

Aliens and Strangers-Part Four: “A Call to Holiness!”

1 Peter 1: 13-16

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Text: (NIV) 13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

“Be Holy in all you do.” That is a very interesting command. By itself, it is incomplete. Peter goes on to more fully quote the Old Testament verse from Leviticus Chapters Eleven and Nineteen. God’s call to his ancient people was not just a call to Holiness but God gave them the reason for his call to Holiness. They were not called to Holiness in order to be saved. They were not called to Holiness in order to remain in his good graces. They were not called to Holiness in order to stay out of trouble with God. Rather, they were called to Holiness by God because God himself is Holy! Again, the call reads this way:

“Be holy, because I am holy.” Right here in this passage we find a critical truth! God wants his children to be like he is! As Christians, we are called to be Holy BECAUSE he is Holy! The word used is very simply....translated “because” ... it’s as if God is saying “Be Holy in view of the fact that I am Holy!” In other words, if the God we worship, the Maker of Heaven and Earth is a certain way and we are his...then we should be that same certain way. So, since he is Holy, we should be Holy! But, how are we do that? How are we to be like God in his Holiness? Great question! First, let us pray.

Let me tell you a story. A true story. Last week in the news, there was an article about the late actor Patrick Swayze who

passed away a couple of years ago. His widow Lisa was photographed at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in Hollywood standing next to a wax likeness of her late husband. The wax statue is so real looking that if one did not know it was wax, one would easily think it was a photo from a few years ago. The maker of the wax figure is to be commended for his or her work! The wax sculptor apparently spent thousands of hours studying photographs and details of Mr. Swayze's physical appearance to create a perfect likeness of the man. He poured himself into this project determined to know the man's characteristics inside and out and create yes...a nearly perfect likeness. In short, the wax figure is an imitation and a very, very good one of the real person.

Allow me to suggest something. As Christians, when we are called to Holiness because God is Holy...we are called to spend all of our hearts studying him and desiring to be like him. We are called to imitate him and to model ourselves after him. It is the most elementary mistake to think that the call to Holiness is a call to compile a great list of "Rules" and "Do's and Don'ts" that we must memorize. The call to Holiness is not a negative call to live uneasy lives insecure in the Lord falling back into following many, many laws. So often the church makes the error of genuinely trying to please God in his Holiness forgetting all about grace that delivers us from the curse of the law. So often Christians seek to be Holy thru a set of rules that give the appearance of Godliness but are impotent and unable to bring about true Holiness.

Consider this. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Galatia and told them he was stunned that they had almost unconsciously changed the Gospel from grace back to works! He said at one point:

Galatians 3:1-2 (NIV) 1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

They had fallen back into the trap of earned Holiness and earned Righteousness thru law-keeping and rule-keeping! Consequently, they were totally insecure and always worried that they might lose their salvation! They failed to understand that God had called them by grace and saved them by grace and that God was determined to keep them by grace! They failed to understand that what God really wanted from them was not a group of children obsessively trying to earn and keep his favor, but a family of children at rest in his favor and free to grow into his Holy likeness! At one point, Paul says to the Colossians:

Colossians 2:20-21 (NIV) 20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”?

I know what he means. I have seen all kinds of Christians living in bondage to rules that they have made up because they feel they must do something to keep themselves saved! A good example would be this: the Word of God says:

Ephesians 5:18 (NIV) 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

The point is that the Bible forbids drunkenness but not drinking. Now there are many people who should never drink alcohol but some can and some did. There is no question that Jesus made real wine at the Wedding in Cana. Otherwise, the entire account makes no sense. But to take a prohibition against drunkenness and amplify it as a total rule against all drinking is to add to the Word of God. It is a legalistic attempt at Holiness.

Ironically, there are people in the Protestant tradition who would insist that they believe in salvation by grace and who would criticize the Catholic Church for teaching a combination of grace and merit...but they themselves are trying to keep God's favor thru "Works-Holiness" and rule-keeping. Instead of seeing salvation as the gift of God for those who come to Christ, they see it as the tentative offer of God for those who come to Christ and

then attain Holiness! Taken to its furthest logical extension, some of these folks even believe that we can live sinless lives if they are truly yielded to the Holy Spirit in this life! Inevitably they think it is their call to pursue personal Holiness thru personal efforts to be Christlike.

What might be wrong with that? Simply this... they are underestimating their own fallen nature and sinfulness! As long as we live in this flesh we will incline towards sin and depend upon grace. If we are not saved fully and totally by grace...and if any man or woman can live a sinless life...then that person would not need Christ and that person would become their own Savior! So, that was the error of the Christians in Galatia and Colossi. For them, Holiness meant “Saved by grace...and kept by works.” In other words, the Christian pursuing “Holiness Salvation” has two problems: [1] They do not understand that they cannot not attain it because their sins are far more seamlessly integrated into their lives and [2] They unintentionally go thru life in a state of nervous pride never fully trusting God to carry them all the way thru to Heaven.

Such people in pursuit of “Holiness Salvation” sometimes cite verses like this when Paul said:

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV) 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...

They see those words “work out” and “fear and trembling” and they think they are on trial and must literally work themselves into a position of acceptable Holiness. Forgetting that the Word of God is really saying the opposite! Namely, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

This is not about “Holiness Salvation” but about living the life of the person saved by the Cross of Christ and living under grace!

We live in fear and trembling at the Glory of God and his great mercies! The New Living Translation puts it best:

Philippians 2:12-13 (NLT) 12 Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

It's as if God is saying "I want you to be Holy as I am Holy. And I know that you can only do that by receiving my Holy Spirit to live inside of you. And you can only do that by giving your lives over to my Son...the Risen Christ!" So, it is not "Holiness Salvation" but a *life of holiness because of salvation*. For the Christian, Holiness is the fruit of salvation and not its cause.

But some are still not convinced. Let me put it this way. What is a very simple definition of "Holiness?" Holiness is a separation from all that is profane and sinful. Holiness can however be "Behavioral Holiness" not true Holiness of and in the heart. That is why so many "Holy" people fall into the most egregious sins.

Those who pursued "Holiness Salvation" or "Works holiness" thought they were being Holy but they were just being rule-followers. Because Holiness is not really attained thru rule following but rather thru a very different means. So, ok...a person might say "Well, it seems to me that you said I am to be like the sculptor working in wax and I must study my subject and work very hard to imitate my subject. Right?" Yes, but for one thing. It is this: the sculptor working in wax has to make a copy of someone outside of himself. So, there would be three people involved: the original person now deceased; the copy of that person in wax; and the sculptor himself working outside of himself. So, no matter how hard the sculptor tries, he will fail. If you think about it, the sculptor would need the person whom he is studying to help him in the process of perfecting his likeness.

In contrast to the sculptor, the Christian seeking to imitate or duplicate God in His Holiness studies God and seeks to

understand God...but he or she has God inside OF THEMSELVES in the person of the Holy Spirit doing the work of Holiness! In other words, being Holy as God is Holy means giving over your life to God and asking him to live in you in the power of his Holy Spirit and transforming you into his likeness! In the end, it is his work in you not your work to be like him! So that imitating God in his holiness is more a work of God than it is of man!

It is true that when God told the Israelites to “Be Holy because I am Holy” [Lev.11:44] he was calling them to separate themselves out from the wicked people around them so that they did not take on their behaviors. But...*BUT*...God knew that such a separation would only be “Behavioral Holiness” not true “Holy Spirit-driven Holiness.” That would require something more. That would require the Son of God coming into the world. That true Holiness would come later. Thus, God’s call to Christians in expecting Holiness is a much deeper and Divine calling to true Holiness.

Let’s pause and clarify something. I have just suggested that true Holiness comes from a change in heart not just a change in behavior. So, one might ask “OK...if true Holiness was impossible to attain...why then did God call the Israelites to Holiness and separation from the godless nations around them?” Because there is value in good and God-fearing behavior and every image-bearer of God has some sense of what God requires. Social Psychologists have hundreds of studies that prove our behavior changes if we are in a group that has different values than we do. The best studies show college kids coming home after their first year at school with almost totally different ideas and desires than they had a year before while they still lived at home. The new group influenced them. This, by the way, is why the Word of God calls for Christians NOT to be “Lone ranger” Christians. We need to spend time with God’s people hearing of God’s ways and sharing the Kingdom with them. Little wonder the writer of Hebrews said:

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This is important. Christianity in the simplest sense is a social “sub-culture” within the larger culture. But it is more than a group of people who behave differently so they can call themselves “Holy.” It is...and this is critical...a group of people *who want to behave differently!* Let me see if I can illustrate this. A while ago someone said to me half kidding “You know Pastor...you should preach some children’s sermons.” Well ok. I’m going to do that now but it is really for the big children...it is for us.

I really love chocolate. Some years back, I had to drive unexpectedly to the east coast and I was a bit hurried. So I drove there and I ate two pounds of chocolate malt balls on the way. [In doing that I proved that it is not only teenagers who need Clearasil.] Anyway...I’m a chocolate guy.

Now...let’s suppose that I am a King. In fact, I am the King of the Kingdom of Chocolate. Now...the Kingdom of Chocolate is a very wonderful and beautiful place. The weather is perfect and everyone is always cheerful and content in my Kingdom. And because I am a good and benevolent King, I want all of you to come and be part of my Kingdom. But there is a problem. You all...every single one of you...all of you...it turns out...every one of you...hate chocolate! Even if I insist that to enter my Kingdom you must learn to love chocolate, and you try your best...you keep avoiding chocolate. Why? Because you really love...licorice! And licorice and chocolate do not go together! In fact, if anyone loves licorice, he cannot love chocolate and vice-versa! So, all the invitations in the world from me to you to join my Kingdom will be pointless because in your natural state you are a licorice-lover! And all licorice-lovers are eternally lost.

But there is good news! As the King of the Kingdom of Chocolate I have supernatural powers. And I use those powers just because I want to! I want to put inside of you a new set of

taste buds! So, I put inside of you a taste for chocolate! In fact, my King-given taste for chocolate is so strong, it eclipses your taste for licorice! Eventually, you can't even stand licorice! So now when I tell you to desire chocolate you say "Yes! I do! Where can I get more chocolate?" And you are delighted to learn that I have an endless supply of chocolate!

Well...we just wrote a parable. Let me be like Jesus and explain it although I sense that is not necessary. The Kingdom of Chocolate is the Kingdom of Holiness. Chocolate is Holiness and licorice is sin and evil. You are the objects of God's love and mercy and when he gives you a taste for chocolate of course he is giving you a taste and desire for holiness! When God's Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we begin to desire Holiness! We do not chase after Holiness by obsessing over our behaviors but by more and more seeking the Holy Spirit of God! Amen? When God saved me he began a project of making me Holy by placing the Holy Spirit inside of me and that Holy Spirit is at work in me. Thus, Peter's statement was written for Christians saved by grace and living as aliens and strangers here on planet Earth.

But what about the practical issues. In all of this? What part DO we play in our growth in Holiness? Is it sufficient to just say "Holy Spirit...it's all up to you! I'll just continue to live for licorice until you give me a love for chocolate? Or I'll live for my flesh until you give me a love for Holiness!?" Let consider FOUR KEYS to the Holy Spirit working in us:

ONE: WE ARE HELPLESS TO BECOME HOLY! IT IS GOD'S WORK TO TRANSFORM US!

Paul wrote these words:

2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (NIV) 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

He is literally saying we are being “morphed” into new creatures! We are being made more and more Holy by the Holy Spirit. But this is why we need each other! Consider again:

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

TWO: WE MUST DECIDE TO PURSUE THIS HOLINESS BY MAKING THE HOLY SPIRIT OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY!

This is our part. To decide once and for all to make time daily for the written Word of God which will inform us and shape us and draw us ever nearer to the Holy Spirit. Nothing will transform the weak and nominal believer in Christ into a chiselled lover of holiness like the Word of God! When the Sadducees who were very religious argued with Jesus, he not only told them they were wrong but he told them *why* they were wrong! He said:

Mark 12:24 (NIV) Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?

If you want to do your part in the work of the Holy Spirit as he transforms you into a person who loves Holiness, commit to a half hour a day in the Word of God!

THREE: YOU WILL FIND AT TIMES THAT YOU STILL LOVE LICORICE!

Paul struggled and so will we as we seek true Holiness. He wrote:

Romans 7:18-19 (NIV) 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what

I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.

We must pray throughout the day “Lord Jesus...help me to love true Holiness! Give me more of your Holy Spirit and shown me how I might be impeding his work in my soul!”

FOUR: REMEMBER THAT IF WE WANT TO IMITATE GOD OUR FATHER WE NEED ONLY STUDY JESUS!

John 14:9b (NIV) “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!”

Because God wants us to be like he is...Holy and living with him and pleasing him...he became one of us in the sinless to Christ. Someone has written “The Son of God became man so that men may become sons of God!” And we can say “Daughters of God!” We are aliens and strangers living here but dwelling in Holiness in the Kingdom of God! Let us pray.