

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:13-25

TITLE: What Does Holiness Look Like?

THESIS: Holiness is not about behavior modification, but Gospel transformation.

1 Peter 1:12-25 (NLT)

12b And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. **13** So think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.

14 So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. **15** But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. **16** For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."

17 And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of Him during your time here as "temporary residents."

18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. **19** It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. **20** God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days He has been revealed for your sake.

21 Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because He raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great glory.

22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

23 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. **24** As the Scriptures say: "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. **25** But the word of the Lord remains forever." And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.

INTRO – Definition of Holy

This morning in our worship time, we sang about the **holiness** of God and about our own lives "being holy." When you hear the words "**holy**", or "**holiness**"...what do you think of?

The **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** defines “**Holy**” this way:

“...**exalted** or worthy of **complete devotion** as one **perfect** in goodness and righteousness; **divine**; devoted **entirely** to the deity or to the work of a deity; having a **divine quality**; **venerated** as or if **sacred**...”ⁱ

When you hear “**holy**” or “**holiness**” defined in this way...what do you think of?

- Maybe you think of holiness as a **cultural shift**, like the **Holiness Movement** of the **1700** and **1800’s**.
- Maybe you think of holiness as a **denomination**, like **Pentecostal** Holiness or **Freewill** Holiness.
- Maybe you think of holiness as a **certain dress style**, or a particular **code of ethics**...
- For example, if you grew up in the **1950’s** and **60’s**, you might’ve associated holiness with this phrase: “We don’t **smoke**, we don’t **chew**, and we don’t go with those who do.”

That’s an **interesting phrase** to me; so often, we tend to think of holiness in terms of **strictly external behavior**.

- **Do** this; don’t do that.
- **Dress** like this, not that.
- **Behave** like this, not like that.

But this text from **1 Peter** teaches very clearly that **holiness** is not just about **behavior modification**...instead, it's about **Gospel transformation**. Holiness is not just **how we behave on the outside**; holiness is about the **saving grace** of Jesus Christ **affecting our heart on the inside first**.

How many of you know that external behavior can be disconnected from inward holiness?

ILLUSTRATION: Freshman Year of Bible College

When I was in **Bible College**, I had a really bad "**holier than thou**" attitude in my freshman year. The reason that attitude was so **prevalent** was that **I was basing my holiness** on **external behavior**. I thought:

- I don't watch **certain shows** or listen to **certain music**, so I'm holy.
- I don't use **swear words** or make **inappropriate jokes**, so I'm holy.
- I **stand up** against **false theology** and I **call out my friends** for being **wishy-washy** in their faith, so I'm holy.
- Whenever we have **Tuesday chapel** (weekly designated college worship service), I'm **demonstrative in my emotion**, and I'm the **first one down front** for every altar call, so I'm holy.

And looking back, it's not **bad** that I avoided certain shows or behaviors...but **that outer behavior did not impact my heart**.

- Yes, I avoided certain **TV shows**...but I did not avoid the **resentment** that I felt toward people who **did** watch those shows.

- Yes, I avoided **swear words**...but I still managed to **gossip** about the people I didn't like.
- Yes, I knew how to **call people out** for **their** sin...but I was not calling out my **own self-righteousness**.
- Yes, I knew how to **pray at the altar** in chapel...but I was not allowing the work of the altar to **marinate** in my heart; it was **business as usual** after I went out the door.

I was treating holiness as behavior modification instead of Gospel transformation.

Anyone else ever have that struggle? Yeah...

Holiness is not about **behavior modification**; it's about **Gospel transformation**.

TRANSITION to TEXT and POINT 1

From **1 Peter 1**, I want to consider **3 Questions of Transformation** that will steer us towards the holiness that God desires in our lives.

First of all, **Has the Gospel Transformed My THINKING?**

POINT 1 – Has the Gospel Transformed My THINKING?

Go to the second half of **verse 12**:

12b And now this Good News [the Gospel of Jesus] has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. **13** So *think clearly* and *exercise self-control*. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.

DEFINITION OF THE GOSPEL

Real quick, let's define the term **Gospel**.

The Gospel is simply "The Good News of Jesus and the saving relationship that He wants to have with us."

- As humans, you and I are ***born as sinners—we have this “sin factory defect”*** that ***cuts us off from God*** and ***subjects us to His judgment***.
- But Jesus, the Son of God, ***became a man, died*** on the cross, and ***rose again*** to ***take that judgment*** that we deserve for our sin.
- Now because of Jesus, you and I can ***enjoy right relationship*** with God in ***this life***, and the ***guarantee of heaven*** in the ***next life***.

For Peter, **notice how that Gospel is the key motivator for holy thinking.** When he tells us to **think clearly** and **exercise self-control**, it's not because...

- “**Society** needs good thinkers, so think clearly.”
- Or, “It's a **messed-up world** out there, so exercise self-control.”

No, Peter says, “**Because of the Gospel**...and the **wonderful grace** of Jesus that has **saved** you, **cleansed** you, and **welcomed** you into the family of God, **allow the wonder of that Gospel** to **transform your mind** and **cultivate holy thinking.**”

So what does holy thinking look like?

SUBPOINT 1A – Holy thinking is clear thinking...

I don't usually read from the **King James Version**, but this is **one example** where the **older language** actually helps us **understand the text better.**

1 Peter 1:13 (KJV)

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind ...

What in the world is he talking about?!

DEFINITION OF “GIRDING UP LOINS”

In **Biblical times**, people didn’t wear the **type of clothing** that you and I wear here in America; they often wore **robes** instead. (If you’ve seen a **Biblical movie**, or if you saw our **Living Lord’s Supper** years ago, you know the kind of clothing we’re talking about.)

Sometimes for Bible folks, as they went through their day, they might have encountered a **circumstance**—like a **battle**, or **emergency**, or some other **labor-intensive task**—where those robes could **restrict their movement**. So to “**gird up your loins**” was to **remove distractions** and be **ready for action**. [Show diagram on screen]

RETURN to SUBPOINT 1A

That’s why some Bibles translate **1 Peter 1:13** like this: “with your minds ready for action” (CSB).

- Because of the Gospel, your mind can be ready for action; it can be **clear**.
- Your thinking can be **intentionally anchored** in the peace of the Gospel.
- So that when **distractions come** and **crises arise**...whether that’s **temptation**, **stress**, **pain**, **loss**, or **other circumstances**...
- When those **obstacles** come, your thinking won’t be **restricted** or **tripped up**. It’ll be **clear** and **ready for action**.

Holy thinking is clear thinking, and it's also controlled thinking.

SUBPOINT 1B – Holy thinking is controlled thinking

“Think clearly and exercise self-control.” Some Bibles say, “Be sober-minded.” The original language actually ties this word into the context of “not being drunk.”

Because of the **transforming power** of the Gospel...

- Your thinking doesn't have to be **haywire** all the time.
- You don't have to live in a **fog of mental chaos** day in and day out.
- Your thinking can be **settled...measured...intentional**...
- Not by **relying** on **external willpower**, but by **resting** in the **internal transformation** that we receive when we **embrace** the Good News of Jesus.

POINT 1 – APPLICATION

That's why spending time in **prayer** and in the **Bible** is so important, because those things transform your thinking.

I've noticed that when I **don't** spend time in prayer or in the Bible...and when my thinking is **preoccupied** with other **distractions**, other **voices**, and other **agendas** that aren't **bad**, but aren't the **best**...that **hinders my thinking**, and it can make me feel **more detached** from the Gospel.

But, when I invest my time towards prayer and the Bible...

...when I designate that specific part of my day to say “no” to my smartphone...no to social media...no to those impulses that tie me up with good things instead of the best things...that investment allows the security of the Gospel to transform my thinking and lead me toward holiness.

TRANSITION to POINT 2

Peter asks us... Has the Gospel Transformed My Thinking? But secondly, Has the Gospel Transformed My DOING?

POINT 2- Has the Gospel Transformed My DOING?

vv. 14-17 (NLT):

14 So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. 15 But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. 16 For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

17 And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of Him during your time here as “temporary residents.”

“Holy Doing” is an area where it is **so easy** to get **tripped up** as Christians.

We’ve already established that Holiness is not about **behavior modification**, but **Gospel transformation**. Our own **external behavior** and **our own external action** does not save us.

Yet the Bible tells us over and over that **while our actions cannot save us... our actions should still reflect the Savior.**

What we do indicates the condition of our relationship with God.

Listen to how the Bible connects **“holy doing”** with **healthy relationship**. Watch all of the verbs—all of the “doing” words in these passages.

- **Deuteronomy 30:16-18a (NLT) • 16** For I command you this day to **love** the LORD your God and to **keep** His commands, decrees, and regulations by **walking** in His ways. If you **do** this, you will live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you.... **17** But if your heart **turns** away and you **refuse** to listen, and if you are **drawn away** to **serve** and **worship** other gods, **18a** then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed.

- **Romans 2:6-8 (NLT) • 6** [God] will judge everyone according to what they have done. **7** He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. **8** But He will pour out His anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness.

So for Peter, what does Holy Doing look like?

SUBPOINT 2A – Holy Doing is Obedient (vs. 14-16)

Self-explanatory. Our doing is not motivated by:

- “I feel like doing this...I have the desire to do this...”
- “Everybody else is doing this...”
- “I’ve been doing this a long time, and I still like it this way...”

Our doing is motivated by, “God loves me...God saved me...God has adopted me as His son, His daughter... Jesus has saved me from who I was, and even though my actions don’t save me, I want my actions to reflect my Savior.”

Holy doing is obedient, but then notice that holy doing is also reverent.
“So you must live in reverent fear of Him during your time here as ‘temporary residents.’ ”

SUBPOINT 2B – Holy Doing is Reverent (vs. 17)

I want to ask an uncomfortable question: ***Do we know how to be reverent?***

The term “reverent fear” in the original language can actually be translated to “terror”.

When it comes to following Jesus in 2025...

- We're good at having fun...we're good at being vulnerable...
- ...but do we know how to be reverent?
- ...not just having a generic respect for God, but a sobering/heavy awareness of God's love for goodness and His hatred for evil?

SUBPOINT 2B ILLUSTRATION: Driving Youth Students

I think about the times when I've driven our youth group to different events, whether it's Youth Camp or Youth Convention, or something else.

Whenever I transport students, I'm not paranoid [“I'm so scared, I don't want to crash!”] but I'm not clowning around either.

Yes, we have fun, we enjoy each other's company, and I'll always throw in a Dad-joke or two (which the students absolutely love)...but at the same time, it's not loosey-goosy chaos.

- I don't do donuts or parking lot stunts;
- I don't drive aggressively or text and drive;

Even as I enjoy our fellowship, there's still this heavy awareness that,

- "I've got someone else's child on board. Someone's son...someone's daughter...someone's sibling with me."
- "Their very lives are in my hands.
- My actions behind the wheel will be the difference between a life-giving experience or a life-ending experience for the students in my care."

POINT 2 – APPLICATION

Lately I've been thinking, "***What if I brought that same heavy awareness into my relationship with God?***"

The text says very openly, "...the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. [If I'm sinning today, I can't buy God off based on whatever good I did yesterday.] He will judge or reward you according to what you do."

In light of that reality... ***Has the Gospel transformed my doing?***

- Am I living life by my own rules and living "lumped in" with the rest of the unsaved world?

- Or am I “holy in everything I do”? Holy Inwardly? Holy outwardly?
- Is my doing motivated by the Gospel?

Being holy as God is holy is not about:

- *being a nicer member of society*
- *or a more upstanding citizen*
- *or a better version of myself.*

Being holy is all about, “Has the Gospel transformed my heart, and does that transformation bleed over into my actions?”

Has the Gospel brought me to a point where I say,

- “I’m not unsaved anymore;
- “I don’t play by the world’s rules anymore;
- “I play according to the gameplan of my Heavenly Father, who loved me enough to give me Jesus.”

Has the Gospel Transformed My Doing?

TRANSITION to POINT 3

Holiness is not about behavior modification, but Gospel transformation.

- Has the Gospel transformed **My THINKING?**
- Has the Gospel transformed **My DOING?**

And finally: ***Has the Gospel transformed My LOVING?***

POINT 3 – Has the Gospel Transformed My LOVING?

In vv. 18-23, Peter gives us **2 Dimensions of Holy Loving**.

First, he describes ***A Holy Love for GOD***.

SUBPOINT 3A – A Holy Love for GOD

18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. 19 It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. 20 God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days He has been revealed for your sake.

21 Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because He raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great glory.

A few moments ago, we talked about “**reverent fear**”, or “**heavy awareness**” in v.17. Notice how the “reverent fear” in v.17 is **directly motivated** by **God’s love** in v.18.

- We don’t fear God because we’re **paranoid**;
- We don’t fear God from a place of **insecurity** and **constant worry**;

- Yes, we're aware of what God might do if we openly disobey Him...
- But far more than fearing God because of what He might do...
- We fear God because of what He's already done.

Out of all the attributes that Peter could've connected the fear of God to...

Peter connects the fear of God to God's selflessness...

- He doesn't say, "Live in reverent fear, for you know that God is majestic..."
- "For you know that God is perfect..."
- "For you know that God is Almighty, righteous, powerful..."

No, he says, "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you..."

SUBPOINT 3A – APPLICATION

In light of God's love for us, how pure and holy is our love for Him this morning?

- Have we forgotten the "empty lives" we had before God saved us?
- Have we become distracted by "mere gold or silver"...those shiny earthly things that hijack our attention and our affection?

Or are we allowing the Gospel to stir up new wonder, new awe, and new gratitude in our souls?

- Do we behold the blood of Jesus as precious?
- Do we recognize the stark contrast between His righteousness and our sinfulness?
- And is that recognition motivating our love for God to be transformed, renewed, and revitalized?

Do we have a holy love for God this morning?

TRANSITION to SUBPOINT 3B

Peter invites us to a Holy Love for God, but also a Holy Love for Others.

SUBPOINT 3B – A Holy Love for Others

v.22 (NLT):

22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now **you must show sincere love to each other** as brothers and sisters. **Love each other deeply** with all your heart.

Doesn't get more basic than that. In light of the love that God has shown me, am I reflecting that love to the people around me?

Does God's love for me have any meaningful impact on my love for others?

TRANSITION to CONCLUSION

Holiness is not about behavior modification, but Gospel transformation.

- Has the Gospel transformed **My THINKING?**
- Has the Gospel transformed **My DOING?**
- Has the Gospel transformed **My LOVING?**

CONCLUSION

Peter began this section about holiness with the Gospel, and now he ends this section with the Gospel.

vv. 23-25 (NLT):

23 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. 24 As the Scriptures say: "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. 25 But the word of the Lord remains forever." And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.

Holy thinking, holy doing, holy loving...the only way that we can truly embody those qualities is if the Gospel has transformed US first.

None of us here today can be holy or set apart solely by our own efforts.

That's why Peter says, "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field."

- A blade of grass is finite; it can't protect itself from being mowed or uprooted.
- A flower is finite as well; it can't sustain its beauty and stave off wilting through its own internal willpower.

"But the word of the Lord remains forever."

- The Gospel that transforms us...that sustains us...
- The Gospel that gives us the freedom, the healing, and the salvation from our sin that we could never find on our own...
- THAT GOSPEL remains forever!
- That "Good News" that Peter talks about...the news that Jesus can save you, free you, and heal you from the inside out...
- That Good News remains forever!

APPEAL

Maybe you're here this morning and you've never allowed the Gospel to transform you.

- Maybe you've tried church here and there...
- Maybe you've tried other religions, other philosophies, other methods...
- But all of those have left you empty.

- If that's you... **The Good News of Jesus still works!**

Or, maybe you're here, and you **used** to embrace the Gospel at one point...you **used** to have a relationship with Jesus...

- But **life** happened, **circumstances** happened, **church hurt** happened, and you're **wondering**, "***I don't know if Jesus still applies to me anymore.***"
- Listen, the **Good News of Jesus is still for you too.**
- Your **questions**, your **hurts**, your **doubts** are not going to **scare Jesus away**; He **still wants you** to **come back to Him!** ***As long as you've got breath in your lungs, it's not too late.***

The Bible says in **John 3:16**, "**For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life**" (NLT).

We're going to sing one more song this morning; **if you sense God calling you** to **respond** to His love today...whether it's for the **very first time**, or the **first time in a long time**...there's space at this altar. We've got a number of church folks who are willing to pray **with you** and **for you**.

For all of us, let's take some time to **worship**, to **think** about holiness, and **fall in love all over again** with the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus and the saving relationship He wants to have with us.

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REFERENCES

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holy>