

# Holiness in Exile (1:13-21)

Well good to see you guys this morning. If you have a bible, turn with me to that passage we just read, 1 Peter 1. If you are joining us for the first time, we are in week 3 of a series where we are just walking all the way through this letter that a guy named Peter wrote to some early followers of Jesus. And the primary thing he's trying to get across is how they should relate to the people, systems and structures in the world around them as followers of Jesus. They were Christians, living in societies that did not *value* or even *like* Christians, and so Peter wants to help them learn how to live faithfully and helpfully in that type of environment.

And he wants to help *us* learn that too. And the language we introduced in week 1 for how Peter wants us to do that was the phrase *distinctive influential presence*. To elaborate, Peter wants us not to *conform* to the world, but rather to live *distinctively* from it. He wants us not to *war against* the world, but rather to *influence* it by showing them a better way. And he wants us not to *withdraw* from the world, but rather to remain *present* within it. He wants us to be a *distinctive influential presence*. And we're spending the rest of the series unpacking what that means and looks like. **So in the passage we're going to cover today, Peter is going to press in on that *first* part of the phrase—on us being *distinctive* as God's people. And the language *he* is going to use for that is that we should pursue *holiness* in our relationship with God.**

Now, I'm aware that there may not be a word out there with less street cred than the word *holiness*. Like, bet money, when you were talking to a friend of yours who isn't a follower of Jesus, you didn't just casually drop the word "holiness" into that conversation. Because that word tends to have all sorts of off-putting connotations to people. I think generally, the reason for that is that **people *assume* the word *holy* simply means something like "morally pure" or even "morally superior."** And because of that, it's almost impossible to hear the word "holy" without thinking of a *phrase* like "holier-than-thou." Right? Just *using the word* somehow feels "*judgy*" to us.

**But I think all of that is really unfortunate. Because in the Scriptures, the idea of holiness is actually a *beautiful* idea.** And while it's not always *disconnected* from the idea of moral purity, it is also so much more than that. So the word *holy* used here in 1 Peter is the Greek word *hagios*—can you say that? And it's actually just a word that means something is "different" or "unique" or "unlike" the things around it. I think probably the best word in English would be a word like "*distinct*." **When the bible talks**

**about something being holy, it simply means that it is *noticeably distinct* from the other things *around* it.** That's the broadest meaning of the word *holy*.

So in the bible, all sorts of things can be holy. Obviously *God* is holy, and *God's people* are called to be holy—that's a lot of what we'll get into today. But also, according to the bible, certain *buildings and structures* are holy,<sup>1</sup> certain *days* are holy,<sup>2</sup> even certain types of *clothing* are *holy*.<sup>3</sup> So obviously, when the bible says those things are holy, it doesn't mean that those things are "morally pure"—physical structures *can't be* moral or immoral—that wouldn't even make any sense (unless it's a Chick-Fil-A restaurant, obviously). But when the bible calls those things *holy*, it isn't trying to say that those things are morally pure—it simply means that those things are *distinct* and *unique* from other things like them. That's what holy means.

I think **the *other* misunderstanding people have is that being *holy* is only about what you *don't* do.** To be *holy*, in other words, is to abstain from smoking or drinking or having sex or do anything else that is considered taboo by whatever standards. And truthfully, I think this is one of the primary reasons that Christians are often more known for the things they're *against* than for things that they're *for*—because we've primarily defined ourselves by what we *don't* do. But holiness is not just about what you *don't* do. **To be sure, the early followers of Jesus were known for some of things they *didn't* participate in like everybody else. But they were just as defined by the things they *did* do, that no one else *did*.**

For example, there are countless stories of early Christians, during the spread of disease in certain cities, who would stick around when everybody else (including doctors) would flee those regions, to stay and care for the sick and the dying.<sup>4</sup> There are stories of Christians in the first and second century saving children from *exposure*, where people in society would take unwanted babies and leave them out in the conditions to die. But Christians were known for hanging out around those places and as soon as someone would leave a child there, they would scoop the child up and take it home to raise it as their own so it didn't die.<sup>5</sup> There are stories of *governors* sent by ancient emperors to persecute Christians, but once they would get there, they couldn't do anything to the Christians because Christians were doing a better job caring for the poor than even the

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3:5, Exodus 26:34

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:3, Exodus 12:16

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 39:41

<sup>4</sup> Some details on this [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> Details [here](#).

*government* was. And so these governors concluded that if they wiped out the Christians, it would likely cause an uprising.<sup>6</sup> And I could go on.

But my point is that those things the early Christians *did* are every bit as much descriptions of *holiness* as anything they *abstained* from. **When we talk about being holy and distinct as followers of Jesus, we're not talking about simply abstaining immoral practices, but that we would also do the things that nobody else does or wants to do.**

**And all of this is done in an effort to show the world around us what God is like.**

That is precisely the *purpose* of holiness in the bible: that our holiness would point people to the beauty and goodness that is God and his kingdom. And that is an absolutely *vital* thing to participate in. Just to give you an idea of the *importance* of holiness, look at this from the book of Hebrews:

*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be **holy**; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*<sup>7</sup>

Did y'all catch how *forceful* that statement is? It just said that without us as God's people being *holy*—without us living different and distinct lives in the world—that “no one” will see the Lord. So are you seeing how *important* this concept is for us to get? The stakes are *high*. According to Hebrews, and 1 Peter, and plenty of other places in the Scriptures, **us living distinct, holy lives is the means by which people will encounter who God truly is.**

So today, we're going to get into *how* and *why* Peter says we as God's people should become *holy*. But real quickly, before we get into all of that, we need to camp out for just a second on the *first* word of our passage—and that's the word “*therefore*.” I'm not exaggerating when I say that the word “therefore” is possibly the most important word in this passage. And here's why: because that word links everything Peter is about to say back to the first twelve verses of the letter, all about our hope being in Jesus, and in his resurrection. Which means **everything we are going to talk about today is aimed at followers of Jesus.** It's *not* aimed at anybody and everybody.

So if you're here this morning and you *aren't* a follower of Jesus, we are so glad you're here. But just as a heads up, this *is* one of those mornings where the teaching isn't really

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<sup>6</sup> Read one such correspondence [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 12:14.

for you—or at least isn't for you yet. It might be helpful to listen in, to just to get an idea of what following Jesus is all *about*, but the things we're talking about admittedly aren't going to make a ton of sense to you. Because **everything Peter is about to say operates on the assumption that you have been rescued by Jesus out of your sin.** If you don't realize that, you'll end up getting the impression that the message of Jesus is something like "change your behavior so that God will accept you." Which in reality is precisely the opposite of the gospel. **The message of gospel is actually that God accepts you through Jesus, and then as a result of that, your behaviors start to change.** They start to come more and more in line with how God designed life to work. And that latter part—your behaviors starting to change—is what we're getting into today. But you can't flip the order—it doesn't work that way. Make sense?

Alright. So in order to sort of digest all this passage is saying, I want us to frame up this passage in three sections: the *path to holiness*, the *reason for holiness*, and the *price of holiness*. We'll spend a little time on each of these. First...

## The *Path to Holiness*

Right in the opening line of our passage, Peter tells us exactly *how* we are to *go about* being holy. Look with me at v. 13:

*[13] Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

So Peter says that **in order to pursue holiness**, whether that's *doing* things *no one* else does, or *not* doing things that *everybody* else does, **you will need to "prepare your mind for action."** That phrase—"preparing your minds for action,"—if it were to be more literally translated, would read, "*gird up the loins* of your mind." Now there's a vivid sentence, right? So the idea was that in *that* society, many of the men basically wore robes. So if they wanted to run, or fight, or play sports, or do anything remotely physically active, they would "gird up" the robe by folding it together and basically tucking it into their belt, as a way of "preparing for action." So Peter borrows that *imagery*, and applies it to our *minds*. He says, **if we want to be holy, we'll have to prepare our minds in that direction.** In today's language, we might use an expression like "roll up your sleeves," or "prepare to get your hands dirty." We're talking about a proactive, involved posture in becoming distinct from the world around us.

And part of how we do that, Peter says, is to “be sober-minded.” He loops in the language of drunkenness and sobriety, but he applies it to how we *think*. So consider that for a moment. **One of the things that you do when you’re drunk is that you almost always take the path of least resistance.** Or so I’ve heard from every funny story about drunk people ever. But that’s what you do when you’re drunk, right? If the path of least resistance is to sleep with a stranger you find attractive, you do that. If it’s to punch somebody in the face just for getting on your nerves, you do that. If it’s to pee off of a four story parking garage directly onto four *cop cars with the cops still sitting in them leading to your immediate arrest*, you do that. Or maybe that one is more specific to my friend Garrett in college. But you get my point, right? **When you’re drunk, you almost always take the path of least resistance.** You mostly lose the ability to think through consequences of your actions, and so you just do what is easiest in the moment.

So you’ve got to think that at least *part* of what Peter has in mind here is that **pursuing holiness means being sober-minded. He at least means that being holy is going to require not always taking the path of least resistance.** Bearing with and forgiving difficult people is not the path of least resistance. Resisting the pull towards sleeping with the person you’re dating is far from the path of least resistance. Devoting a significant portion of your income to generosity is not the path of least resistance. But often, the path of least resistance isn’t always the *best* path. And following Jesus is going to call us to the *best* path, not just the *easiest*. That’s part of what being “sober-minded” is all about.

Now as I was thinking through this yesterday, my mind immediately went to how we *consume* certain types of media (whether that’s TV, or Netflix, or the news, or social media—whatever it is for you). An awful lot of us, before we zone out for a bit to watch Netflix, or scroll through Instagram for a bit, we say something like “I just need to turn my brain off.” “I just need to turn my brain off for a bit.” And I’m not picking on you—I’m picking on *me too*. I’ve said that. And I know some of us have enormously stressful day jobs and daily rhythms, so in no way am I saying it’s wrong to need to decompress from time to time. But at the same time, I think we all know you can’t actually turn your brain off, right? Like you can’t *actually* do that. If you “turn your brain off,” you cease to be alive. So to be more accurate, what’s *actually* happening when we do that our brains are *processing things* without any discernment or caution. We’re allowing things into our minds passively that are actually training us, discipling us to believe certain things about ourselves and the world around us. And that should be concerning to us.

But the Scriptures also seem to be saying that **there's a way to take that type of passive, hands-off posture, not just towards Netflix or towards social media, but towards life in general.** So I wonder if we're "turning our brains off" when it comes to the health of our relationship with the person we're dating. I wonder if a lot of us are actually "turning our brains off" when it comes to our *marriage*—our relationship with our spouse. I wonder if some of us are doing that when it comes to other followers of Jesus that we could be pouring into, helping them learn how to follow Jesus. When it comes to our friends and coworkers and classmates who don't know Jesus. When it comes to fighting certain recurring sins in our life. And most importantly of all, I wonder if we've turned our brains off when it comes to our discipleship to Jesus. When it comes to our pursuit of holiness. And I think if Peter could speak into that, he would tell us to wake up. To be dialed in to the different things that are seeping into our minds and imagination, and tell us instead to be *sober-minded* and *alert* about it all.

So maybe the most practical next step for a lot of us is to confess to others where we've been "turning our brains off." Maybe we need to have a conversation with our spouse where we say "I've been turning my brain off when it comes to our relationship and that's not okay—and I want to do something about it." Maybe we need to have a conversation with those in our LifeGroup where we say "I've been just going through the motions when it comes to living life intentionally with you guys and I don't want to do that anymore." Maybe some of us need to say to people in our life that we're close to "I've been turning my brain off when it comes to this recurring sin or struggle in my life, and I want it to stop, and I want you to call me to the table on it." Those types of conversations might need to happen this week, so that we can pursue what it means to be "holy" together.

And Peter says in v. 13 that all of this hinges upon "setting your hope" on Jesus and where he's taking the world. ~~So this all builds directly on what Marcus talked about last week—that~~ **how we live is entirely dependent upon what our hope is in. If we don't believe a perfect world is coming, we will always try to create a perfect world for ourselves in the here and now.** ~~We'll use any number of different things to create our own little heaven on earth for ourselves. And that almost always ends poorly. So instead,~~ Peter says, we should continually set (and *re-set*) our hope on Jesus. That's the *path* to holiness—that's how we go about it.

*Next*, Peter talks about...

## The Reason for Holiness

Next Peter gets into *why* we should be holy. He gets at this starting in v. 14:

*[14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

So the very crux of this passage is v. 15 and 16, that both say that we should be holy, because *God* himself is holy.” *That’s* the big idea: **that our distinctiveness is motivated by God’s distinctiveness.** Our desire to be different is driven by how different *he* is. The Scriptures are clear that there is no one like God. There’s no one as good as he is, as faithful as he is, as powerful as he is, and specifically there’s no one as *holy* as he is. So driven by the *distinctiveness* of the God we worship, we are also called to pursue a similar type of distinctiveness *as his people*. That’s the reason we’re called to be holy. Not to be better than other people or just for the sake of standing out, but in order to resemble God himself.

And then Paul moves into what might seem like an odd sentence to a lot of us. Look with me at v. 17:

*[17] And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...*

Peter says, “if God is your father...conduct yourself with *fear* towards him.” Does that sound weird to anybody else? We tend to think about father-to-child relationships in terms more like “love” and “acceptance”—not so much “fear.” So what is Peter trying to say?

Well first, it’s probably helpful to note that parent-to-child relationships in *Peter’s* day had a slightly different dynamic than a lot of those relationships do today. Today, we tend to be very focused on being *friends* with our kids. I’ll hear parents say this all the time—that they just want to be their son or daughter’s “best friend.” Now, to some degree, that is a *great* desire. Wanting to be relationally close with your kids is a *fantastic* thing. I absolutely hope both my kids think of me as their friend. ...But I also hope they don’t think of me as *only* their friend, are you with me on that? So my oldest kid is four years old right now. If he sees his relationship with *me* the exact same way he sees his

relationship with his four year old *best friend* at preschool, I don't know that that's a win. Like, if you come over to my house one day and me and my four year old are arguing over who gets the last juicebox, and we have to get my wife Ana to settle the argument between us, you're going to correctly conclude that something is very wrong with our family.

And that's because our relationship should be a *fundamentally different* relationship than the one he has with his friends at school. Hopefully it *includes* friendship, but it is not *exclusively* friendship. There is a—and I know how much we hate this word as a society, but there should be a certain *hierarchy* to our relationship. There's a certain *deference* that should be in place there. I'm almost *thirty* years older than my son—I've got just a *tad* more life experience than he does. And so in our interactions with one another, there should be love and there should be acceptance and there should be friendship—all of those things. But there should also be a healthy understanding that we are not the *same*. There should be an understanding that I am on a somewhat different level from him and that understanding should shape his actions to one degree or another.

So here's my point with all that: **if there is *that* kind of difference between me as an earthly father and my son, how much more of a difference should there be between us and God?** How much should we, as God's people, be dialed into the reality that God is not the same as us? He is our *friend*, to be sure, but he's not *only* our friend. He knows more than we do, he understands more than we do. And he *correctly* claims the authority owed the creator and sustainer of the universe—because that's *who he is*. And **to have a healthy relationship with him, we need to learn to see him in that way.**

And the word Peter uses for that type of understanding is the word *fear*. To be sure, *fear* shouldn't be the *only* characteristic of our relationship with God—that would be equally unhealthy—but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be a characteristic at *all*. There are all sorts of commands in the bible for the people of God to *fear* God. Not meaning we are to be *terrified* of him, but that we are to have a healthy respect and deference for him. There should be an understanding that we are not on the same level as him. That he, at the end of the day, is *smarter* than we are.

So let me ask you: is that how you see God? Do believe—like actually believe—that God is smarter than you? And I don't just mean in *theory*—I mean based on how you live. Because if there are things in your life that are very obviously contrary to how he says life should be lived, and you really have no interest in doing anything about changing



those things, what you've just revealed is that you *don't* believe he's smarter than you. You've revealed that you just think his commands are *suggestions*. And Peter would say what you are missing there in your relationship with God is *fear*. You're missing a healthy understanding that God is on a different level than you are. And he's saying that **when you realize you are God's kid, you won't use that as a reason to shrug off things he says, but rather a reason to listen and be dialed into what he says all the more.**

~~My fear is that some of us treat Jesus like he's little more than a consultant. Is there to bounce ideas off of, and there to help us with some things when we feel like we need it, but at the end of the day, we are totally comfortable accepting or rejecting his input. But that is to fundamentally misunderstand our relationship to him.~~ **If we can look at the holiness and fairness and just nature of God, and go "so it doesn't matter how I live!" we may have just revealed that we aren't truly God's kids.** That is what Peter means by all of this in the passage. That's why Peter can say, "if you call upon him as *Father,*" *[then you will]* "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile." Does that make sense?

All this brings us to the last thing that Peter unpacks...

## **The *Price of Holiness***

Lastly, Peter wants us to know the *price* that was paid *for us to become* holy and distinct. This comes from v. 18-21:

*[18] ...knowing that you were **ransomed** [we'll come back to that word] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, [19] but **with the precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. [20] He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, [21] who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

So finally, Peter says that **all holiness is made possible by knowing we have been *ransomed* by Jesus.** That word "ransom" is exactly what it sounds like: it's a price paid to purchase someone out of a harmful situation. In Peter's day, it was usually associated with the idea of human trafficking. A person who was enslaved could only go free if they were "ransomed": if someone saw it fit to go and purchase them out of their situation. But Peter adds *to* that picture by saying that you and I—followers of Jesus: we weren't just

ransomed with “*perishable* things such as silver or gold”—we weren’t ransomed by *money*, but rather by something far more enduring: with the very blood of Jesus.

So what Peter is referring to, of course, is the cross. Jesus said that he came “to give his life as a *ransom* for many.”<sup>8</sup> His very *life* was the *ransom* that made our holiness possible. Jesus came to us when we were *helpless*—when we were utterly unable to set ourselves free, and he *purchased* us out. He paid the price for us to go free. For us to be his. And for us to become *holy*.

And there’s *another* important word in there: the word *precious*. Peter calls the blood of Jesus that ransomed us “precious.” Now, what does it mean for something to be *precious*? Well on one level, **something being precious just means that it’s *valuable*. But not just valuable in *general*. Something being precious means that it’s *valuable specifically to you*.** Some things are valuable to most *anybody*. If you get handed down a large sum of money, that’s valuable to you really regardless of who you are. If you get handed down a large property or plot of land of some sort, that’s valuable to you regardless of who you are. ***Valuable things have universal significance.***

**But *precious* things have *particular* significance.** Things that are *precious* are valuable to *you*, regardless of whether or not they are valuable in *general*. For instance, when I was in college, a family member gave me a bible that belonged to my grandfather, who passed away when I was three years old. Because I was so young, I never got to know him super well, but everyone told me that he was this incredible, mighty man of God. And so when I was given his bible when I was older, I remember being almost brought to tears by all the notes he jotted down in the margins. And I just sensed immediately, this is *precious*. Now, that didn’t necessarily mean it was valuable to just *anybody*. I could’ve probably taken that bible to a used bookstore and they would’ve given me, *maybe* \$5 for it. Probably less than that because it’s a bible, and because it had somebody else’s writing all over it. But it didn’t matter how valuable it was *in general*—it was valuable to *me*. It was *precious*. So I *didn’t* sell it to a used bookstore. I *treasured* it. I *honored* it. I *revered* it. Because that’s what you do when something is *precious*.

And I’ve got to think that’s the type of posture Peter has in mind in this passage. You’ve got to think, there was nothing more *valuable* to God the Father than the blood—the very *life*—of his one and only son. And yet, to purchase us out of our sin and into his family,

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 20:28

God gave *that* up. He gave the precious blood of Jesus. He sent his only son on a rescue mission to give up his very life for you and for me. And Peter is saying that once you *get* that, you will begin to *become* holy. **The cost of our ransom was of infinite cost to God, and knowing that should make it precious to us.** When you and I look at the blood of Jesus, what we should see is the *price paid* for us to become different. Distinct. Holy. *That's our ransom.*

So I'd love to just end with a *question* for you to consider. And that's this: *is Jesus precious to you?* And listen: that question is a whole lot more practical than you think. If the cross of Jesus is just *one* place that you get your joy, your satisfaction, your acceptance, your meaning—then that means he is not, in fact, *precious* to you—he's just one of many good options available. But if Jesus is *precious* to you—if **the cross isn't just one place you get your value, but the place, then that will change how you live.** It will make you alert and sober-minded. It will lead to rolling up your sleeves and getting your hands dirty. It will lead to seeing God, not as a buddy who has some suggestions on how you might live, but as the God of the universe that we revere as we call on him as Father. So, listen: I get that probably most of us here would say the blood of Jesus is *valuable*. We all see the *theoretical* value in it. What I want to know is *is it precious, to you?*

Because **if it is precious, that will inevitably transform how we live, and what we live for.** Just imagine what could happen if City Church, or even if the church at large in America, became known as people who lived *distinctively*? What could happen if followers of Jesus became known, not just as “those people who are against abortion,” but as the *only* people who would adopt the children from *each* and *every* unplanned pregnancy? What could happen if followers of Jesus became known as the only people who actually *pursued* racial reconciliation instead of just talking about wanting it? What could happen if followers of Jesus became known in our society for being the only people who can disagree with other people without demonizing and ostracizing them? These are the types of things that we mean when we talk about being *holy*. Can you imagine the impact things like that would have on the world around us? Can you imagine the *distinctive, influential presence* that would generate? And all of it starts with seeing the blood of Jesus as *precious*, and then choosing to live our lives in response to it.

May it be so. I'd love to pray for us to that end.