

Called to Be Holy

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:13-25

May 8, 2011

North: *I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.*

South: *Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.*

North: *The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.*

South: *Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!"*

North: *How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?*

South: *I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.*

North: *I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.*

South: *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

North: *O LORD, truly I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from your chains.*

South: *I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.*

North: *I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.*

South: *in the courts of the house of the LORD - in your midst, O Jerusalem.*

ALL: *Praise the LORD!*

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

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 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, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, so that your faith and hope are in God.

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. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 Peter 1:13-25 (NIV)

I ended my message last Sunday with the great passage from Philippians 2:12b-13:

continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Last Sunday we also began this brief look at the apostle Peter's 1st letter. Peter - the one whom Jesus himself said "you are the rock whom I will build my church upon." Peter's first letter is so rich. One in which we should all be able to read and get a grasp of. It's only five chapters in length. Without any notes or commentary, only about four to five pages in length. I want to go back to the introduction, the preamble:

From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. To God's elect, strangers in the world . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood. Grace and peace to yours in abundance. 1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV)

The first letter of Peter is a post-Easter letter. He begins his letter, that which we looked at last week, talking about "the living hope" which God gives us through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, the "sprinkling by his blood." "A living hope." The living is today but the hope is not so much in this life but in the life to come. Hope which comes through Jesus' resurrection. The apostle Paul tells us in his great chapter on the resurrection of Christians through the resurrection of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Make no mistake about it, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Salvation is a gift from God. It comes only through belief, faith in Jesus Christ.

As we have discovered during our Bible study on Sunday evenings, looking at the Book of Romans, the concept of chosenness or election by God, is a concept that is hard for us to wrap our human minds around. But the concept is there throughout Scripture. Way back at the beginning, after the great fall of Adam & Eve, and then the subsequent fall of all human beings following, God reached down to save a certain people. And he began with the Israelites. God's call to them through the Patriarch Abram, who would become Abraham: "*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*" (Genesis 12:2-3).

God chose or elected a certain people to be His. But it was never automatic. The calling had to be received by faith. Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob accepted by faith. Along with many others. Many others did not. The calling was never certain. Some from the blood lines rejected God outright. Some from outside the blood lines were grafted in. Accepted in by faith. Eventually, the Israelites as a whole would become a disobedient people. God would eventually send his Son, Jesus, from the correct blood lines, to save His people. First his own people, the Israelites, and then all others, the Gentiles. Again, salvation was never automatic, it had to be accepted by faith. What was once faith in God, became faith in Jesus Christ. What was once a people whom God called, became individuals from all nations and peoples, who through faith in Christ, would become God's chosen people. All this with the foreknowledge of God. God foreknew that most of the Israelites were going to reject him. He even foreknew which ones. God foreknew that He was going to have to send His Son to save the world. He foreknew which ones were going to reject the free gift and which ones would accept it. He still knows today. God's foreknowing doesn't change our responsibility to accept the gift by faith or not.

You know what the nice thing about Peter was? He was direct and to the point. Well, sometimes it did get him in a little trouble, but what took Paul about eleven chapters in his letter to the Romans to get to, it took Peter eleven verses to get to. But they get to the same point. After explaining everything that God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ: his dying on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, a salvation we cannot earn but only accept by faith, they both get to the same point. And they both begin with the same word, **therefore!**

Paul says, "**therefore** I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's great mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, **holy** and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). Then Paul goes on to describe what it really means to live for Christ.

Peter does the same thing, beginning with our Scripture for this morning: "**Therefore, prepare your minds for action!**" The Greek word used there for mind doesn't mean mind like we understand it today, meaning just our brain. It is much more comprehensive. It means the core of who we are. Our mind, heart, soul, even our bodies. The more correct interpretation may be: "**Therefore, prepare everything about you for action!**"

be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." v. 13-15

"Self-controlled," is not really a virtue which is esteemed much in America today. Of course neither is "holiness." *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* The Greek word for "holy" is "hagios," which means "of high moral quality, consecrated, acceptable and pleasing to God." Not only is God holy, He

calls his people to be holy! The word holy also means to be “set apart.” We are called to be “set-apart” for God.

What does it really mean to be holy? What does it look like?

Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. v. 17

1. “Live your life in reverent fear.”

“Fear” is not a word we are very comfortable with in our culture today. As someone else recently pointed out, when was the last time you heard a good sermon on “The fear of God?” The New International Version (NIV) actually waters down the meaning, using the phrase “reverent fear.” The more correct interpretation of the passage is “conduct your lives with fear of God’s discipline.” A more correct reading of verses 17-19 might be, “Conduct your lives with fear of God’s discipline, because you know that God redeemed you out of a sinful manner of life at great cost - with the precious blood of Jesus.” God is not pleased with us if we just casually disregard the cost of what he has done for us. Discipline and love are not inconsistent:

My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. Proverbs 3:11-12

Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. Deuteronomy 8:5 (NIV)

2. Obedience

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. v. 14

That is the second time that the word “obedience” is used in the beginning verses of Peter’s letter. Way back in the preamble, why were we saved?

chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood. v. 2

And Peter will use the word “obedience” again, a third time, in the verse to follow. Not only Obedience to Jesus, the living word of God, but also the written and spoken word of God.

*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. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you. v. 22-25*

“The living and enduring (or abiding) word of God,” is either the spoken word of God, through the proclamation of the gospel, or the written word of God, in the Bible. Peter says that the word of God is “imperishable seed.” We cannot underestimate the power of the written and spoken word of God.

3. Sincere love for our brothers and sisters.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers (and sisters), love one another deeply from the heart. v. 22

We might be saved today as individuals, upon our confession of Jesus Christ as both our Savior and Lord of our lives, but we cannot stay that way. The Christian life cannot be self-centered and individualistic, for we are called into the body of Christ. The body of Christ which occurs in the context of fellowship and love for one another, both within the body and outside the body. There is no holiness without a deep love from our heart for our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

What might being “holy,” “set-apart for God,” look like today? Well, believe it or not, not that different than it looked like centuries ago:

- One, it is about being “self-controlled.” Not too many years ago the Mennonite Church had what was called “Temperance Sunday.” Perhaps it became too legalistic. The word “temperate” means showing moderation or self restraint, more so than complete abstinence. There are things that God calls his people to show restraint with and there are other things he calls us to abstain from.

When it comes to sex, He calls us to abstain from it until we become united as husband and wife. How different is that from where we are as a culture today? How we use our bodies sexually is a holiness issue.

On the other hand, complete abstinence from alcohol is much more ambiguous in the word of God. Which if you have been reading *The Mennonite* magazine recently has created quite a stir. Leviticus, chapter 10, might give us the best sense of God’s feeling about the use of alcohol and how it relates to holiness:

The LORD said to Aaron, “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean . . . Leviticus 10:8-10 (NIV)

And while the Bible is rather ambiguous regarding totally abstaining from alcohol use on the part of God’s people, the abuse of alcohol and drunkenness is clearly identified as sin. How do we deal with the issue, that while some can drink alcohol in moderation, many others cannot, and it has led to a whole number of issues we struggle with as a society? How about the other things that we put into our bodies, whether it be tobacco products or all the food that we eat? There are not too many of us who don’t abuse our bodies, our God given bodies, in one form or another.

How about the television shows we watch, or movies, or video games, or junk on the computer?

How about the language that we use? I continue to be amazed by the number of people who readily call themselves “born again Christians” and don’t even seem to think twice about the words that come out of their mouths, or the gestures that they use. Hey, I used to be a state trooper, there was a time in my life I could swear with the best of them. That phrase “he swears like a Trooper” is not just a myth. And occasionally a little still slips out but is that who God calls us to?

How might being holy look in our relationships today? Well Peter actually tells us in a few verses ahead, that which might be a little more appropriate to a Mother’s Day message:

*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the **purity and reverence** of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the **holy** women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. . .*

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, . . .

1 Peter 3:1-7 (NIV)

How might being holy look in our relationship with God? Well, ultimately our whole life is supposed to be holy, set-apart to God? We try to separate the different aspects of our life, but God does not. But, what was the first thing that God declared to be holy? Was it a person? Was it a place - a mountain? Was it an object? The Hebrew word for holy, qadash is used for the first time in the Book of Genesis, at the end of the story of creation - it is applied to time. The first thing that God declared to be holy? A day.

*By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and mad it **holy**, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done.* Genesis 2:2-3 (NIV)

In the Ten Commandments, the term “holy” is applied to only one word, the Sabbath:

*“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it **holy**. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. **Therefore** the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it **holy**.”* Exodus 20:8-11 (NIV)

Of course Jesus would later say that He, “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath,” and that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,” (Mark 2:27-28), but who it was made for does not take away from the intent of the day, a day which is to be “holy,” “set-apart” to God. It

is the Sabbath, celebrated on Saturday for Jewish people, Sunday for Christians, which is supposed to “set-apart” God’s people from the others. To distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean.

The challenge seems to be how do we hold up God’s call for us to be holy, just as He is holy, without becoming too legalistic. It’s not, being holy or keeping the law which saves us, it’s God’s grace. We’re saved only by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, which comes through faith - believing in Him. But then through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit He transforms us into the people He created us to be, “Holy and pleasing to Him.” Many years ago, around the time of my conversion experience, there was a book which I read that had a tremendous impact on me, entitled Just Like Jesus, by Max Lucado. The subtitle being: “God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way, He wants you to be Just Like Jesus.” That’s the subtitle of our entire life here on earth as Christians. We never quite get there. He loves us the way we are, but he always want us to be more, holy and pleasing in His sight.