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The Hole in our Holiness, Part 2

Text: 1 Peter 1:15-16

God is not our pal, colleague or equal, as people are sometimes eager to see God. God is, in the words of Rudolf Otto, “The Wholly Other”. That is, God is entirely different from the beings God created.

Peter, writing to the diaspora (1:1), says that God is holy. Then, in a radical admonition, Peter challenges the first century reader to imitate God. Peter builds a case for holiness. It is not the line of reasoning or logic I would have taken.

I would have argued for holiness as a panacea for societal ills. I would have said, “Believers, this world is wicked. If we would live holy lives, we can improve society. Be holy, *because* it’s good for our ethical and moral construct.”

Peter, however, makes it much simpler. Peter says we ought to commit ourselves to holiness *because* we committed ourselves to God. “Holiness is part of the essence of God and it ought to be part of the essence of you”, says Peter.

Here, Peter has two concerns.

1. Conduct

Greek word for conduct, *anastropē,* is used 13 times in the NT. Eight of those occurrences are in First and Second Peter. The Greek word is a compound made up of *ana* (up) and strophe (to turn). Over years the word developed in how it was understood (Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament)

* Turning upside down
* The turning about or wheeling round of a horse
* Turn about in place

Eventually it came to mean how one goes up and down, back and forth. That is, one’s conduct. Peter wants to say that if you take Jesus seriously, you ought to watch your conduct. He compares the lives, the behavior, the conduct of the non-believers (1 Peter 1:18; 2 Peter 2:7) with the lives the behavior, the conduct of believers (2:12; 3:1,2,16; 2 Peter 3:11). The hole in our holiness is that gaping abyss between what we say we believe and how we conduct ourselves. Peter wants to say there should be no break between belief and behavior. Doctrine and decorum. Proclamation and practice. Confession and conduct.

1. Conformity

Peter says that our aim is to be God-like. We are to conform ourselves to the image of God! Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44-45 and 19:2 and 20:7 and connects his admonition to the nature of God. God is holy and we who are God’s people are to be holy also. Listen to the words of our text: “Be holy, for I (God) am holy”.

Jerry Bridges in *The Pursuit of Holiness:*

*This call to a holy life is based on the fact that God Himself is holy. Because God is holy, He requires that we be holy. Many Christians have what we might call a “cultural holiness.” They adapt to the character and behavior pattern of Christians around them. As the Christian culture around them is more or less holy, so these Christians are more or less holy. But God has not called us to be like those around us. He has called us to be like Himself. Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God.*

Charles Hodge, writing on the phrase in Romans 6:19, righteousness unto holiness, said, “The proximate result of obedience to God is inward conformity to the Divine image”

C. S. Lewis in *Letters to an American Lady*:

*How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible.*

Let us be careful not to limit the definition of this conformity to the divine image to lifestyle choices*.* Our decision not to chew tobacco or view R-rated movies or use profanity in our speech may be *part* of our commitment to be holy women and men but those decisions do not, by themselves, *make* one holy.

Holiness is a conscious decision to conduct ourselves in a certain way and to conform to the image of God.

Let us, without apology, give ourselves to this pursuit.

Amen