

Last week, I began a new sermon series that I have called “Stranger,” which will be going through the New Testament book 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a letter written by the apostle Peter to churches in Asia Minor, part of modern-day Turkey. The title of my sermon series is a reference to a theme that is found throughout the letter, that for those who believe in Jesus, this world is not our home, but that we are citizens of heaven. And therefore, we must learn to live in this world as strangers, resident aliens, living here but not finding our identity or hope here or conforming to the values of the culture. This morning, we will read 1:13 – 2:10, paying special attention to the call to be holy. The passage begins with a “therefore”; in the letters, you will always find indicative followed by imperative – first, what God has done and who we are in Christ, followed by how we are then to live. It’s very important to follow that order, for it isn’t our good behavior that makes us acceptable to God, but God saves us, and then we respond in obedience to Him.

**1 Peter 1:13 - 2:10** - *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.* <sup>14</sup> *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* <sup>15</sup> *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;* <sup>16</sup> *for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* <sup>17</sup> *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.* <sup>18</sup> *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,* <sup>19</sup> *but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.* <sup>20</sup> *He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.* <sup>21</sup> *Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.* <sup>22</sup> *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.* <sup>23</sup> *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.* <sup>24</sup> *For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,* <sup>25</sup> *but the word of the Lord stands forever."* *And this is the word that was preached to you.* <sup>NIV</sup> **1 Peter 2:1** *Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.* <sup>2</sup> *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,* <sup>3</sup> *now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.* <sup>4</sup> *As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--* <sup>5</sup> *you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* <sup>6</sup> *For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put*

*to shame."* <sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," <sup>8</sup> and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for. <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

There is a lot in this passage that we could focus on. My approach for this series is to read through sections multiple weeks if I have to, but to focus on one or two of the themes that arise in the passage. This week, I want to look specifically at v. 14-16:

<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. <sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

And then later, Peter addresses them as a community, telling them that they are called to be holy:

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

What does it mean to be holy? And why is holiness so important? When Peter writes the words "Be holy, because I am holy," which is quoting God's words from Leviticus, where it shows up a few times, what is he calling us to be or do?

I would guess that some of you, when you hear the words "be holy," assume that he is talking about living morally. I think a lot of people would think that a holy person is a very moral person, a very religious person. Even the passage I read seems to set holiness up as the antithesis of conforming to evil desires: don't conform to evil desires, but be holy. But if we think of holiness in terms of moral living or being very religious, we are missing the very heart of holiness. After all, throughout the Old Testament, it's not just people who are called holy. Think of Exodus 3:5, where God tells Moses to take off his sandals, for the ground he is walking on is holy ground. Certainly, ground can't be moral or immoral. Or Exodus 16, where the Sabbath is called holy. Or think of the instructions in Exodus

30 given for the construction of the tabernacle, where items such as tables and lampstands and utensils and bowls are to be holy. If holiness just means morality, then what is a moral table? Or what does an immoral spoon look like? Certainly, there must be more to holiness than just behaving morally.

**When we look at the meaning of the Hebrew word “qadosh,” which is translated as holy, we find that it means separated, set apart, or withdrawn from common use.**

Something or someone that is holy is something or someone that has been set apart from common use to belong to God or to be used by God. A holy table is one that has been set apart for use in the tabernacle. The Sabbath is holy because it is a day set apart for the worship of God. And so, from that definition of holy, qadosh, we get a better understanding of just what is meant when we read the words, “Be holy, because I am holy.” Peter is calling the Christians to be separate, set apart, withdrawn from common use to belong to God, to be used by God.

Be holy, because God is holy. Holiness is God’s holiness preeminent attribute. In ancient Israel, if you wanted to emphasize something, you would repeat it – like bolding and underlining something today. There is only one characteristic of God that is repeated three times in the Bible – Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty (Isaiah 6). God is holy, holy, holy. He is separate, set apart from this world, not like us. He is transcendent above the corruption of this world. He can not sin, nor does He take pleasure in sin. He is perfect in every way.

And you are called to be holy, as He is holy. So what does that mean?

### 1) Your heart belongs to God

*<sup>18</sup> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. <sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. <sup>21</sup> Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God*

I have already said that being holy is not just being moral. After all, you can be moral without holiness. You can be moral for all kinds of reasons – because it’s good business practice, because you are afraid of the consequences, because you want to appear like a good person. But living morally does not mean that your heart belongs to God. Remember what Jesus said was the greatest commandment?

**Matthew 22:34-38** - Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment.

**The greatest commandment is to LOVE God.** Not just to obey, not just to be moral, but to LOVE God. God is after your heart. His desire is that you would love Him supremely, more than any other person or thing. Think about marriage: what kind of spouse would be content with a spouse who obeys in action but whose heart is not engaged? Someone who goes through the motions of being a good husband or wife but whose heart is not in it? Do you LOVE God?

The greatest commandment is to love God supremely. How is this possible? How is it possible to love a being we have not seen? John gives us the answer:

**1 John 4:9-10, 18-19** - This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **This is love: not** that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins...There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us.

We give ourselves fully to Him because He gave Himself fully for us. He died for us, so that we might live for Him. To be holy means that your heart belongs to Him, that you love Him supremely, that the primary motivator of your heart is to love and honor Him. As Paul wrote:

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15** - For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

We owe Him everything. Remember that God created you. Everything you have, you owe to Him. But beyond that, even though you rejected Him, even though your rebellion against a holy God merited Hell, He died for you, to make a way for you to be restored to Him and to have eternal life. You owe Him everything.

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** - *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were **bought at a price**. Therefore honor God with your body.*

Make no mistake, God wants your heart, because He loves you and wants life to the fullest for you.

<sup>2</sup> *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup> now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Go to the Lord for your nourishment, to fill you up by His grace and truth. May these words be true of you:

**1 Peter 1:8-9** - *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

## 2) You live unto God

<sup>17</sup> *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

What does it mean to live life “unto God”? It means that we recognize that in the end, it is our Father who will judge our lives, and so we are to live our lives with His evaluation foremost in our mind. As strangers, resident aliens in this world, we live to please and honor our Father in every circumstance. As Paul wrote:

**1 Corinthians 10:31** - *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

What does it look like to live your life unto God, in light of His evaluation and not the evaluation of ourselves or any other person? The Bible gives a few examples to help us understand this important concept. Think about marriage:

**Ephesians 5:21-27** - *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave*

*himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

How many times does Paul reference Christ in this passage? The reason I love and serve my wife is not because she is lovable but because Christ deserves my love and service. The reason a wife loves and submits to her husband is not because he always deserves it but because Christ deserves it. How do you love or respect a spouse when you don't feel like they have earned it? You love and respect them unto the Lord. You do what is right to honor Him.

What about work? Paul addressed that as well. Do not be turned off by the slaves and masters language; in those days, slaves were those who had hired themselves out to pay off debts. Think of this in terms of employees and bosses:

***Ephesians 6:5-9*** - *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.*

What do you see here? Workers, serve as if you were serving the Lord, not men. Work as if your boss is God, to honor Him, even when your boss is not looking, even when working hard will not get you any reward.

And masters, bosses, be a boss unto the Lord, recognizing that God is the boss of both you and your employees. Work unto the Lord.

Can you see how Christians should make the best employees and the best bosses? If you are working not for man but unto the Lord, then you will give your very best and work with integrity at all times, so that He might be honored.

Live your entire life unto the Lord, with His evaluation in mind. Remember Matthew 25?

***Matthew 25:31-40*** - *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be*

*gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. <sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' <sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' <sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

What do you see in this remarkable passage? Treat everyone as unto the Lord. Love the poor, the hungry, the sick, those in prison, the stranger, as if they were the Lord Himself! Do not treat people according to what you think they deserve, but treat them as if they were the Lord Himself.

This is holy living. Not just giving your heart and primary affection to Him, but living your entire life unto the Lord, to honor and please Him. Loving your spouse, your children, your parents, your neighbor, your enemy, and the least of these because He deserves it.

### 3) Belong to a community that images Jesus

Look at the image given in 2:4-6:

*<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- <sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."*

Notice that holiness is not meant to just be an individual pursuit. Peter writes that we are being built together into a spiritual house, into a temple in which the presence of God dwells. In this building, Christ is the cornerstone. He is the foundational stone, in perfect alignment, and we are to align ourselves with Him.

We are to imitate Him, image Him to the world. And so, yes, holiness will include getting rid of evil:

*<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. <sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

If you are going to be set apart to be used by Him, you will need to turn from your evil desires to give Him your heart and obedience. Holiness does involve a life of repentance and faith, turning from evil to live like Christ. If, as I speak of holiness, God is bringing specifics to your mind, then obey Him. Start there. Repent and trust in Him.

But we also see from this passage that aligning our lives with Christ will mean loving as He has loved us.

*<sup>22</sup> Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

Remember the second greatest commandment:

***Matthew 22:34-40*** - *Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

God is not just calling individuals to live solitary lives as strangers in this world. He has called together a community from all nations and people groups to be holy, set apart, with hearts belonging to God, living unto the Lord, and imitating Jesus, not just in moral purity but in deep, sacrificial love.

***Ephesians 4:11-16*** - *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by*

*every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Notice how the maturity, the holiness comes. It comes in community, as you are built up by pastors and teachers, and as you speak the truth in love to each other and serve each other. Holiness comes not just by giving your heart to God and living unto Him but by belonging to a community that is committed to imaging Jesus, to imitating Jesus in how they love each other. Love deeply! We have to do all of this in community. Together we are the dwelling place of God, where He is among us. We are interdependent, like stones in a building.

You can not do this very well from your couch. Bible Recap D groups. Room for other groups. Care & Connect group. Get in community with each other.