

THE CALL TO HOLINESS – Part 1

If you follow the news at all, you'd agree that crime is on an up-swing in America—especially in our major cities. San Francisco could well be called the **Shoplifting Capital** of the U.S. with its incredibly lenient shoplifting laws. In a nutshell, if someone steals less than \$950 worth of merchandise—and gets caught—they are charged with only a misdemeanor! Most times the policemen don't **even try** catching them, though, because they are released within a couple of hours of being brought to the police station so why bother! It should not be surprising, then, that an **organized mob of 80** people raided a Nordstrom store the Saturday before Thanksgiving and that many businesses in San Francisco are closing up shop and moving elsewhere.

In NYC, major crime—murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, and grand larceny—were higher in 2021 than they had been in any of the previous 5 years. Not only are these crimes increasing—more and more of them are being committed in broad daylight!

In 2021, Chicago had more murders than any year since 1996—25 years ago—and gun violence has increased dramatically. Shootings are on the rise in Milwaukee, too. Here's a partial list of shootings from one week in the city of Milwaukee this past October:

- 1) On Saturday, Oct. 2 in the Sherman Park neighborhood, a gunman in a passing vehicle shot into a family car hitting a 5-year-old girl and an 11-year-old girl. The 11-year-old died from her injuries.
- 2) On Thursday, Oct. 7, a quadruple shooting near Eighth and Cherry Streets left three people dead and one in critical condition.
- 3) On Friday Oct. 8, a man was fatally shot near MLK and Garfield.
- 4) On Sunday Oct. 10, a man was shot on Sherman Boulevard.

And just **last Sunday**, 5 people were found dead of gunshot wounds in a home in Milwaukee and a 6th has since passed away.

So **why is** crime on the upswing in the U.S.? That's the six-million-dollar question, isn't it? The answer, I believe, is fairly simple, though, and is found in **Romans 3:18** "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

People **sin because they are sinners**—but they **sin more** if they do not **fear the consequences** of their sin! And although **the pandemic** seems to have brought a greater **fear of death**, it doesn't seem to me to have brought a greater **fear of God**. Why is that? There are a number of reasons, but I believe one is because **God's people** don't **fear God** the way they should!

Is it possible that **the unsaved** don't "worry" about sinning against God because **God's people** don't seem to care if they **sin or not**? I believe that very well could be a contributing factor! Biblically, we know from II Chronicles 7:14 that the key to revival is **God's people—not the unsaved**! "If **my people**, which are **called by my name**, shall **humble themselves**, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from **their wicked ways**; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

With that as a backdrop, this morning we are going to begin a series entitled, "Be ye holy, for I am Holy." Take your Bibles and turn to I Peter 1; please follow along as I read verses 13-17. Today we are going to focus on *The Call to Holiness*.

In the verses we just read, we noted that God commands us to be holy. But what does that **mean**? Next week we will take a more in-depth look at that, but for now here is a **working definition**: to be "set apart" **from sin**—and to be "set apart" **for God**. Remember that two-fold aspect; we'll see that again here in our text.

Let's consider first... **1. The people God calls to be holy**

The command to be holy is found in the middle of verse 15: "...so **be ye holy** in all manner of conversation." But **who** is the "ye" that are being commanded? Does God command **everyone** to be holy? No, He does not!

A. The call to be holy is to ***God's people***, to His children. The context bears this out.

--Vs 3 refers to those who through God's abundant mercy "hath begotten us again" —"born us again"

--In vs 4, Peter says that same group—those who have been born again—have an inheritance in heaven reserved for them

--In vs 8, that same group loves Jesus—even though they have not physically seen Him

--In vs 9, that same group—those who have born again—will receive the "end" of their faith—the fulness and consummation of it—at the appearing of Christ

--In vs 14, Peter tells them they are to be obedient children. Because they are born again, they are in God's family and ***are His children***. But not every child of God is an ***obedient one!***

--Vs 17 "And if ye call on the Father..." If God is your Father—and He is if you are born again—you need to have a ***reverential fear*** of Him. We will come back to vs 17 in a bit, but the point is this:

The call—the command—to be holy is to ***God's people!***

B. The call to be holy is to ***all of God's children***—not to just a select few!

I know we hurried through the verses we just looked at, but did you notice how many times Peter referred to ***pastors***...or elders (another name for pastor) ...or deacons...or ***elderly people***? He ***didn't*** at all, did He?

But why? Did He ***forget***? No; God ***does*** mention pastors in Chapter 5—but He doesn't ***here!***

Why is that? Because God through Peter is emphasizing that He wants ***all His children***—not just a select few—to be holy. Sadly, we often make these ***artificial "classifications" of Christians*** within the church.

--We think the ***Pastor*** should be holy—and rightly so!

--We think the ***Pastor's wife*** should be holy—and rightly so!

--We think that people in ***leadership positions*** within the church—like the ***deacons and Sunday School teachers***—should be holy—and rightly so!

--And sometimes we hold the ***"senior saints"*** to that standard and think, "Yes; they should be holy, too, because they have been saved a long time!"

But then we let ***everyone else***—including ourselves—"off the hook!" We think things like:

--"I'm ***not the Pastor***, so I don't have to be holy!"

--Or, "I don't have an ***important position*** in the church, so I don't have to be holy!"

--Or, "I haven't been ***saved very long***, so I don't have to be holy!"

--Or, "I'm ***German or Irish***, so I don't have to be holy!"

--Or, "I'm ***just a kid***, so I don't have to be holy!"

So, we make all these excuses as to ***why we don't have*** to be holy. Imagine, sitting down with God and saying, "God, ***here is why it is okay for me to disobey your command to be holy!***"

"Pastor, I would ***never do*** that!" Are you sure? ***If you think you don't have to be holy***—and ***justify why*** in your thinking—isn't that what you are doing?!

Who does God call to be holy? His children—***all of them***—regardless of their age in ***years***, age in the ***faith, background, or position*** in the church!

Next let's consider... ***2. The pattern for holiness***

God doesn't ***just*** command us to be holy—He also tells us ***how***. Notice again verse 14 "As obedient children, ***not*** fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:" God gives us a "***not***"—a thing we should ***not do***. He doesn't end with that, though, does He?

What's the next word ***after*** "ignorance" in vs 14—which happens to be the ***first*** word of verse 15? ***But!*** "But" ***what?*** Be holy like God is! So God through Peter instructs us what ***not to do***—and what we ***should do*** instead. Kind of like the ***two-part definition*** of holiness that I gave you earlier...

Let's consider first the ***"not:"*** "not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts..." Since it's something they used to do—but are not supposed to do any more—I'm calling it...

A. A pattern to forsake

So what is this pattern that they are to **forsake**? He tells them not to “fashion themselves.”

“Fashioning” here comes from a Greek word that is used only one other time in the NT in a verse that many of us are familiar with: **Romans 12:2** “And be not **conformed** to this world...”

“Conformed” means to be “formed... or molded... or shaped by.” Some have put it like this: “Don’t be **pressed into the mold** of the world.”

Carrying that idea here to I Peter 1:14, it means “don’t be molded by—don’t be shaped by—your former lusts,” your strong, sinful desires.

“Lust” comes from the Greek word “epithumia” (ep-ee-thoo-mee'-ah) which means “strong desire; passionate longing.” It is used in both a **positive** sense—and a **negative** one—usually indicated by the context. We know here it is being used in a **negative sense**—it is the **wrong kind of desire** and longing—because they are **not to do it** anymore and because it is the **opposite** of being holy!

Peter uses the same word 8 times—four in I Peter and four in II Peter. We aren’t going to look at all of them, but I do want to point out a couple of them so that we can better understand the way Peter is using it here.

--Please turn to **I Peter 2:11** “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, **abstain** from **fleshly lusts**, which **war against** the soul;” **Abstain**—totally stay away from—fleshly lusts—the sinful, selfish desires that fight against your soul—your spiritual life and relationship with God.

--Now **I Peter 4:3** “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness [unrestrained sexual behavior], **lusts**, excess of wine, revellings [carousals], banquetings [drinking parties], and abominable idolatries:” Abominable idolatries refer not only to worshipping an idol, but doing it with **impure and obscene rituals**.

Much more **could be said**—some of which will be said in future messages—but for now we need to make sure we don’t miss the main point:

--Forsake the way you used to be! Don’t be molded by your former sinful passions!

--Don’t be a drunk—or addicted to drugs!

--Don’t be obsessed by sexual sins—or lustful looks!

--Don’t be controlled by your temper!

--Don’t be longing after money—or things!

Don’t let your former lusts continue to shape and mold you! **Forsake them!**

As mentioned earlier, we don’t just have a pattern to forsake. We also have in vs 15...

B. A pattern to follow

Who is our pattern? Who is our example? Who is the one we are to imitate?

Vs 15, “But as **He which hath called you is holy...**”

The One who called us...the One who saved us...the One we now belong to is, **of course, God!**

How **holy** is God? Using part of our definition of “holy,” how **separated from** sin is God?

--Never a wrong action! --Never a wrong attitude! --Never a wrong decision!

--Never a wrong judgment! --Never a wrong motive! --Never a wrong priority!

--Never a wrong reaction! --Never a wrong thought! --And never a wrong word!

And **as God is holy**—separate from sin—we are **to be holy!**

On top of that, we are to **love** what He loves...and **hate** what He hates...and **be** what He is...and **do** what He does! And if **that’s** not overwhelming enough, let’s not overlook the extent we are to follow God’s example. What does the last part of the verse say? “...in **all manner** of conversation.”

“Conversation” does not mean merely **talking**—it means **manner of living**. What does God desire of us? What does He command us to do? God commands us to be as holy as He is in **every area** of our life, **all day, every day**, no matter **where we are...** or **who we are with...** or how **we feel!**

Anyone **feeling like a failure** right now besides me? I’m sure a number of you are thinking, ‘But Pastor, this is impossible! How can God ask us to **do something** we can’t do—and **be something** we can’t be?’

I'll attempt to answer that by looking at... **3. The purpose of pursuing holiness**

Why should we pursue holiness?

The obvious answer is A. Because God commands it

We see that in the middle of verse 15 "...so be ye holy...." In the Greek it is in the imperative, meaning it is a command. But why would God **command us to do the impossible**? Here's the **best answer** I can give you.

1) We understand that we cannot **save ourselves**. We cannot **make ourselves righteous**—right with God—by what **we do**. **Titus 3:5** "**Not by works of righteousness** which we have done, but **according to His mercy He saved us**, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" Being saved, forgiven, born again, declared righteous, are all encompassed in what theologians refer to as **justification**. It is all based on what **Jesus did**. 2) Second, we also understand that we cannot **glorify ourselves**. We cannot change our body into a body like the one Jesus now has. That will happen someday, but again, it will not be our doing. **Phil 3:20-21a** "For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹ **Who shall change our vile body**, that it may be **fashioned like unto His glorious body....**"

If we are born again, our **justification** is already done—past tense. Our **glorification** is yet to be done—and God is the one who does it. We do not have a role in that; nothing we do can either help or hinder it. We **depended on God** for our past justification—and we are **depending on God** for our future glorification.

But...God **still wants us** to be **continually dependent** on Him! And that is where I believe **sanctification**—this pursuit of holiness—comes in. We are commanded to be holy. If we are obedient children, we will forsake our former fleshly lusts—and strive to be holy like God is. But we will fall and fail and will need to humbly ask God for forgiveness and help. And just as certainly as God **resists the proud**, He will **give grace** to the humble. He will help us; He will mold us; He will transform us; He will conform us to the image of His Son.

A well-known Christian counselor by the name of **Paul David Tripp** puts it like this: "God has not called us to a life of 'I have spiritually arrived' or 'I am just waiting for heaven.' Rather, He calls us to a life of constant work, constant growth, and constant confession and repentance." And striving to be as holy as God is will certainly be constant work...and constant confession...and constant repentance.

There is a second reason to pursue holiness found in vs 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:"

B. Because God will judge our works

There are **two major judgments** in God's Word. One is the **Great White Throne** judgment found in Revelation 20 where the **unsaved stand before God** and their doom is pronounced. Twice it says in that passage that they will be **judged according to their works**. That judgment is not to determine whether or not **they will get into heaven**—it is to determine **how severe their punishment** will be in the lake of fire!

The **second major** judgment taught in God's Word is for **believers**. They are not judged for their sins—they are judged for what they did **for God** after they were saved. I would encourage you to go back on your own and read all of I Corinthians 3, but here are some verses on the **judgment of believers**:

I Corinthians 3:13-15 "**Every man's work** shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall **try every man's work** of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

--The fire shall try—it will test—our works

--If it passes the test, we will receive a reward.

--If our works don't pass the test, they will be burned up and we will suffer the loss of reward, but not the loss of salvation. We will be saved "yet so as by fire"—by the skin of our teeth!

Maybe I'm looking at it too simply, but I see a connection between being rewarded for our works—and striving for holiness. Maybe this short illustration will help. Imagine two people that are truly born again.

The moment they both trusted Christ, they were both **justified**—past tense. They were both given the Holy Spirit, like all true believers, Who is their earnest—**their down payment**—that their glorification is yet to come. **Phil 1:6** “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:”

Both go to church, both read their Bible, and both pray—but one takes very seriously God’s command to be holy—much more than the other. Doesn’t it make sense that the one who strived to be holy will be rewarded differently than the one who didn’t?

You might disagree with that thought, but it sure seems to fit why Peter would **tell believers** to “pass the time of their sojourning here in fear” (vs 17). Regardless of if I have that right or not, this **we know for certain**—God commands us to be holy! Are you obeying that command?

So, what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, I’m going to ask the question I just asked—are you obeying God’s command to be holy? If not, why not? What are you waiting for?
2. Second, and most importantly, are you born again? Are you a child of God? Striving to be holy will not get you to heaven—nothing you do will get you to heaven. It is about Christ and what He has done—not about what you do.