



5. A Passion for Holiness (1 Peter 1:1-4 & 10-22)

This is the fifth sermon in our series *Heart of Discipleship* and in it we have seen that we are all called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not an optional extra. Baptism is a mark of that discipleship because it is a statement that we have repented: I am not going to go my way but I am going to walk God's way. *I have decided to follow Jesus - no turning back!* We then saw that the cost of going God's way, of following Jesus is very costly because He wants our whole allegiance.

And in the last two weeks we found that God equips us by giving us *everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:5)* This morning we are going to take this to its logical conclusion. If we are committed to walking God's way, to following Christ, to count the cost, to take up our equipment - then what should we be like?

This is such an important issue as we examined last week. The eyes on the world look at us and what do they see? A people no different from them. And we want to see God move in power in Swaffham? We want to see people come to Christ? Do we want to see revival? Well, revival means we pray the prayer "Revive Your church, O Lord!" YOUR CHURCH. Not the lost people - but Your church! Revive US! How will we see people come to Christ? As God moves in *our* hearts and lives and we see His transforming power in them: and as we do that then we will function as we should in reaching people for Christ.

Let's ask ourselves the questions: how can we have experienced the love of Christ; come into a relationship with the living God; known the power of the Holy Spirit and not be different? Yet that is the reality of many of our lives today. What does the Lord say about it? Let's look in 1 Peter 1:14 *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 as I am holy. The phrase Peter quotes from comes three times in Leviticus. It was a call to the people of Israel to holy living and it is a call to us to live holy lives too.

Being holy? What is holiness? The main problem is that we tend to associated holiness with something that is untouchable and unreachable. But that isn't what it's about. Interestingly the sense of the word for in both Hebrew and Greek is the same. Holy simple means set apart - different. God is calling us to be different in the same way He is different. To be different or set apart, you've got to be different from something. What should we be different from? The world in which we live, the values of our society, the morals of our society, the hopelessness of our society, the cheapness of relationships of our society; its lack of grace, mercy and love. We are called to be everything God is: set apart like He is. Different.

Different. As simple word and unlike holy has no mystique about it. We know what it means. We live in a world of uniformity, sameness. Keep your head down. Blend.

Different means something else. It means standing out from the crowd. Being noticed. For what? Being like the One whose name we own. When people see us they should see Jesus - different.

Blasting the mystique out of a word kind of spoils it doesn't it. But that's the nature of theological words like "holy". They convey mystery. But once we get rid of the mystique the word brings we find truth. We are called to be different like God is different. We are called to be like Him.

It spoils our hymns doesn't it. *"Different! Different! Different! Lord God Almighty", "I want to be different, set apart for You Lord", "When I look into your differentness"*. In the NT, there are other English words that have the same Greek root - sanctify (to make holy - different), saint (different ones).

The good thing about "different" is it sounds a bit more accessible than "holy" doesn't it. It's supposed to. Over the years, holiness has been seen as the condition of the few. Some churches venerate saints. What is clear from the NT is that all Christians were referred to as saints. How about that. St Mark Reid. Perhaps I'll put that on my next set of cards I print. If you know Christ this morning, you are all saints. You are different, you are called to act different, be different, do different. That is our calling and our destiny. Yes you heard it: our destiny. We are to be different as God is different - to be like Him.

We can look at the sanctification of God's people in three ways. Oh, yes, sanctification is the nice theological word. Let's get it into ordinary English. We can see our differentness in three ways.

- ➡ We became different the day we believed
- ➡ We are becoming more different
- ➡ One day we will be truly different like Him

We became different the day we believed

In Christ we are already sufficiently acceptable to come into the presence of God. That's why we can welcome Him as we worship. That's why we can come around His table and commune with Him this morning. Let's read the first few verses of 1 Peter again: *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.* Have a look too at Hebrews 12:10 *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* The day we came to Christ was the day the Holy Spirit sanctified us. He set us apart. He made us different; set us apart into the family of God. For what purpose? For obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood. We've been made different so we can follow Him and know the cleansing of His blood. And here is the table before us and we are going to remember that shed blood and remember again His forgiveness.

Are you a believer? Then as we come around the table this morning, this meal is for you because God has sanctified you. Made you different; set you apart for Himself. As we eat the bread and drink the wine this morning we celebrate our different-ness. God has made us fit for His presence, fit for His family through the blood of Christ!

We are called to become different

We have a different-ness that makes us fit to come into the presence of God, but in the same chapter in Peter's first letter he says this: *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." 17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

It's true that the Holy Spirit has sanctified us. But if we have been made different - set apart - then we should be holy - be different as God is different. How different? Peter tells us:

Different perspective

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.

Being different means having a different aim in life. Our hope is in what's coming. Peter uses interesting words here. Set our hope on the grace to be revealed. We are already recipients of the grace that God has given us through Christ, but that is all going to be fully revealed when Jesus returns and we are going to forever be with the Lord.

That perspective is an important one. We live in a world where we live for today and for what we can get. But we are called to look at life in an eternal perspective. Our hope is eternal. We are different because in a world that is hopeless, we are people of hope.

What difference does our hope make to those we know without Christ? Does our certainty of the future, our confidence about death impress and inspire them? Or do we have the same fears because we have forgotten our hope.

As we come before this table this morning, we see in the broken body and shed blood of Christ that hope and certainty that through faith of our future and that controls our actions. If we don't then let's pray for that assurance this morning.

Different responsibility

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

"The world is not my own - I'm just passing through". We are responsible for our actions and one day we will be called to account for them. That's how it is. If we are called to be holy, different; then God is going to bring us to account for that.

We have entered family and we have a Father to whom we are accountable as children - therefore live in the fear of God. It's not the fear of terror because we are adults, but it's the fear of respect and the knowledge that we are responsible for our actions. And what were we sanctified by the Spirit for? Let's go back to verse *2 for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood*. Why is it that Christians think it's just OK to ignore God. We are called to obedience to Jesus Christ because we've been made different.

■ Different morals

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

The bottom line here is that we are called to be holy as God is holy. Different as he is different - like Him. We saw last week that the Spirit in each believer is there to perform that transforming work. We are called to be different and that means we are not the same as others. It's depressing when we see people who seemed to run well falling into problems, it's saddening when Christians gossip, it's upsetting when Christians are in sharp disagreement with one another, it's concerning when Christians lose their tempers with one another, it's disappointing when Christians think that it's OK to say and do what they like "in love". But the biggest tragedy is that non-Christians look in at us and see nothing relevant and commendable. They just see that Christians hurt people and they hurt one another.

Consider these words Peter gives us 1 Pet 3: *Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't be afraid and don't worry. ¹⁵ Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. (NLT).* The only evidence that Christ exists is YOU.

Do we want to see this Church change Swaffham? It won't come by us having events, or programmes or courses. It will come when we obey this simple scripture - be holy, as I am holy. God has equipped us with His Holy Spirit.

But how do we deal with the issues of living in a way that is holy and morally excellent? Does holiness come by striving after it or by resting in God? Perhaps we can identify with this:

"So far today, God, I' ve done all right. I haven' t gossiped, I haven' t lost my temper. I haven' t been grumpy or nasty or selfish. I' m really glad of that. But in a few minutes, God, I' m going to get out of bed - and from then on I' ll be needing lots of help!"

It's the Spirit who can bring that transformation of holiness into our lives if we let Him fill us and change us. As I said; the only evidence that Christ exists is YOU. I'm grateful to Jim Stibbon for giving me this little item:

*The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Are read by more than a few
But the gospels most read most and commented upon
Is the gospel according to you.*

*We are writing a gospel a chapter each day
In the things that we do, in the words that we say
Men read what we write whether faithless or true
Say what is in the gospel according to YOU?*

One day we will be truly different like Him

Maybe you find this daunting, but we have the promise in 1 John 3: 2 *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

One day we'll be like Him. And he's holy. So if we have this hope what do we do? *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.* As we come around the table this morning, where is our hope? If it is in Christ, in the completeness of His work on Calvary. If it is on the promises of God, then let's come before Him and ask Him to search our hearts. Let's be different, holy, set apart for Him and give Him the glory.

*Search me, O God,
and know my heart today;
try me, O Lord,
and know my thoughts I pray:
see if there be some wicked way in me,
cleanse me from every sin
and set me free.*

*I praise Thee, Lord,
for cleansing me from sin;
fulfil Thy word,
and make me pure within;
fill me with fire,
where once I burned with shame,
grant my desire to magnify Thy name.*

*Lord, take my life,
and make it wholly Thine,
fill my poor heart
with Thy great love divine:
take all my will, my passion,
self and pride;
I now surrender - Lord, in me abide.*

*O Holy Ghost,
revival comes from Thee;
send a revival start the work in me:
Thy word declares
Thou wilt supply our need;
for blessing now, O Lord,
I humbly plead.*

J Edwin Orr (1912-81)

Let's come before God as we come to communion and allow God to deal with our sin and make us different, set apart, holy by His Spirit, which He can do because of His shed blood and broken body. Let's open our hearts and minds in His presence this morning.

