

Holiness in 1 Peter

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If you've ever wondered how long I have to think before I come up with an idea for a sermon, the usual answer is "Not very long". I certainly can't make room inside my head for remembering anything down-to-earth, like buying light bulbs to replace all the burned-out ones in my house, but I've always got all kinds of Scriptures sloshing around up there, and I typically pick the loudest slosher for my sermon topic.

In this particular case, I've had 1 Peter on the brain ever since a friend of mine posted a paraphrase of 1 Peter 1 on the Hymnody group on Facebook. Among other things, this hymn got me thinking about the structure of 1 Peter. Some books of the Bible are more structured than others. As we've seen in our recent study of the book of Jeremiah, it is really more a non-chronological collection of prophecies than a book with a unified theme. 1 Peter, however, isn't like that. Instead, it has a unified structure that builds an argument from point to point. Let's look at part of that argument this morning, as we study holiness in 1 Peter.

Reasons for Holiness

We're going to dive into 1 Peter 1 about a third of the way through the chapter, as Peter begins his list of reasons why we should be holy. First, we have been **TAUGHT BY THE PROPHETS**. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:10-13. A couple of weeks ago, I was talking to somebody, it may have been Jeff Andrews, about the problems with using the Bible to establish the authenticity of the Bible. Both of us agreed that the simplest arguments are circular. If we quote a passage about the inspiration of Scripture to somebody who doesn't believe in the inspiration of Scripture, that proves nothing.

However, it is possible to make a valid argument on the basis of the internal evidences of the Bible, and that's what Peter does here. If Jesus is not the Christ, then how come the details of His life line up so closely with the predictions made by prophets who lived hundreds or even thousands of years before His birth? How could those prophets be so specific in predicting that He would be born of a virgin, in Bethlehem, of the lineage of David, preach the gospel in Galilee, be captured, humiliated, and crucified by His enemies, and be raised from the dead? What those men predicted would happen, Peter and his fellows declared had happened, steadfastly proclaiming Jesus as Lord even at the cost of their own lives.

I've thought about it a lot, but I can't come up with a single explanation for the prophecies about Jesus, other than that He truly was the Son of God. As Peter observes, if that's the case, it's our responsibility to dedicate our lives to His holiness, because His promises of eternal life are true too.

Second, we should be holy because we have been **CALLED BY GOD**. Read with me from 1 Peter 1:14-16. Once we accept that the Scriptures are true, we must also acknowledge that their depiction of God is true too, because only God could be responsible for the Bible. God is not whatever we want to make Him; instead, He is as He has always been. He is holy. He is perfectly good, and He wants nothing to do with evil.

If that is what the God who has called us is like, that's the way we'd better be too. This makes perfect sense. After all, if we're on a football team, and the coach is really big on not turning the ball over, we'd better take care not to fumble. If the coach cares a lot about sound tackling, we'd better not miss a lot of tackles if we want to see the field. Similarly, if holiness is that important to God's very nature, and we want to stay His people, we had better dedicate ourselves to being holy too.

Similarly, we must be holy because we have been **REDEEMED BY CHRIST**. Look at 1 Peter 1:17-21. We weren't purchased out of the slavery of sin by silver or gold or any earthly thing. Nothing of this creation could pay the price for what we had done. Instead, God paid for us in the blood of His Son, whom He sent to earth to live perfectly and die for us so that we could be brought back to God.

This is important for two reasons. First, it sets an extremely high value on each one of us. If God and Jesus thought that each one of us was worth dying for, then every one of us is special. That means that we had better take care of ourselves. If I take care of a car that I paid for with a piece of paper, how much care should I take care of me when I was bought with the blood of Christ? We'd better not squander that!

Second, it also puts us under an immense obligation. If we go out to lunch together, and I realize that I've forgotten my wallet, and you buy my lunch for me, I would certainly appreciate that, but it wouldn't be a big deal. If, on the other hand, you snatch one of my children out of the path of a speeding car, I would

remember that about you for the rest of my days. Jesus, though, didn't merely save our lives. He saved our souls. We will never, ever be able to repay Him for that, but we'd better do our best to try.

Finally, we need to be holy people because we have been **BORN OF THE WORD**. Peter points this out in 1 Peter 1:22-25. Because we are born of God's word, we are God's children. To put things in modern terms, the word makes up half of our spiritual DNA, and we are supposed to act like it. There isn't anybody in this congregation other than my wife who knows my father really well, but if you spend much time around both of us, you won't be left with much doubt that I'm his son. We look alike, we have a lot of the same mannerisms, we read the same kinds of books, we share the same cynical view of the world, we have the same sense of humor, and so on. I'm Ron Bassford's son, so I act like it.

If we are God's sons and daughters, then we're supposed to act like it too. God is holy, so we should be holy. God is love, so we should be loving with the same sincere love that animates Him. On the other hand, if we aren't those things, we are denying our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Before the Lord's Supper, then, let's consider two things. First, let's think about all the things that God did that made it possible for us to become His. Thousands of years ago, He stirred up His prophets to predict the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus did come, He died for us, so that God could call us to share His holiness. We learn about all of this through the word, which is supposed to change us every time we pick it up. Our relationship with God is one in which He clearly has done all the heavy lifting. However, we have responsibilities too. We are called to be holy, as He is holy. Let's reflect on this as we partake.

Living in Holiness

In the next segment of 1 Peter, Peter turns his attention to the topic of living in holiness. In his view, this begins when we **LONG FOR THE WORD**. Consider 1 Peter 2:1-3. The way that Peter constructs this argument is interesting. When other New Testament writers urge Christians to put away things like malice and deceit and slander, as Paul does in Ephesians and Colossians, they contrast those vices with their opposite. Put off malice; put on kindness.

That's not where Peter goes here. Instead, he contrasts evil thoughts with the study of the word. I think this gets back to his born-again argument at the end of 1 Peter 1. If we are God's children, we ought to live like God's children, and the only way we can learn to do that is through the word. The more time we spend with the purity of the word, the more it will change us, and the more holy our behavior will become.

Let's remember this in our own struggles with sin. It's not enough for us to merely resist, resist, resist. If we spend all our time on the defensive, sooner or later, the devil will wear us down. Instead, we need to strike back by spending time with the Scripture and allowing it to transform us.

Second, Peter urges us to **ALIGN ON CHRIST**. He raises this point in 1 Peter 2:4-8. His analogy here is fairly complex. Back in the day, when workers built a stone building, they determined how to lay the stonework by referring to a cornerstone. The sides of that cornerstone were perfectly square and true, so a building constructed along those lines would also be perfectly square and true.

Peter points out that Christ is supposed to be our cornerstone. The builders of His own nation rejected Him, but when we line ourselves up in accordance with His commandments and His character, we are built up into a spiritual building that glorifies God. The Lord must be our standard in all things.

This is not a popular notion in religious circles today. All kinds of churches want to line themselves up according to what is popular, according to what seems best to them. Many of them see great outward success by doing what pleases men. However, when they build themselves up according to the wisdom of men, they inevitably reject Jesus as their cornerstone, just like the Jewish religious establishment of 2000 years ago did. Rejecting Jesus led the Jewish nation to disaster, and it will lead the proud to disaster today too.

Third, our holiness requires us to **PROCLAIM HIS EXCELLENCIES**. Consider 1 Peter 2:9-10. As this text makes clear, we who are God's people have been given many gifts by Him. He has made us His own holy nation. He has consecrated us as a spiritual priesthood, the only people on earth who are fit to offer sacrifices to Him. However, He didn't do this for our glory. He did it for His own, and it is our responsibility as those whom He has redeemed to glorify Him before others.

This was a stern task for Peter's original audience! One of the central themes of 1 Peter is suffering, especially the suffering that arises as a result of persecution. 1 Peter was written to Christians who were enduring persecution right then and there, who faced the loss of their property or even their lives for

following Jesus. And yet, Peter is saying to them, “You need to get out there and proclaim the excellencies of Jesus!” In worldly terms, that makes about as much sense as climbing on top of your roof in a thunderstorm and holding up a golf club. You’re just asking for it! However, Peter expected these first-century Christians practically to invite persecution, because telling others about Jesus was that important.

Today, we’re not going to face lawsuits or lynch mobs for spreading the gospel. We need to be honest, then, about our responsibilities. If the Holy Spirit through Peter exhorted disciples to tell the good news even at the price of severe persecution, what, in our situation, would the Holy Spirit have to say to us?

Finally, Peter expects his audience to **ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS**. Read with me from 1 Peter 2:11-12. In many ways, this goes hand in hand with the previous point. These Christians, who lived in what is the nation of Turkey today, were expected to be noisy about following Jesus in the midst of a population that was hostile to the gospel. Inevitably, even when they weren’t being actively persecuted, they were going to get pushback for that. People were going to scrutinize their lives for evidence that they were hypocrites. When no such evidence was forthcoming, the enemies of the gospel would slander them.

Against these threats to the gospel, the disciples had only the answer of righteous conduct. Peter tells them that they have to live such holy lives that they don’t give their enemies a single thing to pick on. In fact, those lives have to be holy enough to defeat prejudice. Sure, a man may have heard all kinds of slander about Christians, but once he comes in contact with real Christians, he realizes the stories can’t be true.

We know that the same thing happens today too. Once we start talking openly about Jesus, we paint a target on ourselves. People are going to hold us to a higher standard, and some are going to be actively hostile to us because of what they already believe about religious people. We need to own that. We need to talk the talk of spreading the gospel, and we need to walk the walk of true discipleship, so that everybody knows we’re the real thing. We don’t have the luxury of living like the world. We need to live for Jesus.

Holiness in Application

Peter next moves to describe several applications of the principles of holy living. The first application concerns **SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT**. Let’s read 1 Peter 2:13-17 together. There is one situation and one situation only in which Christians should disobey the government. That is when a human law directly contradicts the law of God. If, for instance, the state of Illinois passed a law forbidding Christians to assemble on the first day of the week, we would have no choice but to disobey.

However, in every other circumstance, God commands us to obey the law. This is true of laws that we think are wise and laws that we think are unwise. It is true of laws that are easy to comply with and laws that we find burdensome. We must obey the authorities that God has set over us to the best of our ability.

This is why I am deeply concerned when I see Christians online encouraging others not to comply with the rules of Obamacare. Brethren, that is flatly sinful and wrong. We may not agree with Obamacare; we may intend to do our best to vote politicians who support Obamacare out of office. Doesn’t matter. Obamacare is still the law of land, passed by Congress, signed into law by the President, and affirmed by the Supreme Court. Either we obey the law, or we’re going to answer for it to God. Period.

Second, Peter commands **SUBMISSION TO MASTERS**. Consider 1 Peter 2:18-20. Just as we are supposed to obey the authorities, we are supposed to obey our employers. There is one exception here too, and it’s the same one. If our employers ask us to lie or fudge numbers or do anything else that conflicts with the law of God, we must respectfully decline.

However, in every other instance, we must offer service to those employers as though we were working for Jesus Himself. This includes the wonderful bosses who have a knack for motivating everyone to excel. On the other hand, it also includes the jerks, employers who are overbearing, rude, micromanagers, incompetent, or even all of the above put together. We need to respect those people too.

This is an application of the higher standard that Peter mentioned a few verses ago. There’s nothing righteous about treating a wise and good employer well. Even if we weren’t Christians, we’d probably do that anyway. Our lives only show Christ at work in us when our behavior is different from that of the worldly people around us. Worldly people gossip about the boss around the water cooler. We can’t. Worldly people resent it when the boss chews them out for no good reason and look for an opportunity to sabotage him. We can’t think that way. No matter what our employer does to us, our conduct toward him may never change.

Our co-workers may marvel at this. They may accuse us of brown-nosing. The jerk boss himself may be oblivious. All those things are beside the point. The point is that it finds favor with God.

In this, Peter points out that our goal is **FOLLOWING CHRIST**. He describes the sufferings of Jesus in 1 Peter 2:21-25. Peter here identifies two main characteristics of our Lord. Jesus persevered in doing right even in the face of suffering, and He did it for someone else. Jesus continued to entrust Himself to God even under the most extreme provocation imaginable. Even in the face of humiliation, torture, and death, He never struck back at His tormentors. He endured all of this not for His benefit, but for ours.

If we are truly disciples of our Master, we will live the same way. Hopefully, we will never face the same temptation to strike back at our tormentors that Jesus did. Hopefully, we will never be called upon to literally die for God or someone else. Even if we are, though, our course is still clear. Our lives don't belong to us. Because we are holy, they belong to Jesus, and we must imitate His patience through suffering.

This applies not only in our dealings with the wider non-Christian world, but even within our own families. Peter calls us too to **SUBMISSION IN MARRIAGE**. Look at 1 Peter 3:1-7. Note that this context begins with the words "In the same way". In other words, this is the same song, third verse. If we are determined to be holy people, people who follow Christ and live according to a higher standard, this is the way we are going to be in our marriages. Peter's analysis starts with wives. In many ways, the negative picture that Peter's words paint is a very familiar one. Apparently, worldly women in that day didn't show honor and respect to their husbands when they disagreed with them. Apparently, worldly women dressed in immodest ways designed to draw the eye of others. The more things change, the more they stay the same, I guess. At the root of those things, as with all the sins we've discussed, is selfishness.

The Christian wife, however, cannot be selfish. The cultural message is that in marriage, women need to stand up for themselves and their rights. Logically speaking, this can't be a recipe for a long-term marriage. Two people won't stay together if they're both ruled by selfishness. Indeed, America's sky-high divorce rate bears this out. Similarly, the cultural message is that if you've got it, you need to flaunt it, and if that provokes your husband to jealousy and other men to sin, too bad.

In both of these cases, and indeed in every case, the selfish path cannot be the godly path. As Christians, we don't live for ourselves. We live for something better, something higher. We live for God, and whether we get ours shouldn't be that important to us.

This has some significant implications for the way that Christian women need to behave. They do need to respect their husbands. This is true whether the man is a model of masculine virtue or a total failure. Either way, he needs his wife to believe in him and honor him, and it is her responsibility to do so.

Likewise, daughters of God must focus on improving their inward beauty more than their outward beauty. Peter isn't saying here that there's something wrong per-se with dresses and braided hair. Instead, his point is that what should really stand out about the Christian wife is the excellence of her behavior and the purity of her character, that she is such a godly woman that nobody really pays attention to the way she's dressed. Outward beauty glorifies the self, but the gentle and quiet spirit glorifies God.

Of course, this is a two-way street. Husbands too need to take care to preserve their holiness by living with their wives with understanding. As all married men know, this is hard. I've heard it said that at some point in the fetal development of boys, there is a giant surge of testosterone that kills off a whole bunch of brain cells, and it is those brain cells that would help us to understand women! I don't know how many times I've said to Lauren some variation of, "Why do you want to do that? Why do you even care?" That is the holes in my brain speaking. Conversely, in my experience, when women have trouble trying to figure out men, it's because they can't believe the answer is that simple and are overthinking it.

Regardless, though, holes in the brain or not, it is the responsibility of every Christian husband to do his best to see the world through his wife's eyes. It's easy for men to dismiss women as irrational. That's not true, or, at least, it is no more true of women than of men. Women only seem irrational to men because they start from a different logical basis and have different concerns. Even if we don't get it, men, we can at least figure out what those bases and concerns are rather than dismissing them because we don't see things that way. Above all, we must remember that if we don't listen to our wives, God won't listen to us.