

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO BE HOLY?

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Why waste time thinking about something that sounds impossible? For that matter, why would we even want to run the risk of being thought of as someone who is out of step with society? Why give others an excuse to write us off as being different, impractical, self-righteous, or just plain naive?

In the pages that follow, we'll see why a healthy holiness is not only possible but that nothing is more practical. Nothing is more logical. Nothing is more personally rewarding. We'll sort through the mistaken ideas and see that what God expects from us is not an unattainable perfection but a very achievable way of thinking and living that reflects our true purpose in life.

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WHO HAS A CLUE?

Where do we begin to look for answers when we are trying to understand what it means to be holy? Who has a clue as to why holiness is a trait that we would want to be characteristic of our lives? And who knows how to attain it?

A study of the people of the past and a look around us at the men and women of the present reveal a wide variety of approaches to this issue.

Isolationists. These people believe that the way to get closer to God is to get away from people. Anthony (c. 250–356) gave all he owned to the poor and lived alone in the Egyptian desert (which was probably a good idea because he never bathed). Simeon Stylites (386–459) lived for 36 years

on top of pillars, including one that reached 60' high.

Legalists. These people may differ on the specifics, but they agree on their insistence that true spirituality is found by trying to live up to the laws of their faith.

Libertarians. In sharp contrast to those who insist on “looking good,” these individuals insist that because God is gracious, loving, and forgiving, it really doesn’t matter how they live. They believe their holiness is God’s responsibility.

Perfectionists. Some have insisted that holiness comes through a dramatic emotional experience in which a person is suddenly lifted to a higher spiritual plane, freed of the former struggles with sin.

Passive Recipients. The problem, according to those who hold this point of view, is that we often try too

hard to be holy. The answer is to simply “Let go and let God.” By relying on God’s Spirit and not self-effort, a person can rise above sin and overcome sinful tendencies. We therefore can achieve what is called the victorious Christian life.

***Being holy has
gotten a bad
reputation.***

With these and other views competing for our attention, it’s no wonder we may be confused at times. It can be frustrating to try to understand what God expects from us and what we can reasonably expect from ourselves.

To whom can we go for answers? Let me suggest someone who at first glance may not seem like a likely candidate but will help us to see that holiness is not a

matter of becoming a sinless creature. The person I’m thinking of was an ordinary person with the kinds of questions and struggles that you and I face. Yet he will help us to see that holiness is first a matter of understanding who we are, and then putting that into action. He will help us to see that holiness is first and foremost a matter of the heart.

Let me introduce you to Simon. He was a rough and sun-baked first-century fisherman who worked on the Sea of Galilee. One day his brother introduced him to Jesus Christ, who immediately changed Simon’s name to Peter, which means “rock.” Jesus knew something about this impulsive, unpredictable person that we wouldn’t have noticed on the surface. He chose Peter to teach the world through his

life and words why it makes so much sense to be holy. Peter's life itself would demonstrate that becoming holy was more than just looking good on the outside.

During the 3 years following his initial contact with Jesus, Peter did not always live up to the stability that his name seemed to promise. He even denied his Lord (Mt. 26:30-35,69-75). But Jesus never gave up on Peter. After rising from the grave, Jesus graciously restored the one who had denied Him a few days before (Jn. 21:15-22). In the years ahead, He would patiently work on the rough edges that still marked this "rock" (Acts 10; Gal. 2:11-14). Through it all, the Lord would use Peter to help Christ's followers to understand the true and wonderful meaning of holiness.

We can learn a lot from Peter. It's from his pen that we get some of the strongest expressions of why anyone would want to be holy. He wrote two short letters shortly before his death and addressed them to first-century believers who lived

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in what is now northern Turkey. These letters help us to understand why it's so important to be holy, what it means in practical terms, and why we must continue to work at it throughout our entire lives.

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO BE HOLY?

As difficult as it may be, let's try to put aside the negative images of holiness that may be in our minds. Let's try to see Peter's point of view.

In the pages that follow, we'll see that real holiness will not lead us to retreat from society but to be, as Jesus was, a friend of sinners, a servant of God, a person with a clear sense of purpose, and someone who knows true joy and peace no matter what the circumstances. We'll see what holiness looks like in practical terms. And because it doesn't come by taking the easy path, we'll see where to find the spiritual resources to be holy, why we struggle so much in the process, and what dangers we can expect along the way.

GOOD REASONS (1 Peter 1:1-2:10)



“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’” (1 Pet. 1:13-16).

In principle, holiness is what all of us expect when we turn on the faucet, order a meal at a restaurant, or

take off muddy shoes when we come into the house. We expect our water, our food, and our homes to be kept clean for our use and health.

This was the principle in view when, in the 1860s, Russian scientists recommended moving the water supply pipes of St. Petersburg. Untreated sewage flowed into the Neva River a few hundred yards upstream from the intake pipes for the city's drinking water.

In 1992, 130 years later, environmentalists visiting the city of 5 million people were shocked to find that the situation had not changed. Residents routinely continued to boil the brownish-yellow water that came from their taps. Many strained their water through cheesecloth before drinking it. Unboiled, the water contained toxic bacteria that caused diarrhea, stomach cramps, and nausea.

Holiness is like clean water that has been set aside for our use. Holiness is to unholiness what

- whole is to broken
- usable is to unusable
- special is to ordinary
- valuable is to worthless
- a clear conscience is to guilt
- honesty is to deception
- excellent is to unacceptable
- pure is to stained
- good is to bad
- happy is to sad
- fresh is to spoiled
- gain is to loss
- complete is to incomplete

Holiness is a positive term, brimming with good connotations—if we understand what it truly means and don't load it down with all the baggage of bad experiences or improper usage.

What did Peter mean when he said we are to be holy? At its most basic level, *holy* (from

the Hebrew *qodes*; Greek *hagios*) refers to the condition of being set apart, separated from others, different. It is a word whose highest meaning is found in referring to God, and to objects and people that God has set apart for His own use and service.

In reference to God, *holiness* speaks of the vast differences between Him and us in both His nature (such characteristics as His power, knowledge, glory) and His moral perfection (His absolute sinlessness). Because God is holy, we worship Him and can rely on Him to be absolutely good in how He relates to us.

Sometimes the Scriptures use the same term to describe temple furniture and objects that were to be set apart for the sole use of worship and temple service. On other occasions the term *holy* is used to describe people chosen and set apart by God to be His

representatives and witnesses among all the nations of the world.

The term *saint* sounds different, but it comes from the same root as *holy*. In biblical terms, a saint is a person whom God has set apart for Himself. Saints are not just honored people of the past. They include real-life, down-to-earth, common people who have been set apart as the Lord's own special possession, and as receivers of His special favor. All who know Christ as Savior are called saints because God has called them His people, His spiritual children—distinct from nonbelievers (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:18).

The word *sanctification*, used often in the New Testament, is also from the same root word as *holy*. This word has three closely related meanings:

1. Sanctification is God's official act of setting

us apart as His forgiven children. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, after listing several unholy actions, the apostle Paul stated, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” When we put our faith in Christ as our Savior, our only hope of forgiveness, God cleanses us and declares us His special children, holy and set apart for service to Him. This might be called positional holiness. It is ours not because we have earned it but because we have placed our complete trust and reliance in Christ.

2. Sanctification is the lifelong process whereby God makes a believer more and more like Jesus. This is where we find ourselves right here and now, and this is the set-apart-for-God’s-special-use sense of the term that the Bible spends the most

time discussing. Because we have been chosen by God, our purpose is to live increasingly in a manner that is consistent with our calling.

While we never arrive at the goal of Christlike moral perfection in this life, we can for the rest of our lives experience the results of being in a right relationship to God. This is the progressive, practical side of holiness.

In a letter to a church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Th. 4:3). A few paragraphs later he said, “May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23). These are examples of the many New Testament texts devoted to helping us understand how we are to grow in sanctification—to become

more holy in practice so that we show by our actions that we belong to the Lord.

3. Sanctification is the ultimate goal, the moral perfection that God's spiritual children will one day attain. In 1 John 3:2-3, the author stated, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." We who are children of God will one day be like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

What is the basis for God's call to be holy?

The call to holiness is loud and clear in both Old and New Testaments. In both cases, though separated by hundreds of years and very different social and cultural situations, the basis is the same. In both cases, God

gives His people overwhelming reasons to be grateful as they separate themselves for His service and pleasure.

In Leviticus, God said, "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (11:45). He reminded the Jews that He had just delivered them from a life of cruel slavery in Egypt. He had rescued them by using 10 miraculous plagues, which climaxed in the night of the Passover, to break the stranglehold of Pharaoh and to begin leading His people toward the Promised Land.

The foundational motive of gratefulness is also seen in New Testament calls to holiness. Peter wrote his letter after the sacrificial death of Christ. He looked back to the Father's gift of His Son to provide for the salvation of all who would put their trust in Him (Jn.

3:16-18). Peter reminded his readers, “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” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Because of all that God has sacrificed for us, His people in every age have compelling reasons to let God distinguish them for His use in the world. Because of what He has shown us about Himself, we have indisputable reasons to reflect the moral virtues of the One who has made us and then bought us for Himself.

In the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, we read, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (12:14). Jesus said,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt. 5:8). According to these statements and others in the Bible, distancing ourselves from what God hates and associating ourselves with what He loves are what we need to do (see also Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 2:14-15).

Is there any hope for us? At this point we might be thinking, *It sounds like God's standards are unrealistic. If that's what He demands, I may as well give up now.* But don't despair. Remember the encouraging, down-to-earth example of Peter. He too had his ups and downs. It may seem to be little comfort, but we're all in the same boat. Nobody in the world even comes close to being holy in the way God requires. But there's hope because God is gracious. He can change us, and He has gone to great lengths to help us along the way.

As we have already seen, in one very important sense all who have expressed personal faith in Christ are *already* holy. There's nothing more to be done. But this is only part of the total picture—though it is the crucial first step to living a life that is characterized more and more by holiness.

***All who have put
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Why should we be holy? The reasons include:

- We were designed to find our fulfillment in a life that is set apart for God.
- Sin may seem to bring pleasure, but in the long run it is self-destructive.
- It makes sense to live in a way that reflects our special identity and purpose.
- God has chosen us to be

special, different, holy, as a testimony of His love and grace in a world that is infected and enslaved by sin.

- Holiness is the appropriate grateful response to the gift of salvation, to the great price God paid through His Son to rescue us from sin.
- God is holy, and if we want to know Him better we must learn to live for Him on His terms.
- God commands us to be holy.
- It's a taste of heaven now that can help us focus on the wonderful life that awaits us.

For further thought:

Read 1 Peter 1:1–2:10. What statements help to describe why you would want to be holy? What speaks most compellingly to your heart? Take a few moments to pray and respond to what God has said to you in His Word.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS (1 Peter 2:11–3:22)



“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. . . . He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness”
(1 Pet. 2:11,24).

At this point you may still be wondering what this wonderful principle of holiness looks like. This is where we can once again turn to Peter for help. He

gave us plenty of examples in his letters that show how holiness works its way out in everyday life—as citizens of heaven, as citizens of earth, as employees, as wives or husbands, or as witnesses to a hostile world.

I. As Citizens Of Heaven (2:1-12).

In these verses, Peter reminded Christ’s followers of who they are. That may sound unnecessary, but it’s not. One of the most common reasons for our unholiness is that we lose sight of who we are as God’s children. Instead of seeing ourselves as His people, chosen for His special use, we become shortsighted and see ourselves the way others see themselves—material people destined only for a few years in this material world.

That’s why Peter told us that we are part of a huge spiritual project, members

of a spiritual priesthood of believers who are to serve the Lord and not merely our own appetites (2:1-5). Our lives and our destiny rest on Jesus Christ (vv.7-8). God has chosen us for a noble purpose—to declare to the whole world how great He is and what He has done for us (vv.9-10). Because we have officially become citizens of heaven, we are aliens in the world (v.11). And we have an obligation to live like members of God's kingdom (v.12).

2. As Citizens Of Earth (2:13-17). A holy life, a life lived for the eternal King of the universe, does not carry with it a disregard for the temporary rulers of nations. Peter wrote that holy men and women will respect their national rulers as enforcers of what is right. We are to respect authority and promote order, not anarchy.

3. As Employees (2:18-25). Peter directed his words specifically to slaves. We may think of slave/master and employee/employer relationships as totally different, but the parallels are very strong. We too may feel trapped in a job, working for an inconsiderate and cruel employer. What did Peter say we are to do? We're to respond differently than we might expect. He encouraged us to give respect to our employers and suffer mistreatment rather than lashing out in an un-Christlike manner.

4. As Wives (3:1-6). Peter directed his comments primarily at wives of unbelieving husbands, but the call to holy behavior applies to all wives. Their lives are to be characterized by winsomeness (v.1), purity and reverence (v.2), and the beauty of a gentle

and quiet spirit that was characteristic of the holy women of the Bible (vv.3-6).

5. As Husbands (3:7). A husband who is becoming holy will be considerate of his wife's needs. He will respect her worth and recognize that his relationship with her is a vital part of his relationship with the Lord.

6. As Witnesses To The World (3:8-22). Our behavior is to be so exemplary that those around us will have no basis for badmouthing us and our association with Christ. We need to be willing to suffer for doing good and keeping a clear conscience.

How serious are we about this? What is our spiritual temperature? Do people see holy, Christlike qualities developing in our lives because we are in close fellowship with Him and following His example?

Or are the struggles and frustrations getting us down? Do Peter and Jesus seem to be asking too much from us? Or is it possible that we are self-deceived, assuming that we know what it means to live for Christ but actually setting our sights and standards for living far too low? Do we have a desire to grow in Christlikeness?

In a footnote in *The Discipline Of Grace* (NavPress, 1994), author Jerry Bridges writes, "I am aware that a vast number of professing Christians display little or no commitment to spiritual growth or discipleship, and for them the Christian life is no more than the mere formalities of attending church and avoiding scandalous behavior" (p.233).

What do you think? Do you agree with him? Are you assessing your own

degree of passion for spiritual growth and discipleship?

Are we coasting through life without examining our attitudes and actions in the light of God's Word? Do we

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view ourselves as pretty decent individuals who don't do any of the “big” sins that get people tossed into jail or out of churches?

It's easy to begin to coast spiritually. After all, growth requires hard work. It means sacrificing some

short-range “want to’s” for some long-range “need to’s” that will honor the Lord.

There are no quick fixes. Mountaintop spiritual thrills are followed by valleys of spiritual battles and even crushing failures. Becoming holy and Christlike takes a lifetime.

For further thought: Read 1 Peter 2:11–3:11. Summarize in your own words the key ways that holiness is to be evidenced in your daily life. What is your greatest struggle right now in your pursuit of holiness? What is God telling you to do as you rely on Him? Take a few moments to pray and respond to what God has said in His Word.

TOUGH ENEMIES (1 Peter 4–5)



“He who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires. . . . If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. . . . Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 4:1-2,16; 5:8).

We have formidable opponents: the unholy sinful tendencies that come from within us, the unholy world all around us with its attractive bait that camouflages the hook of sin, and the lies and deeds of evil personified, the

leader of the fallen angels we call the devil.

The Flesh. Peter wrote, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). And later he added that we are not to live for “evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (4:2).

We carry the damaging effects of the disease of sin within us (1 Jn. 2:16). Even though God has declared that we have been forgiven of sin, are spiritually born again, and will never be condemned by Him (Jn. 3:3,16-18), we will have a battle with sinful desires that “war against [our] soul” as long as we live (1 Pet. 2:11; see also Rom. 6–8).

The term *flesh* refers to the sinful tendencies that rise from within us—lust, coveting, pride, self-centeredness—which lead

us into sin (Rom. 7:15-25; Jas. 1:13-15; 4:1-10).

The World. The unbelieving world around us can be hostile to those who follow Christ. Peter warned about the likelihood that believers would suffer as Christians (1 Pet. 4:16) and be objects of ridicule and attack because they identify with Christ (3:13-18). Jesus Himself told His disciples, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (Jn. 15:18-19).

The term *world* refers to the sin-permeated, fallen world-system of life on this planet that draws us away from holy living. It is everything that has been distorted by sin and opposes what is good and holy. First John 2:15 states, “Do not

love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

The Devil And His Lies. Just as Satan deceived Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3), so he continues to spin his web of deceit today. He is a liar by nature (Jn. 8:44), and Peter wrote that the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us as his prey (1 Pet. 5:8). He is called the “ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” in the world (Eph. 2:2). He is doing his worst to lead people astray and hinder the work of God.

Peter instructed his readers, “Resist him [the devil], standing firm in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:9). By knowing God, rooting our thoughts and actions firmly in the Word, and by relying on the Holy Spirit within, we will not fall easily into

Satan's traps or give him a foothold in our lives.

The apostle Paul elaborated on our spiritual defenses in his letter to the Ephesians (6:10-18). He listed several pieces of armor that we must use in our spiritual battles:

- **Belt Of Truth** = Know and live by the truth.
- **Breastplate Of Righteousness** = Even though we are given the righteousness of Christ, we must still be committed to doing what's right.
- **Shoes Of Readiness** = Be ready at every moment to obey and represent Christ.
- **Shield Of Faith** = Trust God. Choose to believe Him when you are attacked by doubts or the lies of temptation.
- **Helmet Of Salvation** = Keep in mind all that Christ has done for you in providing complete

forgiveness and the power to live for Him.

- **Sword Of The Spirit** = Read and use the Bible to guide your thoughts and actions.
- **Prayer** = It's not a piece of armor as such, but it's an essential weapon in our arsenal. We are to pray always about everything.

What is the biggest threat to our spiritual well-being? Whether they originate in the flesh, the influence of the world, or through satanic lies, *little* sins can be a *big* problem. They can be more easily covered up and ignored—at least for a time—than the big sins we quickly recognize as a danger.

Wild animals kill 53,000 humans each year. According to a spectacular photo essay in the March 1994 issue of *Life* magazine, mankind is often the prey of some awesome predators.

Lions, for example, kill 300 people a year. On six Indonesian islands, the sometimes 10-foot-long, 200-pound Komodo Dragon is a creature to avoid.

According to one report, “A Swiss tourist who sat down to rest while his friends went ahead left nothing behind but a camera case and a bloody shirt.”

Then there’s the hippo. This 3-ton beast can move as fast as an Olympic sprinter, and it tramples anyone who gets in its way.

The *Life* reporter states, “Size is critical to our sense of danger. . . . [But] the smallest creatures, in fact, are often the deadliest.” The true king of killers of the jungle is the tsetse fly, which kills nearly 25,000 people each year.

We often have a similar misconception about the size and danger of sins. We tend to recognize the big ones like murder, robbing

banks, rape, kidnapping. But we don’t usually recognize that the biggest threat to our spiritual life comes from what we might casually think of as smaller sins.

Whether they originate in the flesh, the influence of the world, or through satanic lies, little sins can be a big problem.

A little sin? A little fun that violates God’s standards? A little lie? A little temper tantrum? A little dishonesty? A little gossip? A little lust? Let’s not “give the devil a foothold” in our lives (Eph. 4:26-27). Beware of little sins!

How do we respond when the pressure is on? Peter said, “Be clear

mindful and self-controlled.” A little later he added, “Be self-controlled and alert” (4:7; 5:8). After all, it is in times of crisis that our true character shows itself.

In Genesis 39, we read about a young man named Joseph. He faced some incredible pressures. He could have easily given in to bitterness and revenge, but he didn't. He could have easily indulged his sexual appetites when temptation walked through the door, but he didn't. Why? Because his heart was strong, committed to living for God without compromise (v.9).

In the chapters that follow, Joseph faced more pressures. In each case he responded with faith. And when finally he had the opportunity for revenge against his brothers, he forgave them instead and preserved lives (45:1-7).

How do we respond

under pressure? More important, what's the condition of our heart? How's our relationship with God? To stand up under pressure requires inner strength.

*Our true
character shows
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pressure.*

For further thought: Read 1 Peter 4-5, Romans 6-8, and Matthew 4:1-11. What do you find in these passages that will help you deal with the enemies of holiness? Take a few moments to pray and respond to what God has said to you in His Word.

POWERFUL ALLIES (1 Peter 4–5; 2 Peter 1)



“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

In contrast to the enemies of the flesh, the world, and the devil, we

have the allies of new desires, the church, and the Holy Spirit.

New God-Directed Desires. At the moment we placed our trust in Jesus Christ and accepted His gift of salvation, God infused in us a new desire and a new ability to please Him (Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:23; 4:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:4). The Lord has transformed us at the very core of our being, enabling us to reflect God’s holiness and to be free of bondage to evil desires (2 Pet. 1:3-4). We now have Christ living in us and through us (Gal. 2:20), and we are challenged to “die to sins and live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The Church. In contrast to the world that fights against us, as believers we are part of the church, a community that is designed to support us in our growth in holiness.

Peter said, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10). He spoke of the responsibilities of church leaders and followers (1 Pet. 5:1-5).

When we put our trust in Christ, we became part of the church, made up of all believers. God designed the church in such a way that we all have something to offer to everyone else. We each have a spiritual gift for building others up and working toward the goal of holiness together (Acts 2:41-47; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:1-16).

This process occurs on various levels through group worship, teaching/learning situations, small-group interaction, and one-on-one accountability. To alter a well-known saying, “No Christian is an island.” We need each other if we are to

be all that Christ wants us to be.

The Holy Spirit.

Peter began his first letter by mentioning that this process of sanctification, becoming holy, is a work of the Holy Spirit. He wrote, “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” (1 Pet. 1:1-2).

All of God’s children have the Holy Spirit living within them, working to produce holy, Christlike behavior. In some key New Testament passages, the apostle Paul described, in greater detail than Peter, the role of the Spirit in our lives.

- To resist sinful desires and become holy, we must live in reliance on

the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-13).

- Every believer has the Holy Spirit within, enabling us to please God and help others to be all that God wants them to be (1 Cor. 12:7,13; Eph. 1:13-14).
- If we submit to God's direction and rely on His strength and not our own, our lives will produce the fruit of holiness instead of the dead works of evil desires (Gal. 5:16-26).

The key to living a holy, Christlike life is not simply to attend church, try harder, read the Bible, or take a stand against Satan and his lies—as important as all those actions are. The key is this: We are to live the Christian life the way we began it—depend on God's grace and place all our hope and trust in Him. The apostle Paul put it this way, “Just as you received Christ

Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him” (Col. 2:6).

Jesus Himself used an analogy of a vine and branches to emphasize that we can do nothing to please Him if we are not close to Him. He said, “Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. 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” (Jn. 15:4-5).

To be holy and separate from sin, we must be close to Jesus Christ. That occurs as we focus our thoughts on Him, speak to Him in prayer, and depend on Him throughout each day.

Perhaps the clearest and most powerful statement of what God has done for us and what He expects from us is found in the first

chapter of the apostle Peter's second letter. He began by describing what God has done for us.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

God has given us everything we need to live a holy life. His transforming power has changed the very core of our being, and He provides us with the ability to say no to sin and yes to Him.

Then, verses 5-9 present to us the responsibility we have to pursue holiness, giving every effort to be godly men and women.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Pet. 1:5-9).

Those verses put a great deal of responsibility on us, don't they? Even though God has done so much for us, we still have to do all we can by being diligent, virtuous, gaining knowledge, exercising self-control, persevering, learning godliness, being kind, and the sum of it all, being loving. Doesn't sound like a picnic, does it?

Why does it have to be so hard to be holy? If God wants us to be holy, and we want to be holy, why then does it seem so hard to actually attain it? Why doesn't God just remove every trace of sin from us right here and now?

We are caught between the "already" and the "not yet" of God's plan for our lives. We are already saved, forgiven, and cleansed from sin—but we are not yet living in heaven. We have important work to do for the Lord on this earth to lead

others to know God as we know Him. And the struggles of this present life are part of His plan to make us more like His Son, the One who faced the temptations and trials of life and came through it all perfectly.

How does God use pain and suffering in our lives to make us more Christlike? Peter wrote, "Since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God" (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

Trials in life, and a right understanding of God's goal for our lives, help us to see the folly of sin. Suffering helps us to see what is really important in life. When all is well, we tend to become complacent and our lives get cluttered with

unholy nonessentials. Painful situations have a way of sifting out what is not important.

God's more concerned with our long-term progress toward holiness than our short-term feelings of happiness.

God is more concerned with our long-term progress toward holiness than our short-term feelings of happiness. We have a warped understanding of life if we imagine that living for Christ means that we will not have troubles, sorrows, or opposition. Just look at the life of Jesus Himself. He was mocked, betrayed, tortured, and crucified. His apostles suffered persecution and

martyrdom. Do we think we are somehow exempt?

The apostle James taught that suffering produces in us a receptivity to the work of God. He wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (1:2-3).

Suffering and hardship give God opportunities to replace our unholy character traits with godly ones. Just as a farmer clears his land of weeds and rocks before planting his crops, so the Lord uses difficulties to help us see and clear our lives of those attitudes that distract us from producing the fruits of righteousness (Heb. 12:11).

For further thought:

Read 1 Peter 4–5 and 2 Peter 1. What does God expect *you* to do in the process of becoming more holy? What will *He* do? How can the

spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study help you become more holy? Are you part of a local church fellowship, being encouraged and serving others? Take time now to pray and respond to what God has said to you in His Word.

DISASTROUS DETOURS (2 Peter 3)



“Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

The road to holiness is

not without bumps and dangers. Mistaken ideas and outright lies have sidetracked God’s people from making progress toward the goal of holy Christlikeness. Instead of standing firm in their secure position in the truth of the Word of God, they fall into error in both thinking and living.

In Peter’s second letter, he somewhat shifted the focus of his discussion to touch on a few of the potential detours that can sidetrack believers and keep them from maturing in holiness. He warned his readers of false teachers who not only spread false theology but who practiced an unholy morality. He addressed the kind of scoffing opposition that believers can expect from the world, and urged his readers not to cave in to pressure and abandon the struggle to live faithfully for Christ. Then he concluded with a stirring call to “live holy and godly

lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (3:11-12), to “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him” (v.14), and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (v.18).

Against this backdrop, let’s briefly examine some of the possible detours to holy living that we need to avoid.

Loveless Legalism.

This is the belief that we can please God and earn salvation or approval in the Christian life by measuring up to a list of external rules of conduct. Legalism focuses on rule-keeping as the road to holiness, and it neglects the essential heart relationship with Jesus and a response of love toward people.

Self-Deprivation Or Asceticism. Some people have mistakenly thought that worldliness could be avoided if they lived in isolation or if

they deprived themselves of ordinary human pleasures such as eating certain foods, relating to other people, wearing comfortable clothes, speaking with others, and experiencing married sexual relations. But holiness is not achieved by withdrawing from society or giving up the God-given good things of life; it is a matter of separating ourselves from the sinful, self-destructive, and God-denying elements of life.

Self-Effort. We may mistakenly focus on trying to be holy by spending time in prayer, Bible study, Scripture memorization, church attendance, and worship, as if we are holy simply by doing all of these things. As good as they are, self-discipline and good habits are not holiness. God, however, wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Lk. 10:27). We must remember

that all these activities are means to the end of knowing and loving God, not an end in and of themselves so that we can feel religious.

Passivity. Some people feel that the answer is simply to trust God and not try so hard. They say we are to just rest in Jesus and allow Him to give victory over sin. But the Bible never promises that we can gain “victory” in the sense that sinlessness can be achieved at a point in time in this life (2 Pet. 1:5-8; 1 Jn. 1:8-10; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:14-25).

According to theologian J. I. Packer, “The Christian’s motto should not be ‘Let go and let God’ but ‘Trust God and get going!’” (*Keep In Step With The Spirit*, Revell, ©1984, p.157).

Perfectionism. This is the idea that we can become sinless here and now through a special work of God’s Spirit as we surrender our heart and life to God. Sometimes

referred to as a “second blessing” or “baptism of the Spirit,” this view lacks biblical support. The Bible never speaks of a two-stage view of the Christian life, in which we are saved and then experience another life-changing encounter with the Spirit that takes us to a higher level of living.

In Romans 7, the apostle Paul testified that the battle with sin was lifelong, and the best we can hope for is progressive improvement, not sudden perfection. Even the holiest person has impure motives and lapses of thought and action. In fact, it has been said that the more holy we become, the greater our awareness of sin. When the prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of God’s holiness, he sensed his own unholiness (6:1-5). As we get to know God better, we will become more aware of our own sinfulness.

License. On the other

hand, we must not fall into the error of thinking that we can sin because “God understands we’re only human.” Nor can we separate what we do in the body from our spirit. The New Testament addresses this wrong thinking (Rom. 6; 2 Pet. 2:17-19; 1 Jn. 1:6-7; 2:15-17).

Self-Satisfaction.

To quote J. I. Packer again, “Modern Christians tend to make satisfaction their religion. We show much more concern for self-fulfillment than for pleasing our God” (*Keep In Step With The Spirit*, p.97). This is a gimmie-gimmie attitude toward our relationship with God, as illustrated by the teaching that promises health, wealth, and prosperity, and the thinking that God must meet our own expectations.

The Bible teaches, however, that holiness comes from dying to self

and living for Christ:

- “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11).
- “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).
- “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Eph. 4:22).

Emotionalism.

Holiness is not a feeling that we achieve in a highly charged and very moving worship service or prayer time. During such times we may make strides toward loving God more and turn our affections away from that which is unholy, but holiness is not an emotion. Holiness is a way of thinking and living.

Intellectualism.

Gaining head knowledge about God and understanding Scripture is

not a substitute for putting that truth into practice.

Serving. Trying to do great things for God but not having a close relationship with Christ is misdirected action. 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” (Jn. 15:5). We may be evangelizing the lost and serving the needs of the helpless and homeless of the world, but if we are not pursuing holiness we are doing good for the wrong reasons.

Procrastination. We may fall into the error of thinking that we will give serious thought to this matter of holiness later in life, or at a more convenient time. But, to consider again what Peter had to say, we have no time to lose. The apostle Peter wrote, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief. . . . Since

everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives” (2 Pet. 3:10-11). Peter answered his own question with these challenging words: “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him. . . . But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (vv.14,18).

For further thought: Read 2 Peter 3. In what ways are you ready for Christ’s return? Do you feel a sense of urgency in getting your life in order and making the most of your fleeting days? Take a few moments to pray the words of Psalm 19:12-14, and respond to what God has said to you in His Word.

THE RACE

An Olympic marathon runner doesn't just suddenly wake up one day to find himself receiving a gold medal. The process begins as a baby with a tiny but important first step followed by practice, practice, practice. Then, during the race itself, the marathoner can't wander off course, take a 2-hour nap, or quit 15 or even 25 miles into the race. To gain the satisfaction of finishing well, he has to keep going all 26 miles and 385 yards of it.

It's much the same when our goal is sanctification, or holiness. To become Christlike and to finish well, we must take step number one, accepting His gift of forgiveness and holiness. We then need to focus our thoughts daily on the goal, patiently enduring and persevering. We have

to keep our eyes focused on the finish line, the day we will meet face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But remember, it's not merely a matter of trying hard to be holy. Without the transforming, life-giving, and holiness-producing power of Jesus Christ working in and through us, we couldn't make any progress toward holiness. That's why we need to live the Christian life from start to finish *by faith*, depending on God's ability, His power, His grace.

As we complete this study, my prayer for you is the same as that of the apostle Paul. He wrote:

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it (1 Th. 5:23-24).

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