“BE HOLY IN ALL YOU DO”

1 Peter 1:13–2:3

Key Verses: 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.’”

Have you ever had to make radical changes in your life? Like moving to a completely different place, changing your appearance, your language or your name? In today’s passage Peter challenges Christians to make the radical life changes that come with accepting the gospel of Jesus. What are these changes? And why and how should we make them? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

In verses 1–12 Peter begins his letter by praising God for what he has done. These people were suffering, living as exiles scattered in various places in Asia Minor. But God chose them to belong to Jesus. Through Jesus God gave them new birth into a living hope, an eternal inheritance in heaven. God was using their trials to refine their faith. They were so blessed to receive the long-awaited gospel. Now Peter encourages them to live out their new lives of faith practically, especially in the midst of suffering. In 1:13–2:3 Peter begins his practical teaching by urging them to be holy.

Read verse 13. In Greek the expression “minds that are alert” is literally “binding up the loins of your mind.” In their culture it meant to tuck one’s long robes into a belt around one’s waist so as to work or move quickly. We all like to relax and take it easy once in a while. But this verse is urging us as God’s people to have an overall sense of readiness. “Fully sober” means “calm and collected in spirit”—not emotional. It says we should set our hope fully on the grace to be brought to us when Jesus is revealed at his coming. As we saw in last week’s passage, this world offers us all kinds of hopes, but none of them are a living hope. Even though we believe in Jesus, our hearts can become divided by these worldly hopes. To begin living a holy life, we first need to set our hope fully on the second coming of Jesus. 1 John 3:3 says, “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” The hope to see Jesus one day is the foundation of our holy living. Verse 13 also says that when Jesus comes again, believers will receive “grace.” It means salvation. Though as we live our lives in the real world we struggle to keep our hope and our hearts fully in Jesus, when he comes, he will save us only by his grace. Only his grace, not our performance, can be our hope.

Read verse 14. Here Peter again mentions obedience. In verse 2 he said we’ve been chosen “to be obedient to Jesus Christ.” In verse 22 he says we purify ourselves “by obeying the truth.” In verse 14 he calls us “obedient children.” The core of our new life and of holy living is obedience to God. We’d all like to receive God’s help and his many blessings. But even more important is to obey him. Many people use their freedom to rebel. But God calls us to live as his obedient children.

What does the obedient Christian life look like? Verse 14b says, “…do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” Literally, “evil desires” can be translated as “forbidden lusts.” In English we have the expression, “When the cat’s away, the mice will play.” These people had been scattered to strange places where in many ways they lost the accountability of Christian community. When we become Christians, our evil desires don’t suddenly go away; we still have a sinful nature with all its passions and urges. Society always tells us to follow these urges, to conform to them. It tells us to ignore God and give in to our desires. But God calls to do something else.

What is it? Read verses 15,16. God calls us to be holy like him. Later in chapter 2 we’re called a “holy priesthood” and a “holy nation” (2:5,9). In chapter 3 Peter mentions “holy women of the past” (3:5). But what does it really mean to be holy? The word has two basic meanings. First of all, “holy” means “set apart” or different. God calls us to be different from the people who ignore him. It doesn’t mean God wants us to just be odd or weird. God wants us to be committed to be used by him. This commitment to be willing and available to be used by God in all areas of our life is what makes us different. Holy also means to take God’s side, to identify with God. As social creatures we identify with the culture around us, but holy people identify with God. This, too, makes us different.

Secondly, “holy” means “pure.” 1 Thessalonians 4:7 says, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” We live in an impure world, in terms of both hygiene and morality. There has always been strong social pressure to conform to moral impurity. 4:3,4 says, “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.” These scattered Christians were being pressured by people around them to be impure. Today even teenagers are encouraged to live a promiscuous life. People pride themselves on how dirty and immoral they can be.

But God calls us to be holy in all we do (15b). Ephesians 5:3 says, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” Not even a hint—wow! 1 Timothy 5:2 says to treat “older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” But holiness or purity is not just about our sexuality, but also about how we relate to people in all kinds of ways, and how we handle money. If we try to manipulate people for our own benefit or gain, we’re not pure and holy. If we are materialistic and dreaming to be rich, we’re not pure and holy. Holiness also affects our speech; to be holy, we need to refrain from unwholesome, foolish talk and coarse joking (Eph4:29; 5:4).

Why does God ask us to be holy in all we do? Read verse 16 again. God says this repeatedly to his people in the book of Leviticus (Lev11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26). Holiness is one of God’s essential characteristics. God our Father is holy. When we believe in Jesus, we’re born again to be his children. As his children he calls us to be holy like him. The Bible says God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness (Heb12:10). It also says that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb12:14). We all need to keep growing to be more like our Father God, who is holy. But it’s not about being forced or feeling burdened. Just like little children *want* to be like their parents, believers should be *longing* to be holy like God. The more we love God, the more we want to be holy like him.

But how can we be holy practically? In Greek verses 17–21 form one long sentence to show us how. To make practical life changes, motivation is so important. It’s as true for holiness as it is for dieting and fitness—we need to be *motivated*. But how? Read verse 17. Holiness starts with being aware that God is holding me accountable for how I live. It says God judges each person’s life work impartially. It means God is watching *me*. How should this truth affect me? It says we should live in reverent fear. It means not to take God’s love and grace for granted. It means to take pleasing God seriously. It also says to “live out your time as foreigners here.” In Greek it means to live in this world as if we’re just traveling through it and don’t belong to it. As believers in Jesus we’re called to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. It means we’re not to adopt the world’s lifestyle and values. To live as foreigners here means to really believe God’s promise of the living hope of his kingdom.

There’s another motivation for holy living. Read verses 18,19. We need to remember the great cost that was paid to redeem us from our old way of life. The cost wasn’t big money; it was “the precious blood of Christ.” It’s way more precious than all kinds of silver or gold, than millions or billions of dollars. Jesus shed his own holy blood to help me leave my old life. To live a holy life, we need to believe in his blood. Only the blood of Jesus can purify us from all sin (1Jn1:7,9). Remembering that Jesus shed his blood for me may be the best motivation to struggle to live a holy life. It also says that our old way of life handed down to us from our ancestors is “empty.” In Greek the word is literally “useless.” It’s a life living for my own gratification, my own ego. Who wants to live a useless life? Our Lord Jesus shed his precious blood so that we would not live a useless life, but a holy life useful to God and to others. In our sins we’re so useless, but our Lord Jesus who died and rose again and is glorified helps us to have faith and hope in God (20,21).

Then Peter gets into what may be the ultimate outcome of holy living. Read verse 22. The outcome is love. Holiness is to be separate from the world and its godless, destructive lifestyle, but not separate from people; it’s to be deeply close to people. Holiness is not to criticize and judge one another, but to love one another. This love is not superficial, lip service love, but sincere love, deep love, wholehearted love. The Bible says that without such love, we’re just noisy, frantic Christians (1Co13). In this letter Peter repeatedly urges us to show our love for one another (2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). But growing in this love is a process. We begin to love as we learn to obey the truth. But it has to go deeper. As we begin to love one another sincerely, we need to learn to love deeply, from the heart. It requires learning to cover over a multitude of sins (4:8); in other words, learning to really forgive. This kind of love makes us holy, or different.

In our sinfulness we don’t have the capacity to love like that. How can we? Read verse 23. The word of God, which is living and enduring, has the power to give life, to really change and transform us from within. God’s word can change loveless, selfish, cruel people into deeply loving people. Peter goes on. Read verses 24,25. Here he’s quoting from Isaiah 40:6–8. These verses contrast people and their glory with the word of God. These scattered Christians were living among people who had many kinds of attractive glories. Human glory can so easily capture our hearts and lead us to follow the world. What is human glory? It’s how gorgeous people look when they’re young, how strong and able and capable. It’s so easy to be impressed. But such glory never lasts. Gorgeous people eventually grow old; strong people eventually become weak; able people eventually become helpless. Peter mentions this to help us depend not on ourselves, or on other people, but on the word of God, which endures forever. In loving it’s so easy to get hurt and disappointed and to close and even harden our hearts. But as we open our hearts to God’s word, it can revive us and renew us and inspire us to love again and again, and to love deeper and deeper.

To help us to love, Peter concludes with very practical teaching. Read 2:1. We all have these elements within us. If we’re going to love deeply, we need to rid ourselves of all of these things, of every kind of them. But it’s not just a negative struggle. Read verses 2,3. Pure spiritual milk is the word of God. Like milk to a baby, it’s our nutrition that helps us grow. Sadly, so often we have to be forced to study the Bible. But it says here we should *crave* the pure spiritual milk of the word of God. It’s the only way we can grow up in our salvation, grow up into the loving image of our Lord Jesus.

Let’s read 1:15,16 again. We all have to live in this unholy world. It influences us all the time, more than we realize. May God help us accept his call to holy living in all we do. May we especially remember the precious blood of Jesus and crave the pure spiritual milk of his word, so that we may grow in his holiness, especially in his great love.