



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 1, 2009
Released on Wednesday, October 28, 2009

"A Holy People"

Lesson Text: 1 Peter 1:13-25

Background Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1-25

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 7:6-11

1 Peter 1:13–25

13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- 1.** Tell what Peter says is the source and the evidence of holiness in the life of a Christian.
- 2.** Illustrate the need for holy living among Christians today.
- 3.** Demonstrate that if we claim to be a part of God's covenant community, our lives must be marked with God's holiness.

INTRODUCTION

We seem to be living in an age of unholiness. It is a time of moral chaos and uncertainty. Many today believe that the most important value in life is personal freedom and independence. Anyone who would impose standards or rules is intolerant. Ironically, such intolerance is not to be tolerated. Yet holiness is expected of the people of God.

The biblical understanding of holiness has two important aspects. First, holiness implies a separation, a consecration. That which is holy is set apart. It is neither worldly nor commonplace (see Leviticus 10:10; 20:26; Ezekiel 22:26; 42:20; 44:23; compare Hebrews 7:26). Second, that which is holy is morally pure. It is clean and untainted by sin (see Philippians 2:15). These dual aspects are illustrated in Psalm 24:3, 4. There the one who wants to ascend the holy hill of the Lord (separation from the world) must have clean hands (moral purity).

Holiness, then, is somewhat measurable because it involves standards and invites comparisons. All standards and comparisons for holiness come back to God, for He alone is absolutely holy (1 Samuel 2:2). We must depend on the power of God to achieve holiness. We are made holy (sanctified) through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13). This is our imperative for abstaining from sin at every opportunity (1 Thessalonians 4:3). So, yes, we live in an age of growing, strident, and public unholiness. But we are still called to be holy in word and deed.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 63

Place: from "Babylon" (most likely Rome)

Many Christians today consider Paul to be the greatest of the apostles because he wrote so much of the New Testament. But many in the first century probably considered Peter to be the greatest apostle. After all, he had been an eyewitness to the momentous events of Jesus' ministry. Peter also emerged as the leader of the Jerusalem church after Jesus' ascension to Heaven.

Peter's prominence in the early church may be seen in Acts 12. Here King Herod Agrippa I discovered that the execution of a church leader increased his popularity among the non-believing Jews. His first victim was James, the brother of John. This choice seems to have been made arbitrarily and is not explained. When Herod realized its effect, however, he sought to take the life of the biggest fish in the Christian pond: Peter.

Peter at the time was both the public face of the church and its primary leader. To lose him would have been a crippling blow; Acts 12 tells the story of Peter's miraculous deliverance.

Although not documented in the New Testament, reliable tradition has Peter traveling extensively outside of Palestine (compare 1 Corinthians 9:5). Strong tradition claims that Peter ended up in Rome sometime during the AD 60s. There he met his death under the persecutions of Emperor Nero about AD 67 or 68. One often repeated tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down at his own request, claiming that he was not worthy to receive death in the same manner as Jesus (see John 21:18, 19 for a reference to Peter's death).

While in Rome, Peter wrote two short letters that have been preserved in the New Testament. At least the first one was written with the help of Silvanus (or Silas, 1 Peter 5:12). This letter mentions being in "Babylon" (5:13), a code term for the city of Rome. The Jews referred to Rome as Babylon because it was the oppressor of their nation.

Peter's first letter is addressed to people in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). These were Roman provinces located in modern Turkey and may have been visited by Peter during his travels. Peter knew that the recipients of this letter were confronted with persecution (see 1 Peter 3:13-15). Thus he gave them instructions that called them to live holy lives even when faced with this threat. This theme - holiness in spite of persecution - makes 1 Peter a timeless resource for the church. Every generation of believers encounters persecution.

THE DISCIPLINE OF HOLINESS (1 Peter 1:13-16)

1. What does it mean to "gird up the loins of your mind"? (1 Peter 1:13)

To *gird up one's loins* is a figurative expression arising from the ancient world's style of dress. Men, in first century Israel, commonly wore flowing, robe-like garments that extend to their knees or ankles. This was fine for walking or sitting, but could be inconvenient or dangerous when engaged in strenuous activities where the robe could be tripped over.

When a man was about to undertake a task, he would gather up the lower end of his garment and put it under his belt so that he was able to move about more freely. The bottom of the robe would be gathered between the legs and lashed at waist level with a belt. Therefore, a call for girding up one's loins is a call to ready oneself to undertake a task. It is akin to our expressions "roll up your sleeves" or "put on your work gloves."

Peter was advising the readers to prepare mentally for the ordeal ahead (compare Luke 12:35). In the same way, we are to clear away any impediment that would hinder us in the pursuit of holiness.

In addition to preparing mentally, the believer is also to be sober, which refers to self-control and serious watchfulness. Just as a man who is drunk is unable to be careful and watchful about his circumstances, so a person who is taken up with light and vain pursuits is unable to fend off evil. We do need to be aware of the importance of spiritual alertness.

Peter also gives them a focus point: they are to remember the coming *revelation of Jesus Christ*. This is a reference to the *hope* we gain when we remember that Christ has not abandoned His people. He has promised to return and take His faithful ones home to be with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

2. What other prerequisites does Peter give for advancing in holiness? (v. 14)

Christian parents are faced with the challenge of raising their children to live holy, godly lives. What motivation to this end can those parents give the children that will last a lifetime?

Peter faces this same issue when writing to his *children* in the faith. For Peter, the preparation for persecution is more than mental toughness. It should manifest itself in the *obedient* lifestyle activities of the believer. Will we strive to be obedient in the matters of godly behavior? Will the general passions of our flesh be the controlling factor? For Peter, such fleshly *lusts* are self-destructive (1 Peter 2:11; compare Romans 12:2; Ephesians 2:3; 4:17, 18). We should no longer yield to them after escaping the *ignorance* of unbelief.

Peter was evidently writing primarily to Gentile readers since he referred to their former life, when they knew nothing of the God of Scripture and lived according to their worldly desires (1 Pet. 1:14). They were no longer to be "fashioning," or conforming, their lives according to the world's ways.

3. What is a prime motivation for us to live a holy life? (vs. 15-16)

Instead of following the example of the world, believers are to grow in godliness, pursuing their true family likeness. A fundamental attribute of God is holiness, and the call upon His people to be holy as well is repeatedly emphasized in Scripture (cf. Eph. 1:4; 1 John 3:3).

Here, Peter quotes Leviticus 19:2. The history of the church records many examples of men and women who have sought to be *holy*. The church today offers many examples also of those who struggle mightily to expunge sin and live holy lives. Yet every one of these wonderful people has failed at some level. No human being (other than Jesus when He was in the flesh) can be seen as an absolute, perfect example of holiness.

We should not conclude that we cannot be part of the people of God unless our lives are sterling examples of holiness. Holiness is not an exclusionary tactic by God; it is an inclusionary one. By yielding our lives to Him and obediently serving Him, He invites us to participate in His holiness.

The church is holy because God is holy and He has consecrated it. It is not made up of people who have achieved personal perfection, but of sinners who have been sanctified by God's grace. This marvelous gift serves as a powerful motivation for us to work hard at the

elimination of sinful, unholy behavior. While God's gracious sanctification of the believer is a free gift, personal holiness comes from radical self-sacrifice and discipline.

4. In what specific areas do you need to make holiness a higher priority? What hindrances will you overcome to do this?

Certainly we should strive for holiness in all areas. But people have different battles. For some, the battle is with sexual sins. Others fail to practice holiness in regard to the use of money. Still others struggle with sins of the tongue (profanity, gossip, etc.). One Christian can drive past a bar and never have any temptation, while another person struggles in this same setting.

We can be hindered in our battles for holiness when we put ourselves into positions where the temptation is right before us. Thus the major part of the battle can be won by avoiding such contexts to begin with. Counselors call this "modifying our environment."

THE FOCUS OF HOLINESS (1 Peter 1:17-21)

5. How should the fact that God is the Judge of all affect our actions? (v. 17)

We need to keep a proper balance in our view of God. Acts 10:34, offering a statement made by Peter many years earlier, also affirms that God is "no respecter of persons." This means that social status, race, gender, or other human standards have no role in personal holiness. Being rich does not help one be holy, for holiness cannot be purchased. Likewise, being poor is of no advantage in the pursuit of holiness, for lack of material goods does not equal sanctification.

In light of this truth, we should take care how we live before God. We should have a healthy, reverent fear of God, respecting His greatness and righteousness. Remembering that we are just sojourning here (that is, traveling as in a foreign land on this earth while we head for our true heavenly home) will help us live with the proper attitude. We will not try to build our life around earthly treasure. Rather, we will long for the time when we shall enjoy eternal joys in God's presence.

6. What things are not effective in bringing about redemption? (v. 18)

We should live for God and heavenly joys because we recognize that this world's goods had nothing to do with our salvation. "Corruptible" things are those that will decay and die away. All the "silver and gold" in the world could not purchase our rescue from sin or make our lives worthwhile. Before God undertook to save us, we lived a "vain," or empty, existence. Our "conversation," or manner of life, had no lasting value.

The people Peter was writing to had lived according to the culture they had grown up in. It had no claim to truth except tradition. It was by divine grace that they had been delivered from the endless round of meaningless activity in which they had been trapped.

7. Why is Christ described as a "lamb" and His blood as "precious"? (vs. 19)

When we adopt an eternal perspective, we realize that true redemption is possible only through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. At this point Peter invokes the image of the Passover lamb to describe Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 5:7). We are reminded of the great cost of this sacrifice for God. Jesus, His Son, was His perfect lamb; as such, He served as the necessary sacrifice to take away the world's sin (John 1:29).

Indeed the means of our deliverance was the redemptive work of Christ. Christ's blood is precious because the sacrificial work that it represents accomplished what the so-called precious things of the world, like gold, could never do - purchase eternal life and freedom from the guilt of sin.

The old covenant had called for blood sacrifices of unblemished lambs, but these could not ultimately atone for man's sins. They pointed, rather, to the sacrifice of the sinless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

8. What is the source of the believer's faith and hope? (v. 21)

It is through Christ that we come into relationship with God. We trust in God because He displayed His sovereign power in raising His Son from the dead (1 Peter 1:21). The Son appeared to many witnesses after His resurrection and then ascended into heaven to be with His Father. He ascended in great glory, having been victorious over sin and the grave.

That same power by which Christ rose from the dead is now at work in all of His people. Because we are clothed in Christ's righteousness and are united with Him, we will experience the same ultimate victory over sin and death that He did. This is the source of our faith and hope. As we pursue holiness, we are trusting not in our own strength but in the power of God. And if we face persecution, He is there to sustain us.

THE OUTWORKING OF HOLINESS (1 Peter 1:22-25)

9. How do we show holiness in our lives? (v. 22)

Peter seems to be a bottom-line guy. Talk is good, but action is better. Therefore, he follows up his doctrinal discussion of holiness with some practical advice for our quest of personal holiness.

Peter's action plan is surprisingly simple: show holiness by loving others. He says we must do this *fervently*, meaning it must become a passion. It must be *unfeigned* (sincere), for there is no hypocrisy in true holiness. It must come from the *heart*, for lip-service holiness is worthless.

Peter's picture of a person pursuing holiness is neither that of the austere, unsmiling killjoy nor the disconnected, head-in-the-clouds mystic. We offer our obedience with a view to holiness when we are warm, generous, and forgiving to our Christian brothers and sisters (compare John 13:34; Romans 12:10).

10. What is it that brings about the believer's new life? (v. 23)

When we commit to the pursuit of holiness, we adopt a new perspective, a new set of priorities. Our focus has shifted away from ourselves and toward God and His people. Our desire is to serve Him, not ourselves. We "put on the new man," the person like God in "righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

We do not instinctively know how to do this, however. This is why Peter ends this section by reminding his readers of a key factor in maintaining holiness: *the word of God*. Scripture guides God's people in the ways of righteousness. It has done so for thousands of years. It is *incorruptible* and eternal. It will never fail us.

11. What is the purpose of Peter's quotation from Isaiah? (vs. 24,25)

Peter reinforces the abiding value of the Word of God by quoting Isaiah 40:6-8. Scripture is contrasted with the annual cycle of *grass* and flowers. These things grow for a time and then die (compare James 1:10, 11). Such a fleeting life is like the *glory of man*, for the famous of today are the forgotten of tomorrow.

The enduring nature of *the word of the Lord* stands in stark contrast with *all flesh*. The central aspect of Scripture for Christians is the good news (*the gospel*) about Jesus Christ. He is the "Son of the living God" (John 6:69) who atoned for our sins. He offers the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Him.

12. How do you demonstrate confidence in the Word of the Lord?

Sadly, the Word of the Lord often is more revered than read. For instance, a Gallup poll notes that American readership of the Bible declined from 73 percent in the 1980s to 59 percent in the year 2000; further, the same poll notes that the number of Americans who read the Bible at least once a week declined from 40 percent to 37 percent over the course of the 1990s (www.gallup.com). But that trend seems to be reversing. The Barna Group (www.barna.org) reports that weekly Bible reading increased from 37 percent in 2001 to 47 percent in 2006.

Confidence in the Word begins by reading it, but that is not enough. We must move from reading to obedience (see James 1:22).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. To make God-honoring decisions, we must fill our minds with God's Word (1 Pet. 1:13-14).
2. We should strive for the holiness of God to rule in every part of our lives (vs. 15-16).
3. Understanding of and respect for God are necessary for us to live holy lives (vs. 17-19).
4. Faith and hope are meaningful only when they are directed toward the Lord (vs. 20-21).
5. Love for others is something we must actively practice, not just presume (v. 22).
6. The Bible is the key to an enduring, active faith (vs. 23-25).

CONCLUSION

Christians are bound to God and to each other by the new covenant provided by the atoning blood of Christ. The first-century church was faced with the challenge of living out this covenant in the midst of hostile surroundings. This situation was well understood by Simon Peter, for he had experienced it firsthand.

Some Christians are perplexed when it comes to personal holiness. Whose responsibility is it? If it is strictly our job, we are inadequate and doomed to failure before we begin. If it is God's work, then why should we be concerned about it? Shouldn't we just get out of the way and let God do it?

This way of thinking misses the true basis for Christian holiness. We do not seek holiness as a way of earning God's favor. To the contrary, we have the possibility of holiness because God has been gracious to us.

We don't work to eliminate sin so that we can get merit points in God's ledger. Through the work of Christ we already are in God's ledger, the Book of Life (Revelation 20:12, 15; 21:27). He helps us be pure and holy. He does so (and wants to do so) because the unholy elements of life are the things that destroy us.

Holiness, then, is not to be a duty, but a joy. We rejoice in the holy name of the Lord (see Psalm 105:3). The "hope of the righteous shall be gladness" (Proverbs 10:28), the great joy of being at peace with our Creator and content to serve Him.

So how does one "be holy"? It does not happen by receding into a life of passivity. It happens, rather, by pursuing righteousness with all the strength Jesus gives us to do so.

PRAYER

Great God in Heaven, holy, holy, holy is Your name! Guide us, we pray, in Your ways of purity and righteousness. May we use Your holiness as our goal! Remind us that we shall one day be in Your holy presence forever. We pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus the holy one. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Holiness is a must. Holiness is our joy.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "A Chosen People." God chooses us on the basis of His mercy, offers us hope and makes us a new people who can display His nature to the world. Study 1 Peter 2:1-17.

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