

SONGS: Whiter Than Snow (Lord Jesus I long to be perfect); Stepping in the Light (Trying to walk in the steps); The Old Fashion Way (They call me old fashion)

CLOSE:

Holy Preoccupation Clean *In Pursuit of Holiness – Part 2 of 10*

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:15-16

AIM: To show that for the Christian, holiness is a matter of conforming to the unchanging character of God, recognizing that he is their standard for everyday life.

INTRODUCTION:

A. Robert Murray McCheyne

Around 175 years ago, there appeared briefly, like a meteor in the sky, the life and ministry of a young man in Scotland named Robert Murry McCheyne. His testimony continues to impact lives nearly 200 years later.

He entered the pastorate in 1836, at the age of 23, but he would only serve in the ministry for six years. He died in a typhus epidemic when he was only 29. Still, his brief life influenced thousands of people throughout Scotland and beyond, to surrender their lives to the mastery of Jesus Christ.

If you have ever read of Robert Murray McCheyne's life, you come away with the clear impression that he was preoccupied with God.

- I. He was preoccupied with the **glory** of God.
- II. He was preoccupied with the **grace** of God.
- III. He was preoccupied with the **word** of God.
- IV. He was preoccupied with the **preaching** of the gospel.

He delivered these words in one particular sermon where he challenged believers – and I quote –

Remember, you are God's sword, His instrument – a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talent that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus Christ. A holy [Christian] is an awesome weapon in the hand of God.¹

The Apostle Peter would say amen to such dedication to pursue the likeness and holiness of Christ.

If you were with us in our previous message from 1 Peter, we asked the question – **How do you become and stay clean in the middle of an unclean culture? How do you pursue holiness in an unholy world?**

We previously focused on **four steps** in our exposition of **1 Peter 1:13-16** – let me invite you to take the NT, and turn to Peter's first letter where we've arrived at *chapter 1 and verse 13*.

B. Since we are continuing our discussion with point number 5, let me review quickly the first four.

1. **The FIRST step to being clean is simply this: Get a handle on your thought life.**

Peter writes in vs. 13, *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind"* – we are to gather up the loose fabric of your thoughts and tuck them in so they don't get in the way as you run the race.

We are to get a handle on our thought life.

¹ Adapted from, "The impact of Robert Murray McCheyne" by J. Harrison Hudson (originally published in the January 1987 issue of Life and Work, the magazine of the Church of Scotland.) & Holman New Testament Commentary (Holman Publishers, 2000), p. 444

2. The SECOND step to staying clean is: We are to get a grip on our emotions

Peter writes next in vs. 13 that we are to *“be sober”* that is, we are to be spiritually level-headed – we are NOT to be having a panic attack and we NOT be carried away with our emotions.

3. The THIRD step to staying clean is to: Get focused on our future

Peter writes again in vs. 13, *“hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”* We are to **FIX** our hope – **PIN** our expectation – completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, Christians are to live in the **future tense** – like an engaged couple who saves up money or as a bride in waiting fills up that “hope chest” – they are determining every action and making every decision in the present tense, in light of the future tense of living their lives together.

We, the bride of Christ, should be making our decisions and our formulating our plans in light of the fact that our bridegroom is coming soon and we will soon enter the glory of His heaven and our union with Him.

4. And then, step number FOUR is simply this: Get rid of old habits

Peter writes in **verse 14**, *“As obedient children, not fashioning [not conforming] yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance...”*

The Gk. word for *“lusts”* is simply a summary of the sinful, self-centred, immoral, corrupt desires that drive the children of disobedience – *“children of disobedience”* is what Paul calls the unbeliever, in **Ephesians 2:2**.

And I made note of that very encouraging comment by Peter that for the believer, these are **FORMER LUSTS**. The fact that these are described as *“former lusts”* means these habits can be broken!

And Peter is not saying that a believer will never lust again – he means that the believer is no longer choosing to pattern his or her life as *“children of disobedience”*, but as children – he writes here – who are ones who are obedient.

I promised you that, God willing, **we would cover two more points** today. But since I had more time to study this text, I came up with 5 more. And if I had another week, I would come up with more—*right?*

BUT don't you just love that about this wonder of Book we call the Holy Bible? I find as you study a passage – or even read a passage; there's something new to taste and to savour every time you break open this loaf of bread. You never ever reach the bottom.

For our study today, I will give you **two more steps** to becoming and staying clean in an unclean culture – and what I'll do, for the sake of sanity is to try to fit the other points in as sub-points to my second point.

So here is step number 5 in how to stay clean.

I. NUMBER 5: GET SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR CALLING

Vs. 15 – *“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation”* [i.e. behaviour]

A. Don't miss that ... Let us just pause here for a moment. This is a favourite concept of the Apostle Peter.

1. Most people think that only pastors are called by God; that there is no special calling for all the other Christians in the community of believers.

That's exactly what the Devil would love for you to think:

- For one thing, it discourages the normal Christian to think that what he/she does in this life as being second-class—that what they do doesn't have any kind of eternal significance;
 - But worse is the perspective that lets you off the hook thinking, "Hey, I'm not called ... God hasn't called me to anything special. That's just for pastors and missionaries – they get called by God."
2. Peter is writing to all the believers, scattered throughout Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia (an area approx. the size of Turkey) ... scattered throughout 750,000 square miles. He says to these believers, "You've all been called by God to serve Him there."
 3. In fact, Peter uses this concept of "*calling*" often in his letters:
 - Here in vs. 15 you're going to discover a unique calling to holiness;
 - In **chapter 2 and vs. 9** Peter writes that every Christian has been called out of darkness into a marvellous light;
 - In **chapter 2 and vs. 21**, we have been given a calling to model the self-control of Christ in the face of suffering;
 - In **chapter 3 and vs. 9**, we all have been given a calling to inherit a future blessing;
 - And one day, we're going to be given a calling that will include deliverance to God's eternal glory, >> **1 Peter 5:10**
 - Even in his second letter, Peter almost immediately reveals that the Christian has been given a special calling to a life of godly excellence in whatever they do >> **READ 2 Peter 1:3.**
 4. Beloved – you have a calling from God!
 - a. And the calling Peter emphasizes here is a calling to holy living.
 - b. **So, get serious about your calling** – vs. 15 again – "*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.*"

B. Part of staying clean, is understanding, that God has called you to pursue holiness.

1. You're going to have to get serious about it because without decisions and disciplines, it isn't just going to happen.
2. D. A Carson, a reformed evangelical with whom I would disagree on many in points said something in an interview I would agree with on this point. He said,

[Christians] do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish indiscipline and call it relaxation; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have escaped legalism.²

So, the believer fights against the gravitational pull of our fallen nature and our fallen world – we fight against the undertow of worldly pressure – we refuse to drift along in the current of moral compromises assuming there is not a Niagara Falls ahead.

² Adapted from D. A. Carson, quoted in "Reflections," Christianity Today (7-31-00)

Step Number 5: Get serious about your calling.

II. STEP NUMBER 6: GET THE HONEST TRUTH ABOUT HOLINESS

You can ask a 100 people to tell you what holiness is and you'll come up with 100 different answers. Peter is about to make it really clear. And what I want to do here is break down step #6 into three sub-points as Peter describes holiness.

Here we go:

A. First, holiness is COMPREHENSIVE

1. Notice again **the latter part of vs. 15** – “*so be ye holy in all manner of **conversation**”*
2. You can render this phrase, *so be holy in all your conduct / behaviour / culture.*
 - a. In other words, in all the different areas and all the different activities and all the different concerns of daily life.
 - b. This is very comprehensive as it covers every aspect of your life.
3. Now this doesn't mean that you wear a starched shirt and a necktie to the grocery store or that you try to read your Bible while you're changing the tires on a customer's automobile.
4. And it doesn't mean you've written out a long list of things you won't do today. In fact, holiness is just as much about what you do as it is about what you don't do.
5. But keep in mind that if holiness is only about a list of do's and don'ts, then you've actually missed your special calling. You've missed the object of your holy preoccupation:
 - YOU are to be preoccupied with the One who calls you to be in relationship with Him as Lord and Saviour;
 - YOU are to be preoccupied with the One whom you desire to model after and imitate and love and follow and obey.
6. In all your pursuit of holiness, don't run past Him! And as you genuinely pursue Him, Peter makes us aware that everything will belong to Him.
7. Comprehensive holiness – means you don't talk one way in church and another way on the golf course or in the cubicle at work or on the weekend outings with your friends or in the school halls or out and about socializing.

Let us take for example election time.

Keep in mind when you just you are not just voting for a person—you're voting for a platform – **for a world view** – for president who chooses future justices who, we pray, will make godly judgements.

But you know what the problem is in an election? In every election, there is always the same problem.

It doesn't take long for the public to discover that the candidates have compartmentalized in some way, their integrity and their honesty and their sense of right and wrong.

It isn't long before so many of the candidates are delivering speeches that effectively tell us:

- You can trust me in this area, but never mind about that area;
- You can respect me for what I said over here, but try and forget what I said over there;
- I'm honest about this issue but just don't shine the spotlight on some other issue.

And it isn't long before we have to hold our noses.

When there is election it is a great time to demonstrate the contrast in the lifestyle of the candidate.

Integrity and honesty and purity doesn't just show up in this area or that area, **BUT** in *every* area of life.

We want to believe there are no closets ... no dark corners ... no secret business deals ... no filthy conversations ... no dishonest posturing in order to gain the approval of man, but time after time the opposite is revealed to be true.

For the believer, whether he / she runs for office or not, our passionate preoccupation should be a platform of comprehensive holiness, for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel.

When Justin wrote his Apologia...

The Apologia was Justin's defence of Christianity in the second century, sometime before he was martyred – hence the name traditional name, Justin Martyr. He wrote specifically to the Roman Emperor. Not only did he give the normal arguments for the truth claims of Christianity, but he also challenged the emperor to examine the lives of Christians and observe their purity.³

Can you imagine that argument being used today? Can you imagine writing the Taoiseach, the President of Trinity College, or the CEO of Intel and saying to them, "Listen, I just want to validate the truth of Christianity for you – and all you'll need to do is examine the lives of your citizens or your employees or your students and you'll come to conclusion that because they are so uniquely pure, Christianity must be uniquely true.

The point is—this should still be the argument—the apologia or defence of the faith.

8. The fact that the believer is to maintain an hour by hour, day by day holy life-style does that mean that true Christians are perfect?
 - a. OF COURSE NOT! ... that's **NOT** what holiness means.
 - b. The word Peter uses here in vs. 15 is the common Gk. word – *hagios* – for holiness, which at its core means in Scripture means "separated." Therefore, in its moral and spiritual significance, it is *separated from sin and consecrated to God*—it is sacred, which distinguishes the person, place or thing as being – *different*.
 - The **temple** was considered *hagios*, not because the bricks and mortar were somehow mystically perfect, **BUT BECAUSE** this building was **different** from other buildings;
 - The **Sabbath** was holy, for the Israelite nation, **BECAUSE** Saturday was treated **differently** by them from all the other days of the week;
 - Likewise, the Christian is *hagios*, not because he's perfect, **BUT BECAUSE** he is **different** from non-Christians around him.
 - c. We use that same concept today when we refer to marriage as holy matrimony.
 - 1) Is it holy matrimony because you married a perfect woman?
Well, in that case—yes, I did ... I've got to watch these illustrations.
 - 2) No, of course not! It's called holy matrimony, because you and your wife, though imperfect, are in a relationship that's different from any other relationship.

³ R. C. Sproul, 1 – 2 Peter (Crossway, 2011), p. 46

- d. You have in your lap a “Holy Bible” – in Greek, *Biblion*, which simply means Book – but it’s THE BOOK because it’s different from any other book—it’s Holy Writ or Holy Scriptures

And just like these believers in the First Century, a believer in the 21st Century has a fantastic opportunity to reveal their differences – which is this comprehensive or all-embracing preoccupation with the Holy character of God – and it shows up everywhere.

One New Testament scholar, writing on this phrase, said – “There should be no part of our lives which does not savour the fragrance of holiness.”⁴

Holiness is not compartmentalized, it is comprehensive.

B. My second sub point is this: holiness is not only comprehensive, holiness is NOT something new

1. Notice the ending of vs. 15 again – “so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [i.e. behaviour] (why?) vs. 16 **because it is written.**”
 - a. This isn’t something Peter came up with. He didn’t just think it up one day that it would a great idea if people pursued the holiness of God.
 - b. He’s actually quoting here from the Book of Leviticus – where all the pages in your Bible probably stick together.
2. The word “*holy*” shows up more times in the Book of Leviticus than any other Book in the Bible.
 - a. And in that Book, God is revealing through Moses all the dietary laws, all the ceremonial commands, all the prescribed rituals and customs and regulations and laws that the people of Israel were to follow.
 - b. **AND** at the core of it all was God’s desire that His people **distinctively** reveal their covenant relationship with Him to the nations around them.
3. What Peter does here, and rightly so, in this New Testament dispensation, is drop out any mention of ceremonial or dietary or Sabbatarian, custom, festival or sacrificial requirements and he simply repeats the core command.
 - a. And this core command is just as relevant in the dispensation of grace as it was in the former dispensation of law – **Be holy just like God is holy.**
 - b. And Peter prefaces it by saying, “Listen, this was written down a long time ago – but *this* hasn’t changed ... so don’t argue with me ... argue with God!”

Holiness is NOT compartmentalized, but COMPREHENSIVE. Holiness is NOT something NEW. Thirdly...

C. Holiness is NOT something you CREATE

1. Let us repeat Peter’s core command – notice – **“Be ye holy; for I am Holy”**
2. Holiness isn’t something you create – it is a state in which you are created – **1:2.**
 - a. Sanctification is the predetermined state of the believer who is called by God’s grace.
 - b. **BUT** once we enter that state of grace we are to begin a course to pursue it!
3. Therefore, the holiness of a believer isn’t something you create – it’s Someone to whom you conform!
 - a. Your calling is to pursue conformity to the character of God.

⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH, 1984), p. 96

- b. Once you are saved, **Phil. 2:13** tells us it is God’s desire to work in you, to will and to do of His good pleasure. **WHY?** – because you belong to Him and you are His child.
- 4. Children **should** grow up modelling what they see in the lives of their parents. So, probably the last thing you want is for your children to start acting like other children, right?
 - a. If you have grown up with any brothers or sisters there is a very good chance you would have heard your mother say I want you to grow up and become more like our Dad.
 - 1) When lacking a Dad figure in the family usually another upstanding male would be chosen – a granddad, uncle or some other relative, even the Pastor, etc.
 - 2) I wanted to be like my brother who was 15-yrs older than me. As I got older, I found out that he wasn’t the best choice for me to make.
 - b. **You see, this is part of our problem in being holy is that we’re following the wrong model;** which means that as Christians – we’re setting our sights way too low. We’re creating our own self-made standards.

Modelling

One “church father” (by which I mean an ancient influential leader in Christianity—one who may or may not be saved), writing from one the most celebrated Christian schools of the second century got it all wrong about modelling. He was asked by a young man who wanted to live a holy life what that meant. Unfortunately, this church father rolled out all the rules, and missed the point.

He wrote back to this young man these words:

Forsake coloured clothing; remove everything in your wardrobe that is not white (how do you do that in the second century before dry cleaning was invented?) *Remove everything in your wardrobe that isn’t white* (he continues) *no longer sleep on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don’t eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths* (in other words, you can’t enjoy any comforts if you want to be holy; he continues) *and if you are sincere about following Christ* [in holiness] *never shave your beard, for to shave is to lie against Him who created us, it is an attempt to improve on the work of Him who created us.*⁵

- 5. In a previous message, I pointed out that *asceticism* might make a person appear spiritual, because of its emphasis on humility and poverty, but it is a vain attempt to appear more holy than others.
- 6. Listen, this spirit of pseudo holiness is alive and well today. Where I grew up, people in leadership thought it was sinful for a man to where wire-rimmed glasses or to *have* a beard – how ironic as this guy in the 2nd century is saying that it’s sinful to *shave* your beard.
- 7. The truth is, we pander to manmade rules for the sake of manmade approval – and Peter here draws our focus back to a relationship.

D. Holiness isn’t self-created, it’s the fruit of a calling

- 1. God has given us a calling to Himself ... you belong to Him!
 - a. Remember in **chap. 1:3** God “*according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope...*”

⁵ A compilation of excerpts taken from Elizabeth Elliot, *The Liberty of Obedience*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1968, pp. 45-46, a sermon of Pastor Stephen Davey and my own interjections.

- b. In 1:4 He has given the believer an inheritance that will boggle your imagination.
2. And with that kind of foundational relationship between Father and child, Peter effectively tells us to grow up and act – NOT like each other – but like our Heavenly Father.
 - a. The truth be known, we don't know if God has a beard or not?
 - b. Nonetheless we model after Him – BUT not the colour of His clothing or the softness of the cushion on His throne – if He has one – but His character and His attributes and His disposition and His grace and His love and His glory – **He** becomes our holy preoccupation.
3. And when that demonstration of modelling takes place, the world recognizes that we, like Him, are unmistakably *hagios* – **H-O-L-Y** – different.

III. CONCLUSION

J. Allan Blair, now with the Lord, told in his commentary about a meeting that took place between a Christian leader he knew and David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel the and a leader in the formation of the modern state of Israel. David Ben-Gurion was born in 1886 and died in 1973.

The Christian statesman took advantage of the private conversation he had with Ben-Gurion and began telling him of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Ben-Gurion asked, “Are there any Christians in the world – like the ones I find in the New Testament. I've read the entire New Testament and am deeply moved by what I read there. I have even read it entirely in the Greek language. The teaching and the standard is wonderful, but where are those who live up to it? Are there really those who are living the Christian life today? Can this Book produce that which it sets forth?”

This Christian statesman responded, “It can indeed, Mr. Ben-Gurion” and he then told his own testimony regarding the change in his own life through Jesus Christ. “But are there others like you?” asked Ben-Gurion. “Yes, millions more,” the Christian affirmed. “Where are they, then?”

“Well, they are all around the world.”⁶

Can you imagine – The Prime Minister seriously asked, “Are there any real Christians in the world? And, where are they?”

And to this, God is calling you and me to answer that question.

- Called out of darkness into a marvellous light;
- Called to imitate the excellence of our Creator God;
- Called to model the self-control of Christ in the face of tribulation
- Called to demonstrate the distinctiveness of a holy life, in the midst of an unholy world

That's our calling ... that's our calling! Are there any real Christians out there answering the call?

On a ministry trip to India preaching and teaching ...

...A visiting pastor who travelled in several states, and preach in a number of rallies and churches to crowds of thousands shared this incident.

One day, as he spent the morning and early afternoon in his hotel room studying and preparing his sermon, the maid came in and cleaned his room. He said, “I could sense—what

⁶ Adapted from J. Allen Blair, *Living Peacefully: 1 Peter* (Kregel, 1959), p. 31

I could only describe as a sense of joy about her. She did an outstanding job in her cleaning—very careful and polite in her broken English.”

The next day, she was in the hallway again and he greeted her—once again he said he was struck by her diligence and a quiet sense of joy.

The following day, as he was leaving, he related– “I was pulling my suitcase down that long corridor, and this same maid was standing by her cart of supplies.” He stopped and asked her a question that could have caused some difficulty for her if they were overheard, but he wanted to ask her anyway, “Ma’am, the excellent way in which you cleaned my room – and the look of joy on your face – I have to ask you – in a world where you are surrounded by Hindus, antagonistic to everything about Christianity, do you belong to Jesus Christ?” And she immediately beamed and said, “Oh yes,” she said, “I am a Christian.”

What did this pastor have to go on to stir him to ask such a question? He said,

- She had an attention to excellence in her work;
- And her countenance, which in that line of work, and in that world of great poverty, wasn’t the most conducive thing for having a joyful spirit.

He later related that it struck him ... she will probably never deliver the gospel to hundreds or thousands of people ... she may not be known to a large body of believers ... but she cleans hotel rooms and you can tell it is a demonstration of her preoccupation with the holiness of God – with the pursuit of the character and the glory of her Saviour and Lord – whom she, in fact, was following making her *hagios* – *holy* – and uniquely different.

Are there any Christians in this part of the world? Where are they?

Let’s answer that question tomorrow ... when we wake up and show up to start our day ... and take these steps in our desire to become and stay clean.

Like Robert Murray McCheyne, let’s become awesome weapons in the hands of our holy God – not because of great opportunity or great talent, but because of a great likeness to Jesus Christ ... our gracious, redeeming, holy God.