter 2:11-12

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

The pursuit of holy living is founded on our identity as God's separated people and involves abstaining from fleshly passions as well as conducting an honorable life before the world.

Discussion Points:

The first element in holy living relates to who we are. In verse 11 of chapter 2 the Apostle Peter refers to the believers as beloved and urges them to holiness as aliens and strangers. This identity changes the way we live.

- Our standing as the beloved of God should serve as our motivation to live a holy life because it speaks of the reality of God's love and grace in saving us and making us His people. What are examples of wrong motivations for living "holy" lives and what do these say about our view of God?
- Another incentive for living a holy life is the fact that we are separated to God and are aliens and strangers in the world in which we currently live. Give some real examples of how that should change the way you view your life here. Try to use a specific example from the last couple of days.
- What could be some examples of an unhealthy misinterpretation of what it means to be an alien or foreigner in this world? In other words, how could Christians wrongly interpret this reality and as a result live in an unhealthy way?

So the pursuit of holiness begins with who you are; it also includes what you avoid. The Apostle Peter urges these believers to abstain from the passions of the flesh. He includes the idea that these passions "war" against our soul. We will have to declare war against ourselves if we are to live holy lives.

Discussion Guide cont.

- One of the misunderstandings about sin is this idea that it comes from somewhere outside of us. The truth is that sin comes from within. Our sinful nature is eager to use the members of our body to indulge in the sinful avenues of this world. Stephen used an illustration given by the great preacher John Bunyan to make this point. Read through that illustration again and discuss it. Can you think of other illustrations you could use to make the same point?
- How does the concept of being at war with our fleshly passions change the way we approach our daily life and the choices we make? Where are some specific areas that you have let down your guard?

So the pursuit of holiness begins with who you are and includes what you avoid. Finally, the pursuit of holiness also involves how you act. In other words, holy living isn't just about saying no it has a lot to do with saying yes. The Apostle Peter charges the believers to keep their conduct honorable in the world so that their good works will be used to glorify God as God works to bring the lost to Himself.

- The world around you is watching you. Name some of the people around you that are lost and know that you are a Christian. What is your testimony to them? Would they want what you have?
- Can you think of a time that you personally were slandered as evildoer for your faith? What was your response and how well did it reflect your identity in Christ?

Gospel Connection:

We are a holy people separated unto God. This is our identity. As a result we do not belong in this world. However, we are to live according to our identity in the midst of this fallen world as representatives of the God we belong to. Holiness then is not something we have to achieve. It is who we are. The decision is then is to pursue a life that is in agreement with our identity.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** We are God's holy people. We need to think of ourselves as not belonging to this world but simply sojourning in it.
- Pray:** Pray for the Lord to open your eyes to see those in your traffic pattern that are watching how you live. Then be alert throughout your day.
- Do:** Declare war on those things that are at war against your soul. Enlist the help of others to hold you accountable in specific areas of your life. Get honest and go to battle against those passions that are seeking to destroy you.

Making Holiness Obvious

In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 10

I Peter 2:11-12

Today we complete our series of studies in I Peter chapter 2 which we have entitled, In Pursuit of Holiness.

And we purposefully used the words “in pursuit” simply because no Christian ever arrives. No Christian can claim perfection.

But that isn’t to suggest a free pass either. The genuine Christian longs to grow in holiness.

Part of the challenge is simply the fact that there are so many different definitions of holiness out there. It’s one list after another . . . one set of rules after another . . . what does it mean to live a holy life?

I was sent this by a few people over the years . . . this humorous story’s been out there for a while.

One pastor tried to get his particular list of sins across to his congregation and it backfired. He was personally convinced that it was a sin to drink, smoke and eat anything made out of chocolate . . . among other more obvious vices.

So he decided to have a visual demonstration that would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon and teach his congregation a lesson they’d never forget.

As he began his sermon, he placed four worms into four separate jars.

- the first worm was put into a jar of alcohol;
- the second worm into a jar filled with cigarette smoke;
- the third worm was put into a jar of chocolate syrup;
- and the fourth worm was put into a jar filled with rich, clean soil.

Then the preacher preached away against the sins of all the above. At the conclusion of the sermon, with quiet a dramatic flourish, he showed the congregation the following results:

- the worm in the alcohol – dead;
- the worm in the cigarette smoke – dead;
- the worm in chocolate syrup – dead (as an aside – I’m sure it was smiling)
- but the fourth worm in the good clean soil – alive!

So the minister asked his congregation, “And what have you learned from this demonstration?” A little old woman in the back quickly raised her hand and said, “As long as you drink, smoke and eat plenty of chocolate, you’ll never have worms.”

Well that didn’t work! When you ransack the scriptures to find traces of holy living, you discover that holiness isn’t a list of boxes you check off. In fact, you’ll discover that holy living is as much about saying yes to certain things as much as it is to saying no.

If you’ll open your Bibles and return to *chapter 2 of I Peter*, what I want to dive into today is how Peter defines holiness by giving us three elements . . . and all three play a role in the pursuit of holy living.

1. And here’s the first element. The first element in holy living relates to who you are.

Skip this and you’re heading down a joyless path of performance.

Notice how Peter begins at *verse 11. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts.*

Stop there for a moment. Peter describes the believer three ways.

First, he calls us *beloved*. After telling the church that she is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a part of God’s personal treasures (*verse 9*); remember how Peter went further to remind them in verse 10 that they were once not the people of God, but now they were – they were once without God’s mercy, but now they are – in other words, the believer is now included and pardoned . . . what more can Peter say about the heart of God for His children than to use the word beloved.

This term is wrapped around the word agape. “You are the beloved of God.”

Beloved is an incredibly honored title for everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ.¹

Listen, Peter rightly begins here because it happens to be the foundational principle and incentive and joy that causes us to want to live holy lives.

We don't pursue holiness because God hates us. We don't pursue lives of holiness because if we don't, God won't love us. We don't reach for holiness because God has a club ready to clobber us when we miss the mark.

We pursue a life of holiness from the perspective of wonder and amazement and joy that God through Jesus Christ, actually and deeply and faithfully loves us. So let's start there – *beloved*.

Peter is also *urging* – calling – encouraging those he additionally calls aliens and strangers. That's also who we are. Don't forget that too.

In fact, another incentive to holy living is the reminder that we really don't belong here. Holiness means - remember – that you are different – separated unto God.

The word aliens literally translated means, "alongside the house."ⁱⁱ In other words, this isn't really your house.

The word alien refers to people living in a place that isn't their true home. We refer to them today as resident aliens. You live here, but this isn't the country of your birth or your citizenship – and eventually you plan on leaving this place – as soon as you get your PhD from NC State (if you couldn't get into State; or you finish that job assignment, or whatever – and you leave here and return to your home country.ⁱⁱⁱ In the meantime – you are a long-term visitor – a resident alien.

The word Peter uses here for *stranger* is a word that refers to a visitor staying only briefly in a foreign country.

You don't stay long enough to even try to become accustomed to the food or the clothing styles or the weather. You're here and then gone again fairly quickly. Peter says – this is who you are.

Now, that doesn't mean you don't care about your neighborhood or the country where you've been temporarily assigned. You happen to be ambassadors, Paul wrote, assigned by the Kingdom of Heaven to some spot on planet earth where you represent the nature and character and interests and message of our King.

Miss the balance and you'll miss your assignment.

One author said that Christians need to resist becoming rabbit hole Christians – in the morning

they pop out of their safe Christian homes, hold their breath and stay out of sight as much as possible at school or work, scurry home to their families and then head off to their church activities and Bible studies and finally end the day praying for the unbelievers they safely avoided all day.^{iv}

Just because we're temporary doesn't mean we're isolated. Jesus Christ called us salt . . . salt is no good inside the salt shaker.

So Peter is describing a balance here to holy living. We don't avoid the world. We don't hide from the world. We don't flee from the world, we engage our world; we allow Jesus Christ to transform the world through the gospel we deliver to the people in our world.^v

So, who are you telling? Who have you invited to coffee? What about that classmate who doesn't seem to have any friends.

What about that guy who usually ends up exercising next to you at the gym? You've chitchatted enough and you even know his name . . . has it ever occurred to you that he's pedaling that bicycle as fast as he can because he's terrified of dying. Ask him out afterward for coffee and a couple of Krispy Kreme doughnuts . . . show him you're balanced – and not afraid to die.

Who is it that God has brought into the traffic pattern of your life?

This is who we are. And the incentive to pursue a holy life includes an awareness that we are temporary residents . . . briefly passing through . . . on assignment from the Lord – and we happen to be His beloved.

That's the foundational element to holy living: this is who we are.

2. The second element has to do with what we avoid.

Notice *verse 11 again, Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts.*

We really don't need a lot of commentary on that one, do we? *Abstain from fleshly lusts.*

The verb *abstain* means to hold oneself away from; it implies tension and struggle; it's in the present tense which means it's an ongoing activity.^{vi}

You never let up.^{vii} In practical terms, to abstain means that we say no in an effort to keep ourselves away from stuff that we know will pull us back into the undertow of an unholy life.

So the question is, how often do you say no to yourself? Where did you say no last week? Where will you have to no again this coming week?

From what are you abstaining? Beloved, let's apply it even more clearly:

- there are some books and magazines that shouldn't be read;
- there are some television programs and movies you shouldn't watch;
- there are video games you shouldn't play;
- there are some places you shouldn't go;
- there are some relationships you shouldn't encourage;
- and there are some sights you shouldn't see.^{viii}

In other words, pursuing holiness will always involve the ongoing activity of restraint. Holiness is the art of saying no.

On a broader scale, Peter has already described some of this former way of living – up at *verse 1 in this same chapter* Peter referred to *putting away malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander*.

Over in chapter 4, he'll write even more bluntly in *verse 3* – that these believers once *pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. (1 Peter 4:3)*.

Don't miss the fact that Peter wrote that to Christians. Now maybe you're thinking, why in the world would Peter ever have to warn Christians to abstain from any of that old way of living?

John MacArthur provided an excellent answer in his comments on this text when he wrote – and I quote – even though regeneration produces a new disposition with holy longing, that new life force remains incarcerated within us, precipitating an ongoing battle between the spirit and the flesh.^{ix}

Has it ever occurred to you that holy living is nothing less than a declaration of war? Maybe you've had people tell you that you need to lighten up – you're taking this Christianity thing a little too seriously. I mean, Come on . . . it's a war?

That's exactly how Peter described it. Notice again *verse 11, the middle part – abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul*.

That immaterial, spiritual part of you that reflects your mind, your character, your will, your holy pursuit, – the real you – behind that face of yours.

Your flesh is at war with your soul.

Which means, get this, you are at war with you. There's a war going on, inside of you – and it never lets up.

The lusts of the flesh are at war with your very soul – one author wrote – they are not only trying to injure your body, they are trying to pervert your desire, enslave your will, darken your understanding and deepen within you a spirit of disobedience against God.^x

Imagine – as far as Peter is concerned here – your greatest enemy to holy living just so happens to be . . . you. Your flesh is constantly battling against your soul!

You decided to get up early in the morning and read the word – and your flesh said, “Are you kidding? You set that alarm clock and this means war!” You decide to resist that temptation and your flesh says, “Are you crazy? What are you doing? Don't resist that temptation, it might go away!”

D. L. Moody, the evangelist and pastor from the 1800's once said in a sermon, “I have more trouble with D. L. Moody than with any other man I know.”^{xi}

Now the word Peter uses here for *war* is telling; it carries the idea, not so much of hand-to-hand combat, but of a first century military campaign.^{xii}

In other words, your flesh represents a master military campaign, determined to fight you every step of the way should you desire to gain any ground in holy living.

And it also means, the Christian experience isn't a one battle deal and it's over; you've found that out, right? It's a constant warfare and it will not end until you see Jesus – only then will you safely hang up your weapons and the armor of your warfare.

The 17th century English Puritan John Flavel wrote these powerful and realistic words – quote – To keep a holy government (or holy control) over thy thoughts; to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart – is constant work. The keeping of the heart is a work that is never done until life is ended. (I love this encouragement – he writes) – there is no time in the life of a Christian which will allow an intermission in this work.^{xiii}

The verb tenses used by Peter add to that truth and the ongoing drama of this warfare – Peter writes, literally, *continually abstain from fleshly lusts* because *they are continually waging war with your soul*.^{xiv}

John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress* also wrote a lesser known book called *"The Holy*

War". I've referred to it before, but it's worth repeating because Bunyan was attempting to illustrate this particular issue.

In his book he personifies the soul of the Christian as a city having 5 gates:

- the ear gate
- the eye gate
- the nose gate
- the feel gate
- the mouth gate

Bunyan wrote that the enemy of Mansoul, simply named – Sin – would come on a daily basis to attack Mansoul at one of those gates.

Some days Sin will whisper through the ear gate some alluring message; other days Sin would paint some alluring portrait to the Eye Gate. Sin never let up.

In Bunyan's book, it's interesting to discover that Mansoul could never be damaged or defeated by outside attacks. The only way Sin could gain a victory was if one of the senses opened their gate from the inside and let him in.

How true. Paul wrote to this issue when he wrote to the Roman believers in **Romans 6:13, stop presenting the members of your body to sin.**

He uses a military term from his day that was used in the transfer of arms or weapons. Paul is effectively writing – stop handing over your weapons to the enemy. Stop opening the gate and letting the enemy parade in and set up shop. You are defeating yourself.

Any man who wants to battle impurity, but watches the average movie or television show which depicts sexual content – has effectively handed his eyes over to the Enemy as if to say, "Here, I'm going to swing this eye-gate open . . . I really want to grow in my Christian life, but I'm going to hand you my eyes for a couple of hours so that you can use them against me . . . so come on in and grab some popcorn.

A woman who wants to be a holy woman for God but listens all day to music at her desk or on her iPod or in the house with lyrics that depict the sensuality and selfishness of the world – she's effectively handing her ears over to the Enemy and saying, "Here, you can have these for 5 hours a day . . . why don't you use my ears to help defeat me as I pursue holy living.

Peter doesn't make it really all that complicated.

It happens to be a war. The question for the beloved isn't, are we ever going to lighten up – the question is, are we going to wake up?

I'm urging you, Peter writes – I'm urging you as the beloved of God who don't belong to earth – watch out . . . this is more than temptation . . . wake up . . . this is war.

This is not the time to take an intermission.

So the pursuit of holiness begins with who you are; it includes what you avoid;

3. Finally, the pursuit of holiness involves how you act.

In other words, holy living isn't just about saying no . . . it has a lot to do with saying yes.

Notice, verse 12. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles (the unbelievers); so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Let me first address the issue of what this day of visitation is before we focus on what I want to focus on as we head into the last lap today.

The **day of visitation** sounds prophetic, but this exact expression doesn't appear in Old or New Testament prophetic passages.

Furthermore, it doesn't fit the result of what you see happening here. Peter is saying that as a result of unbelievers seeing your testimony of purity and excellence, they're going to glorify God. The word for glorify is *doxazw*, which gives us our word *doxology*. It's found more than 60 times in the New Testament and never once does it refer to unbelievers being forced to glorify God.

Glorifying God is always voluntary praise coming from the believer.^{xv}

Peter then is actually referring to people in your world and mine coming to faith in Christ, through the gospel they see and hear through you.

The visitation then is the movement of God toward them in bringing them to repentance and faith.

But what did God use to get their attention in the first place?

Two things: first - notice at the beginning of **verse 12 – keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.** Excellent behavior – that's the first thing they can't get away from.

The word for *behavior* represents your normal daily conduct. It isn't so much how you show up on Sunday, but how you show up on Monday.

The word for *excellent* is a rich and varied word that has at least 6 other English translations to help us understand what Peter means. It can mean something that is beautiful, winsome, gracious, polite, fine and noble.^{xvi}

Listen, the world doesn't have an answer to someone whose attitude and behavior can only be described when they show up in the classroom or the board room or the lunch room as beautiful, winsome, gracious, polite, fine and noble.

Come on . . . isn't that's asking way too much? If we think it is, then maybe that's why not very many people in our culture today are glorifying God after having watched a few Christians in the classroom, board room or lunch room. And you are being watched.

Peter writes – notice – *as they observe* – the unbeliever is watching you. In fact, the term Peter uses here for observing refers to a close personal scrutiny of an eyewitness.

One Greek scholar noted that the present tense of this participle indicates that there has been an *intense and prolonged* scrutiny.^{xvii}

Even while the believer is being *slandered as an evildoer*, Peter writes in the middle of this verse – and we've already looked at the accusations against Christians – everything from treason to immorality – the unbeliever keeps watching; intensely watching the believer's reaction and response to the hatred of their culture.

Think about it; how many Christians who are being slandered unjustly, are responding beautifully . . . nobly . . . kindly, graciously.

But when you do, the world just doesn't have an answer for that – but you do. Excellent behavior.

Secondly, *good works* are also carefully scrutinized – notice – *they may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation* – that is, the day He visits them with the grace of His gospel and they believe.

Follow this closely – Peter isn't just interested in Christians making progress in holiness. He isn't just interested in us developing a good reputation. He's interested in a gospel reformation. He wants to see the church reaching people with the gospel.

And it isn't going to happen unless we walk in a way that brings glory to God; why would we ever

expect an unbeliever to be interested in finding out how to glorify our God if we don't?

The implication is staggering – if we don't really care, why should they?!

Peter doesn't just want us to pursue holiness . . . he wants us to make holiness obvious. Make it obvious!

Paul wrote the same way to the Ephesians, *for we are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10)*;

Take it outdoors! Paul commands again through Pastor Titus, serving on the Island of Crete, *Show yourself in all respects to be a model – an example – of good deeds (Titus 2:7)*;

Don't hide it! You see, holiness isn't just about you and me. It isn't just about the church. When holiness becomes obvious, it ultimately builds a bridge to the world.

There is not a more powerful missionary force than an obviously holy life.

No wonder the Enemy wages war every day to try and keep it from gaining ground and getting out.

I was reading recently an article where a Christian columnist was at the Midway airport during a blizzard. He writes, an engineer from India was sitting next to me and as we talked, I found out he was going to have to take a bus to another airport where his wife – who was expecting – would drive with her two small children to pick him up – in these blizzard conditions.

So I told him, look, I'm about to pick up a car here and I will give you a ride to your home. He was grateful, and as we drove, I prayed for an opportunity to deliver the gospel.

When he asked me why I would be willing to go out of my way for him, I found the opportunity. I asked him, "Has anybody ever done something so kind for you that it makes you want to pass a kindness along to someone else?" He nodded. "Well, Jesus Christ has done something incredibly kind for me," I said.

As we talked, I explained the grace of God through Christ and the fact that God's grace. When I dropped him off he thanked me and said, "I'm going to have to do some thinking about all of this."

He closed his article by writing there is no doubt in my mind that my words about Jesus Christ registered uniquely and powerfully with him because they were heard while being driven by a kind

stranger through a snow storm to his home and family.^{xviii}

That's Peter's final incentive. Holiness is about who you are. Holiness is about what you avoid. Holiness is about how you act.

And the result? Opportunity for the gospel and the glory of God.

You see, as we walk according to the Spirit – and not according to the flesh, people who are carefully inspecting your life and mine, Peter is confident that some of them will come to think much of our behavior and then be ripe and ready to hear us make much of our Savior.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 02/05/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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i David R. Helm, 1-2 Peter and Jude (Crossway, 2008), p. 79

ii John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishing, 2004), p. 137

iii Adapted from Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Peter/Jude (Tyndale House, 1995), p. 60

iv Jan Johnson, Moody Monthly (November 1987); citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1996/December/439.html

v Adapted from Daniel M. Doriani, 1 Peter (P & R Publishing, 2014), p. 78

vi Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 752

vii Daniel G. Powers, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 9

viii Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 103

ix MacArthur, p. 137

x D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1984), p. 156

xi Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Hopeful: 1 Peter (David C Cook, 1982), p. 68

xii Hiebert, p. 156

xiii Dave Furman, Being There (Crossway, 2016), p. 40

xiv The Application Bible, p. 61

xv Adapted from Application Study Bible, p. 63

xvi Adapted from MacArthur, p. 139

xvii Hiebert, p. 159

xviii Lee Stroebel, "Why Do You Care?" (May/June 2010 citation; www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/december/3122710.html)