

Be Holy

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Key Verse: 1:15

by Kevin Albright

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do...”

We are beginning a new year 2009. Many of us have chosen new year key verses to guide us and help us to grow spiritually in Christ. We are also studying Peter's first epistle. Today, Apostle Peter tells the early Christians, "Be holy, because God is holy." A few years ago there was a saying for young basketball fans, "Be like Mike." Many youngsters wanted to imitate Michael Jordan. Other young people imitate rock stars or Hollywood stars. But usually these stars are not good role models to imitate. On the contrary, so many 'famous' people live miserable and deplorable lives. Christians have a better role model: Jesus Christ. He is our example. He is also our hope. Those who endeavor to be like him are truly wise. Of course, it is not easy to be like Christ. In fact, it is impossible by our own effort alone. Yet, as children of God, we are expected to make our best effort. God promises to do the rest. Let's learn from Peter how we can be more like God by considering 7 imperatives he gives. These imperatives are:

1. prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled, set your hope (1:13)
2. don't conform to evil desires you had (1:14)
3. be holy (1:15-16)
4. live as strangers in reverent fear (1:17)
5. love one another deeply (1:22)
6. rid yourselves of all malice... (2:1)
7. crave pure spiritual milk (2:2)

Before looking in to these seven imperatives, note the first word of verse 13: "therefore." One Bible scholar said, "When you see a 'therefore' in the Bible, try to figure out what it is there for. Peter's therefore refers to verses 3-12. In these verses, Peter praised God for giving us new birth into a living hope and salvation in Jesus Christ. Peter also gives Christians reason to rejoice amidst trials: it is that hardships refine the faith of believers. A friend of mine is in financial hardships right now. His car broke down and he had to have it towed. But he showed up to our campus prayer meeting even though he had to travel two hours by train. He said he was reading the book of Job and was amazed that Job praised God amidst suffering and loss, something he wants to be able to do. He was glad that when we jump-started his car with my van, it worked. He was also glad to grow in deeper faith in a time of trial. The next morning, my van wouldn't start. That's another

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story. Peter's point is that even trials are not so bad, when we remember who God is and what he has done for us. Now let's consider the seven imperatives Peter gives us here.

First imperatives: prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled, set your hope (1:13). Let's read verse 13 together: "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." Peter says, "Prepare your minds for action." The idea is of a traveler getting ready to go. To say it another way, "Get ready to do something." What should we be ready to do as Christians? One good thing is to be ready to share our hope and faith in Jesus with others (3:15). Peter also tells us what to do in the rest of this verse and this passage.

Peter says, "be self-controlled." "Be self-controlled" occurs two more times in this letter. 4:7 says, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." These verses say that being self-controlled goes along with being alert, clear minded and prepared in mind for action. Self-control is an interesting expression. Self-control sounds like we are to control ourselves, for example, to control our temper. But we all know how hard it is to control ourselves. In fact, without God's help, no one can really control oneself. Galatians 5:22 says that 'self-control' is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. So self-control is the power to control ourselves, which comes from God. If we are not controlled by the Spirit of God, the Bible says we are controlled by evil spirits or by our sinful nature. For example, Abel and King Saul were both controlled by jealous, evil spirits when they did not listen to God or depend on God. As a result, Cain murdered Abel, and Saul tried to kill David. Even though self-control comes from God, we are still commanded to grow in self-control. 2 Peter 1:5-7 describes this saying, "...make every effort to add to your faith, goodness...knowledge...self-control...perseverance...godliness... brotherly kindness; and...love."

Peter says one more thing in verse 13: "set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." The hope spoken of here is similar to the living hope in last week's passage, in that both are heavenly hopes. Peter says to hope for a gift from Jesus when he comes. What we hope for or hope in motivates and drives our lives. Last year, I searched long and hard for a new home, since I had a hope to find a suitable, affordable home for my family. I'm glad that God provided a home for us near our main church. Last year, I also put a lot of effort in to a 20th anniversary trip to Hawaii in September. I looked forward to being alone with my

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precious wife Maria, catching up on lost conversation from our hectic lives. Of course, to keep our trip spiritual, we attended a Christian conference. But you know what made the trip most memorable? It was two things: a morning in prayer with Maria near the beach, and a 5-person worship service with the Akins' missionary family. In what is your hope? Examine your heart. What thrills and excites you? Is it something heavenly or worldly? What encourages you to press on? Recently, I came across a last lecture by a Carnegie Mellon professor on YouTube. He made the lecture, knowing that he had only months to live. He shared his philosophy of living life to the full: have fun, work hard, don't give up, etc. At the end he said it wasn't for his listeners, it was for his young children to see later. It was a beautiful moment of a father leaving this videotaped lecture for his wife and children. But I couldn't help but feel a bit empty, since there was no mention of God or "I'll see you again some day." More beautiful is the faith and love of Christians who have passed on and left their loved ones the hope to reunite in heaven with Jesus some day. Consider this question: if you knew you had one year to live, would that change your life today? How we answer that question expresses our real hope.

Second imperative: don't conform to evil desires you had (1:14). Let's read verse 14. "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." As children of God, we want to be obedient children. We want to please our Father in heaven. Before hoping in Christ, we lived to please ourselves. Peter calls this 'living in ignorance.' Self-centered living is quite natural and normal. But it is devoid of wisdom and perspective. It is foolish to live as if there is no God. Yet we all lived this way before knowing Christ. In fact, we are still pulled in to this old way of living from time to time. It might come in the form of a temptation to go and hang out with unbelieving friends, rather than with Christian friends. Of course, to hang out with unbelievers in order to share Christ with them is a good intention, if we actually do it. But if we don't share Christ with them, or worse yet, if we are pulled in to ungodly behavior or talk with them, then it does more harm than good. Suffice it to say, Christians are not immune to the sinful diseases and pulls of the world. Furthermore, we all have bad habits to kick; vestiges of our sinful nature to put to death. How can we do this? When we, with the help of God, decide to live as obedient children of God. A good example is Peter, the trained fisherman, who obeyed Jesus' words: "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." (Lk 5:4) Peter curbed his fisherman's pride and obeyed Jesus, and made a miraculous catch of fish. If we love Jesus, we will curb our own idea and desire, and obey him. Obeying Jesus leads to victory in the spiritual battle.

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Third imperative: be holy. Let's read verses 15 and 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.'" God has called Christians to be holy. What does 'holy' mean? Simply put, it means 'set apart from sin.' God is holy. God is perfect, righteous and without sin. Then are we supposed to live without sinning at all? Yes, that is the goal. Some might think, "That sounds no fun. It sounds boring." Some people, to encourage sinful behavior, say: "Well, everyone else is doing it, so it can't be that bad, right?" That way of thinking is not in sync with God's word. For example, Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Mt 7:13-14) Herein is one of the primary challenges of being holy: it is not popular. There is great pressure to conform to be like others. Those who don't dress or talk like others are strange. Of course, some people like to be strange or different to catch attention, like with an unusual hairstyle. Though the word 'holy' has the connotation of being different from others, it is not just for the sake of being different or defying the culture. Christians are different from the world because they strive to be like God: holy, pure, righteous, loving and perfect. Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48) We are to aim for perfection. So the excuse, "Well no one is perfect, right?" can be no excuse for a Christian. We are called to be holy, because God is holy. Though we are not God, we are called to be like him. We are called to be God's children. Good children do not want to shame their parents' reputation and name; they want to be a good example and representative that others can look up to. Good parents set a good example for their children to follow. Jesus is our model. We are called to be conformed to his likeness. We are called to be graceful and truthful, pure and loving as he is.

Fourth imperative: live as strangers in reverent fear (1:17). Let's read verse 17, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." God our Father is also the Judge. He does not play favorites. He will judge each person according to what he or she has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." (Ro 2:6-8)

Peter says that Christians are to live as strangers. In 1:1, he called Christians "strangers in the world." So it's normal if you are a Christian and a worldly person says to you, "You're not from around here, are you?" Christians are to be different, not in a bad way, but in a shining way. Christians are to be salt and light in a decaying, dull and dark world. Why? Because we follow Jesus, the light of the

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world. Christians are to be pure, as Jesus is pure. So we don't enjoy impure jokes, as the world does. Christians are to be joyful, not gloomy or complaining, because they have ample reasons to be joyful in Jesus. People of the world are drawn to real joy and purity, because they also long for it in their souls. No one will follow a gloomy, lazy or complaining person. As Christians, we are called to be good advertisers of Jesus Christ.

Peter says that Christians are to have reverent fear of God. These days, the fear of God seems largely absent in our society, even in our churches. Statistically, it is said that churches have similar rates of divorce, abortion, and suicide as unchurched people. This should not be. Something is definitely wrong with the modern church. Could it be the lack of a proper fear of God? To fear God is to have a proper view of God as the holy and righteous Judge of all souls, including me. To fear is to know that I am a sinner, deserving of condemnation and only God's mercy will save me. Recent polls say that many people, even unbelievers, think they will get to heaven simply because they are not a bad person. Perhaps they think that God will give them a last-minute pardon of their sins. Even a criminal dying next to Jesus had no fear of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Prov 1:7)

Before moving on to imperative five, we must think about very important connecting verses, 18-21. These verses contain the key to obeying these imperatives. Verse 18 says that Christians have been redeemed or ransomed, not with gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. The salvation and freedom of Christians has been bought by Jesus' blood shed on the cross. Peter already mentioned the evil desires we lived according to when we did not know Christ. It is Jesus' blood that saves us from the guilt and condemnation of our sins. The blood of Jesus redeems us from slavery to sin and sets us free to love and serve God. The blood of Jesus empowers us to live a holy life. No one can live a holy life before God apart from the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus' blood redeems us from an empty way of life. Without Christ, the world is crazy and we don't know what we are doing or why we are here--life is empty. Blaise Pascal wrote: "Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the meaning of life, of death, of God or of ourselves." King Solomon wrote these discouraging but true words about worldly life: "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind." (Eccl 1:14) This verse scared a new believer, since it sounded like the Bible admitted that there is no meaning to life after all. But life has meaning in Jesus Christ. Suffering has meaning in Jesus Christ. Love has meaning in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' shed blood and

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resurrection, we have redemption and hope. Through Jesus, our faith and hope are in God.

Fifth imperative, love one another deeply (1:22). Look at verse 22. "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." This verse tells us several things. Obeying the truth of God's word purifies us and gives us sincere love for others. Yet Peter says not to stop there: keep on loving one another, deeply from the heart. It would seem that love has many levels or depths. For some people, the words "I love you," are easy to say and don't mean much. For others, to say "I love you" is harder than buying a gift or doing something for someone. Peter says, "love one another deeply, from the heart." Jesus gave this command to his disciples on the night before he died: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn 13:34-35) The model of love is Jesus. Jesus said, "As I have loved you..." How did Jesus love them and us? He gave his life. That is the deepest level of love. Insincere love has strings attached and wants something in return. Jesus' love is not self-seeking, not easily-angered and keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus' love always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Jesus' love never fails.

Again we must not miss the very important connecting verses, 23-25. Peter again mentions the new birth of being born again. Our physical life is from perishable seed for we will all die some day. But our spiritual rebirth is eternal. This new birth came through believing the word of God, the gospel. Our new person, our spiritual body, which was born through believing the word of God, and which has a relationship with Jesus and an inheritance in heaven, shall never perish. Peter then quotes the Bible again from Isaiah 40:6-8: "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." All people are like grass in the field and all our human achievements and honors are like flowers. Grass withers. Flowers fall. It's sad but true. There is no guarantee that any of us will live to next year. We will all die some day, some sooner, some later. Then what can we do during our short lives on earth? We must invest in eternity. We must store up treasure in heaven, rather than focusing on treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. We must not cling to things of the world for the world and its desires pass away. But the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Sixth imperative, rid yourselves of all malice... (2:1) Chapter 2 begins with another 'therefore': "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." This is similar to imperative two

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about not conforming to evil desires. Peter lists things that we are to rid ourselves of as Christians, things that are contrary to love: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Also, they are all relational words, pointing out sins against others. Then how can we rid ourselves of these things, which are not Christ-like? Firstly, we must repent of these things in our minds and hearts whenever we recognize them there. Also, we must fill ourselves with something better. This leads to the last imperative.

Seventh imperative, crave pure spiritual milk (2:2). Let's read 2:2-3 together. "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." Again Peter returns to the notion of new birth. As babies need milk to grow, so Christians need pure spiritual milk to grow spiritually. What is the pure spiritual milk? It is the word of God, which gave us new birth. As milk gives babies the nutrients and calories they need to grow, the word of God has power to make us grow spiritually. The word of God has power to purify and sanctify us. The word of God is living and active. Look at verse 3 again: "...now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." The pure spiritual milk is also God himself, the Holy Spirit. Please think about these two questions: What do you crave? Are you growing spiritually? Worldly things cannot fill or satisfy our souls and deepest longings. Only the Lord and his word can fill our soul's longing. The writer of Psalm 42 understood this: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Ps 42:1-2) How strong is your desire for God's word? Do you want to grow spiritually? What are you going to do? Be holy, for God is holy. Crave pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow up in your salvation. May this be the desire of our hearts, the longing of our souls, and our daily prayer and endeavor.