

**Wholly, Holey, Holy***2<sup>nd</sup> in series on Peter's Principles*

1 Peter 1:13 – 2: 3

04-26-2009 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

**Introduction**

Years ago I was reading in the den when I heard this CLOMP, CLOMP, CLOMP coming down the hall. I looked up to discover our then two year old daughter had been amusing herself in Daddy's closet. She had discovered my old **cowboy boots** and put them on her feet. Her toes barely came past the heels and the boots almost came up to her waist, but she could not have been any prouder of her new footwear.

No doubt many parents share a similar memory or snapshot from their past as well. Children play "dress up" in order to mimic their mothers and fathers. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then parents should blush. Our young sons and daughters want to grow up to be just like us.

**I. Imitators of God**

In my Christian life, it often feels like I am clomping around in shoes much too big for my feet. We are children of God, sons and daughters of the Almighty King. Our goal is to become just like our Heavenly Father; but, we have a lot of growing still to do.

In Ephesians 5:1, Paul wrote: "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly beloved children . . .*" In our Scripture lesson today, Peter challenged his readers: "*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.'*" (1 Peter 1: 14-16)

Christians are called to be imitators of God, to be holy as God is holy. We have mighty big shoes to fill! Oftentimes we look like children playing dress-up in oversized clothes. Holiness is a garment into which we must grow; but it is a goal towards which we are called to strive. The Bible reveals three different aspects of holiness:

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| 1) God is holy. | 2) God sets us apart<br>as holy people. | 3) We are called to<br>lead holy lives. |
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**III. God is Holy**

First and foremost, **God is holy**. Holiness is a chief characteristic of the divine nature. Biblical synonyms for holy include righteous, sanctified, and sacred. We serve a holy God of purity and light; in him, there is no evil or darkness.

In Isaiah 6, the prophet described his call to ministry. During worship, Isaiah experienced an awesome vision of God sitting enthroned in the temple. Seraphs surrounded the throne, singing: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*"

In the presence of divine holiness, Isaiah was convicted of his human sinfulness. He cried out: "*Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*"

Then a seraph took a live coal from the altar and touched Isaiah's mouth. The angel declared: "See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Only then could the prophet hear and respond to God's call.

In Revelation 4: 8, God is worshipped upon the throne with the repeated call: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." The passage inspired the words of the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*. The third stanza declares:

*Holy, holy, holy, though the darkness hide thee,  
Though the eyes of sinful man thy glory may not see.  
Only thou art holy, there is none beside thee,  
Perfect in power, in love and purity.*

## II. A Holy People Set Apart for God's Use

God is holy and in turn calls us to be His **holy people**. In Leviticus 11: 44, God commanded: "Be holy as I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 echoed this command: "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.'" How do we translate divine holiness into personal holiness? The process begins with the recognition that holiness is both a gift and a goal.

First, this holy status is a **gift** from our heavenly Father. We are declared holy by the One who called us out of darkness into his wondrous light. Holiness is an unearned status given to us by God. It has more to do with divine grace than human character. According to the Bible, holiness means that we have been **set apart** for God's use.

Most families here have a set of "holy" **china** at home. We may not use the word "holy," but it is the nicer dinnerware that is reserved for special occasions. The ordinary dishes are used for daily meals. The fine china is set apart for extraordinary celebrations. We have imbued it with a special status and purpose.

In the same way, things holy to God are set apart for **divine use**. The Bible is holy because it contains God's Word. The Sabbath is holy because it has been set apart from the rest of the week by God. The sanctuary is holy because it has been set apart for worship. The church is holy because we have been set apart for divine service.

We are not chosen and set apart because of some special ability, morality, or worthiness. At the heart of the gospel, we always discover **grace**—a free gift given by a loving God to a people who can never deserve or earn it—only accept it.

A corollary to this understanding of holiness is that we are not set apart for privilege but **responsibility**. Fine china that sits in a cabinet because it is too special to be used never fulfills the purpose for which it was created. We are set apart to serve God and others in the name of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, one of the titles given to the church is "*the body of Christ*." We are God's hands and feet in the world. In Christ's name, we have been commissioned to declare the gospel of God's love and grace to the world.

## IV. A Holy People Called to Lead Holy Lives

Personal holiness is a gift, but it is also a **goal**. God declares that we are holy, and then calls us to **become holy** in our attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds. We might sing “*Just as I am*,” but we dare not stay just as we are. We are called to grow into holiness.

To use a different image, our heavenly Father **adopts** us as his children with all of our faults, vices, and sin. We become a part of God’s family and bear the name of Christ in the title “*Christian*.” However, the Lord then expects us to start living up to the family name! We are called to reflect God’s holiness in our lives.

Remember the words of 1 Peter 1:15-16: “*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.’*” In “The Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus rephrased the command in radical terms: “*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” (Matthew 5: 48)

Christ’s call to perfection and holiness can feel overwhelming. In fact, we often dismiss these words as an unobtainable ideal. After all, no one’s perfect. But let’s turn that statement around for a moment. If perfection is an impossible dream, then how much imperfection are we willing to tolerate in our lives? If holiness seems to be a lofty goal, then how much un-holiness is acceptable in our souls?

During the past year, one of the lead consumer news stories has been the **salmonella** outbreak traced to a peanut production plant in Blakely, Georgia. State and federal inspections discovered unsanitary conditions at the *Peanut Corporation of America*. The investigation discovered that plant officials knowingly shipped peanut butter contaminated with salmonella. A number of illnesses along with some deaths have been linked to the tainted product.

So let me ask you a question: how much salmonella is acceptable in your child’s peanut butter and jelly sandwich? I’m thinking NONE! Even a small amount of toxin is too much. The same is true when it comes to sinfulness in our souls. Even a small amount of sin is toxic. This is why God sets such a high standard for his children. Our goal is holiness, our goal is perfection.

There is a moral, ethical quality to holiness. Our goal is to be imitators of God. In Romans 8: 29, Paul said the same thing in different words when he wrote that we are called “*to be conformed to the likeness of God’s son.*” It is my personal observation that most of us have a lot of conforming yet to do!

This lifelong pursuit of holiness occurs both in **being** and doing. During Lent, I talked about the importance of **abiding** in Christ. In John 15: 5, Jesus said: “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” Holiness is something that “rubs off” on us by spending time in God’s presence through prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, etc.

The great devotional writer, Andrew Murray, wrote: “The secret of true obedience is the clear and close personal relationship to God. All our attempts after full obedience will be failures until we get access to his abiding fellowship. It is God’s holy presence consciously abiding with us that keeps us from disobeying Him. I must consciously include the Lord in every thought, activity, and conversation until the habit is established.”

Joseph Stowell recorded a conversation he had with a business consultant who specialized in quality control. The expert said: “In quality control, we are not concerned about the product. Instead, we are concerned about the process. If the process is right, then the product is guaranteed.” Sometimes we focus upon the “end” rather than the “means” of holiness. But it is the means that leads to the end.

Abiding in Christ is vital in cultivating a holy lifestyle. Oftentimes we make holiness into a self-improvement project. We consciously try to rid ourselves of bad habits. However, holiness does not simply come by working hard to eliminate sinful habits. Instead, it occurs by allowing the Holy Spirit to fill our lives.

Consider this **science experiment** as a spiritual exercise. I have a glass in my hand. How can I get the air out of it? The best way is to fill it with water. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, there is no room for sin and unrighteousness.

Holiness is being . . . but it is combined with **doing**. When we abide in Christ, our attitudes and actions naturally and supernaturally change. The converse is also true. By acting as God’s children, we grow in Christ’s image. To quote Mark Twain, “*Always do right. This will gratify most people, and astonish the rest!*” It also allows us to live up to our family name.

*The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* recently carried an article by a professor at **Cornell University** who conducted an experiment on “*The Superiority Complex*.” In interviews, he discovered that most people possess a “**holier-than-thou**” attitude. The majority of people think they are better than others. Statistically, this is obviously false. By definition, average is in the middle—in fact, half of the people you meet are below average! Either folk think they’re better than they are or others aren’t as bad as they seem.

In a series of experiments, the professor discovered that we tend to accurately judge others’ morality. However, we tend to give ourselves more credit than we deserve!

Although it wasn’t the study’s main point, Professor Dunning made an interesting observation. He wrote, “We define morality by looking at our own behavior. Once you say you are a moral, wonderful, generous person, you have to live up to those standards. So even if you have overestimated yourself, you are constrained by your self-image.”

Our self-image is God’s vision for his people. We are challenged to live holy lives—“*be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*” In our Scripture lesson today, Peter reminds his readers of their salvation. God’s people have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. In him, sin and death have been vanquished by forgiveness and life. The crucifixion and resurrection invite us to become a part of God’s family.

Then chapter two begins with the word “Therefore.” Based on divine action, we are called to a human response. “**THEREFORE**, *rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, SO THAT by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*” (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Peter's call to "*rid yourselves*" of evil uses the imagery of taking off **dirty clothes** and putting on clean clothes. In Christ, we are new creations in which the old has passed away; but "the old" is a stubborn reality that clings to our souls, resurfacing at the most inopportune times. The decision to lead a holy life does not occur once but dozens of times daily as we choose to follow Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Holiness is first and foremost a part of God's nature. In grace, God declares that his people are holy and set apart for a divine purpose. In response to God's grace, we are called to lead holy living. We abide in Christ's presence and act by the Spirit's power. Our goal is to "*be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.*"

We have mighty big shoes to fill; and sometimes we feel like a toddler clomping around in boots that come up to our waist. However, we are called to grow in holiness day-by-day. Our goal is to become like our heavenly Father. When others look at us, they should be able to say, "You look just like your father."