

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: May 11, 2014
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“BECAUSE I AM HOLY”

First Peter 1:13-21

Leviticus 11:44: **“I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.”**

Leviticus 11:45: **“I am the LORD...your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”**

Leviticus 19:2: **“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”**

■ First Peter 1:15-16: **“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.’”**

“I am holy,” declares our God.

Do you believe this to be true? I do!

{Is 6:3; 1 Jn 1:15; Jas 1:13} I am convinced of it in the marrow of my bones. Insofar as I can recall, I have never doubted the absolute holiness of the Living God. Scripture gives voice to this conviction: **“Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty”; “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all”; “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”**

“Be holy,” commands our God.

Do you believe this to be proper? I do!

{Ps 119:137; Ro 7:12; Heb 12:2} I am persuaded that God is right to require this. For as long as I can remember, I have known that the holiness imperative is entirely appropriate. Scripture gives voice to this conviction: **“LORD ... your laws are right”; “the law is holy, and the**

commandment is holy, righteous, and good”; “make every effort... to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

“Be holy, because I am holy.” It is true and proper. Yet for many Christians, this command evokes feelings of ambivalence, guilt, and dread.

I get it. There was a time when the call to holiness was, for me, a source of terrible despair.

✧ I heard the mandate to **“be holy.”** Then, as now, I knew that it is true and proper and necessary.

✧ So I made every effort to **“be holy,”** confident that my resolve and belief would propel me to success.

✧ And I did achieve “holiness” – if by that you mean abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and sex, refraining from profanity, withdrawing from brazen sinners, and immersing myself in religious activities.

✧ Then God opened my eyes to see that while I had managed to avoid some sins I was guilty of many others, less obvious but equally bad. I was not holy.

✧ I redoubled my efforts, only to find that the more headway I made in one area the further behind I fell in another. I still was not holy.

✧ My conviction that the holiness imperative is true and right collided with my sense of moral incapacity. I arrogantly drew the false conclusion that holiness is as impossible as it is indispensable.

“Be holy, because I am holy”: necessary, yet unattainable (or so I thought); unattainable (or so I thought), yet necessary. It had every appearance of a catch-22 situation.

What do you do with that?

I lived in frustration and defeat. I despised myself as a failure and a hypocrite. I was furious with God not only for demanding the impossible but simply for being holy, because if he had not been holy I would have been off the hook.

In this I was like Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer. When asked, “**Do you love God?**” he answered, “**Love God? Sometimes I hate him!**”

Hallelujah, I am speaking in the past tense! Our kind and merciful – and holy – God rescued me.

I no longer hate God. Not that I love God *perfectly*. Far from it! But I do love him.

I no longer see holiness as an impossible demand. Not that I am *perfectly* holy. Hardly! I cannot even claim to be getting better *every day*. Yet I am growing in holiness.

Back to the text.

■ Verse 14: “**As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.**”

■ Verse 15: “**But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.**”

■ Verse 17: “**Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.**”

■ Verses 18-19a: “**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... but with the precious blood of Christ.**”

Do you hear the connection? The thread that binds it all together is our new identity in relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When the Living God declares, “**Be holy, because I am holy**” it is to those whom he identifies as “**children,**” the “**called,**” “**foreigners here,**” and the “**redeemed.**” Genuine holiness, the holiness commanded by God, begins in, continues in, will be completed in – *and only in* – relationship with God.

☉ In verses 14 and 17 Peter identifies Christ Followers as “**children**” of God the Father.

{Acts 17:28} Every human is naturally a child of God, in that God is the Creator of every human. As Paul told the pagan Athenians, “**We are his offspring.**”

{Jn 1:12-13} Yet the status of *spiritual* child of God is limited to those “**who ... [receive]**” God’s Messiah and believe in his name. To them he “[gives] **the right to become children...born of God.**”

{G.R. Lewis} The God who gives us birth “**is morally spotless in character and action, upright, pure, and untainted with evil desires, motives, thoughts, words, or [deeds].**” Holiness is who God is and what God does.

{Ro 8:29} As his children we have God-given potential to resemble him. Holiness is in our spiritual DNA, for “**those God foreknew he ... predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.**”

{1 Jn 3:2} This conformity is guaranteed in the resurrection: “**when Christ appears we shall be like**

him, for we shall see him as he is.” However, it is not guaranteed in this life. Our potential is a matter of promise, not absolute certainty. To put it another way we are *children* of God, we are not *clones* of God.

{1 Jn 3:3} We cannot be holy apart from the spiritual DNA imparted to us by God. At the same time, we are responsible to cooperate with him so that this capacity is fulfilled. Thus, **“all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”**

✪ That brings us to verse 15, in which Peter identifies Christ Followers as those who are **“called.”**

{1 P 1:1-2} When he greets them in verses 1-2 he addresses them as **“God’s elect...chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.”**

The Father has chosen his children, not only to be members in his family, but also **“to be obedient to Jesus”** **“and sprinkled with his [cleansing] blood.”** It is our reason for being.

For his part, God accomplishes this **“through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”** (Sanctification is the process by which we are set apart for God and transformed into new people.)

We do our part by **“not [conforming] to...evil desires”** (verse 14), by pursuing holiness in all we do (verse 15), by living **“in reverent fear”** of the LORD (verse 17), and **“by obeying the truth”** (verse 22).

✪ Moving on to verse 17, Peter identifies Christ Followers as **“foreigners here.”**

{NIV; NRSV; GNB; NASB} In verse 1 Peter greets his readers as *παρεπιδημοις διασπορας* [parepidēmois diasporas], **“strangers,” “exiles,” “refugees,” “those who reside as aliens”** and who are **“of the dispersion.”**

This describes their material circumstance. They are ① mostly Jewish Christians ② who used to live in Rome ③ who were evangelized either in Jerusalem at Pentecost or in Rome but ④ were expelled from Rome with other, traditional Jews and dispersed into Asia Minor.

It also describes their spiritual situation. Most people submit to Caesar; they submit to Christ. Most idolize security and ease; they embrace cross-carrying. Most store up earthly treasure; they store up treasure in heaven. Most hate their enemies; they love their enemies.

They are foreigners here because they are citizens of God’s kingdom. Those who inhabit it are made holy by the LORD, and he calls them to think, speak, and act in holy ways.

✪ Finally, in verses 18-19 Peter identifies Christ Followers as the **“redeemed.”**

To be **“redeemed”** is to be delivered out of bondage. If we are in Christ, the Father has redeemed us **“with the precious blood of”** his Son Jesus.

{Tit 2:14} Messiah **“gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness”** for our purification, so that we will belong to him and be **“eager to do ...good.”** Redemption is deliverance *from sin for holiness.*

{Gal 4:5} And Messiah gave himself “**to redeem**” us from dependence on the Law for “**adoption to sonship.**” Redemption is deliverance from the false holiness of legalism for the true holiness of sonship in Christ.

{Col 1:20, 22; Eph 2:13} The high cost of our redemption inspires us to seek holiness. Moreover, it actually empowers us to *be* holy, for “**by Christ’s physical body through death**” the Father “**has reconciled [us] to himself.**” We “**were far away**” from Holy God, but now we have “**have been brought near by the blood of Christ**” – and in his holy presence we are made holy.

Redemption is not limited to the forgiveness of guilt and the promise of eternal life after death. It is also deliverance from bondage to sin and the false holiness of self-reliant legalism.

“Be holy, because I am holy.”

Holiness begins when God the Father draws us to himself by choosing us. As we respond in faith, he redeems us through the blood of his Son and sanctifies us through the work of his Spirit.

{Php 2:15} Holiness progresses as we draw near to God. In mercy and kindness he empowers us to “**work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling**” by living “**as obedient children**” who turn away from evil desires, obey the truth, and represent his kingdom on the earth.

{Jn 14:3; Rev 21:3} Holiness will rise to a whole new level when Christ appears and he “[takes us] **to be with [him].**” “**God’s dwelling place [will be] among the**

people, and he... himself will be with [us].” And “**we shall be like [his Son], for we shall see him as he is.**”

“Be holy, because I am holy.”

This is the word of the Lord.