

INTRODUCTION

What did we do before answering machines and voice mail? Most of us have pretty boring messages on our answering machines and voice mails. If you call my cell phone you'll get a message that says, "Hi, this is David. Please leave a message at the beep and I'll get back to you." Pretty generic, huh?

I recently found a funny list of actual messages recorded on answering machines and voice mail. Here are some of my favorites:

1. Hi! John's answering machine is broken. This is his refrigerator. Please speak slowly and I'll stick your message to me with one of those little magnets.
2. Hello, my name ees Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Now leave your name and number and prepare to die.
3. Greetings, you have reached the Extra Sensory Perception research department. We know who you are and what you want, so, at the sound of the tone, please hang up.
4. We are BORG. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile. Leave a message and we'll assimilate you later.
5. (Blonde?) I can't come to the phone now, so if, well, actually, I CAN come to the phone now, I mean, like, I'm at the phone NOW, recording this message, but I'm doing this NOW, while you're listening to it LATER, except for you I guess it's NOW, like, when you're listening to it... I mean, ... this is totally weird, like.
6. (Actual AT&T recording) The number you have reached, 226-0477, is disconnected or no longer in service. The new number is 226-0477. Please make a note of it.
7. Hello, I'm not answering the phone. I'm trying to avoid an obnoxious person. Leave a message, and if I don't call you back, you know it's you.

If you could call God's phone number and get His answering machine, what would you hear? (People in Texas insist it's just a local call.) I think you could hear something like this: "Hello, this is God, I am holy, so you be holy, too." "You shall be holy, for I the Lord, your God am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)

That message is repeated several times in scripture, so it must be an important message. In our study of 1 Peter, the Apostle has been laying a foundation about the meaning of salvation. Beginning in verse 13, he continues this theme and adds the concept of holiness. Let's start reading in 1 Peter 1:13:

"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. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.' Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

This message is entitled "Hunger for Holiness." The word "holy" is one of the most common words in the Bible, and yet it is one of the most misunderstood words in our language. We throw

the word “holy” around a lot. Have you ever heard anyone say, “Holy Toledo?” I’ve been to Toledo and I didn’t find much holiness there. Even Batman’s sidekick Robin used the word a lot. Did you hear about the time Batman said, “I don’t understand it, Robin, the Batmobile is out of gas.” Robin said, “Holy gas tank, Batman.” Batman said, “Right again, boy wonder.”

God has called us to be holy, but how many of you want that word on your résumé? What if I was describing you to someone else and I said, “He/she is kind, friendly, funny, loving, compassionate...and holy.” All the other descriptive words have a favorable impact, but not everyone feels good about the word “holy.” If someone says you are “holier than thou” or “Holy Joe” or, heaven forbid, a “holy roller” they aren’t being complimentary.

When you hear the word “holy” you may conjure images of “church lady” from Saturday Night Live who says, “Well, isn’t that special?” Or you may visualize that group of Christians who are a part of the Pentecostal Holiness movement that started in the early 1900s. The women don’t wear makeup, cut their hair, or wear pants. I believe most of them are sincere in their conduct, but that’s not all the word “holiness means.” In this message I’ll examine the wonderful concept of holiness from two perspectives. We’ll briefly examine God’s holiness and then discuss what it means for us to be holy.

I. HOLINESS IS THE PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

There are many Bible words that describe the character and nature of God. We read that God is Spirit; God is Light; God is Love; God is Merciful; God is our Shepherd; God is Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider; God is Jehovah-rophe, our healer; God is El Shaddai, the Almighty One...I could go on for the rest of this message simply recounting the words and titles used to describe the richness and beauty of God’s character—and still not scratch the surface!

But of all these descriptive terms there is one word that appears more than any other: God is HOLY. In Isaiah 6, the prophet had a vision of the Lord high and lifted up. In this vision, the seraphim hovering above God shouting to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3) In the Bible, we often find that word “holy” repeated three times in reference to God. In Jewish thought, the number three was a Divine number: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The angels don’t say, “Holy” or “holy, holy” —they shout, “Holy, holy, holy!” God is perfect in holiness.

You may be thinking, “Okay, God is holy, but what does ‘holy’ mean?” The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament is *kadah* which literally means “to cut apart, separate.” The New Testament word is the word *hagios* which is the same root word for “sanctified” or “consecrated.” It basically means “separate, distinct, different.” So, for a working definition, let’s learn that holy means set apart (different). For instance, this book is the Holy Bible. The word *biblos* simply means “book.” When we say it’s the Holy Bible we’re saying it is different than any other book ever written. It’s the only book written by God. The temple in Jerusalem was called the “holy Temple” it was the only building used for the worship of the true and living God. When we say God is holy, we’re saying, He is totally unique, different from any other life force in the Universe. He’s the ONE—and nobody else is like Him.

The Psalmist says about God, "In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you." (Psalm 89:7-8) In heaven, John saw heavenly creatures praising God and he recorded, "Day and night they never stop saying, 'Holy, holy, holy in the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!'" (Revelation 4:8)

When I grew up in church, I always loved singing hymn #1 in the hymnal. It was the wonderful song "Holy, Holy, Holy." I notice that it written by John B. Dykes. I asked my mother if he was related to us. I'll never forget her answer. She said, "Son, your dad came from a pretty rough background, I don't imagine too many of his ancestors were writing hymns!" I always like to think that John B. Dykes, was my long lost great-great-granddaddy when he wrote that song. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty; Early in the morning, our song shall rise to thee; holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty. God in three persons, blessed trinity."

II. OUR HOLINESS IS THE REFLECTION OF GOD'S NATURE

God is holy, and we are to be holy, too. In this passage Peter gives us some practical advice on how to reflect God's holiness in our lives. He doesn't just say, "Be holy" and leave it up to us to figure out *how* to be holy. Starting in verse 13 he gives us five specific areas of our lives where holiness operates. If you want to be holy you must understand holiness involves:

(1) Holiness involves your mind: Decide to be holy

Peter writes, "prepare your minds for action." Being holy begins with the right attitude; you must decide you will be holy. The King James Version translation of this verse says "gird up the loins of your mind." Back in Bible times men wore long flowing robes, so when they wanted to run, they would pick up the hem of their robe and tuck it into their belt—that was called girding up your loins. It would be like us saying, "roll up your sleeves." In other words, you've got to desire to be holy, and that begins in your mind. Peter is literally writing, "get ready to be holy."

One of the greatest illusionists and escape artists of all time was Houdini. He was in tremendous physical condition and bragged he could withstand any blow to his abdomen without flinching. Once while performing in Canada he was challenged by a man, and Houdini was distracted and didn't have time to prepare for the punch. A few days later, he died from a ruptured appendix which may have resulted from that blow. In a real sense that's exactly what this word means—we've got to prepare ourselves mentally for the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we aren't in the right frame of mind, we'll suffer a sucker punch from these spiritual enemies.

Sadly, too many people hunger for happiness instead of hungering for holiness. A.W. Tozer wrote: "The emphasis of the New Testament is not upon happiness but holiness. God is more concerned with the state of people's hearts than with the state of their feelings. Go to God and tell Him that it is your desire to be holy at any cost and then ask Him to make you holy whether you are happy or not. Be assured that in the end you will be as happy as you are holy; but for the time being let your whole ambition be to serve God and be Christlike." (*Of God and Men*, P. 46)

(2) Holiness involves your will: Practice self-control

Next, Peter writes "be-self controlled." Your will is the part of your soul that determines what you do, where you go, and what you say. In the world it's called "willpower." People who want to stop smoking but just can't are said to be lacking in willpower. Your will is what caused you to get out of a warm bed this cold morning, get dressed and drive down here and fight for parking place to study the Bible and worship. You make a decision with your mind, but it's your will that makes it happen.

Peter is writing about the need to exercise self-control when you are tempted to sin. It's your will that says "NO" when you are tempted to sin. A few years ago, there was a national drug-awareness campaign called "Just say NO." But resisting temptation is often much harder than simply saying, "Just say NO." We have an external source of temptation—the devil. But we also have an internal source of temptation the Bible calls "the flesh" or "self." It's the big "I" that says, "go ahead, if it feels good, do it!" This "self" must be controlled. Actually, it must be crucified. The voice of "self" must be silenced continually, or it will lead you into sin.

Each of us has a control center in our lives, it's like a throne. Whoever is sitting on the throne is controlling our lives. Let me illustrate it with two circles from Campus Crusade. In the first circle, King Self is on the throne, and Christ is simply present in the person's life; He isn't being allowed to control that person's life. As a result, all the other interests are unbalanced which produces frustration. Does this circle represent your life? Is self controlling you?

The second diagram represents God's will for our lives. We must enthrone King Jesus as Lord of our life. To do this we must dethrone (crucify) King Self and yield ourselves to Jesus. When we do that our other interests are in balance which produces harmony and blessing.

That's what it means to exercise self-control. And it's a part of being holy. Self-control is actually one of the fruits of the Spirit. So, as your surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, your self-control will be greater.

(3) Holiness involves our future: Hope based on God's grace

Next, Peter writes, "Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." That phrase means to "completely establish your hope." Remember HOPE is Having Only Positive Expectations. The source of our hope is the return of Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote about the second coming he said, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13)

Sometimes Hollywood produces a movie with a message, and in 1994, "The Shawshank Redemption" was a story about hope. It's set in the 1940s and is about a banker named Andy, played by Tim Robbins who was unjustly convicted of killing his wife, and sent to prison for two life terms. While in prison, he is befriended by a prisoner named Red played by Morgan Freeman. Red has been in prison so long, he's lost hope. Every time he appears before the parole board, he doesn't expect to be released, so he isn't, and his hopelessness only grows. Andy, however, is a man full of determination and hope, and he plants the seeds of hope in his friend. He tells him about a certain place where there's a container buried in a stone wall beside a corn field at the base of a big tree. He tells him that this container contains a great treasure.

This awakens a sense of hope for the future in the man. He begins to believe there is something valuable that exists outside the world of the prison, and it's worth living for. And finally, his hope sustains him and he is released, and he goes and finds the treasure, just as his friend promised.

What a great lesson to us about hope! My friend, there is a treasure waiting for all of us when we're released from this life—it was a buried treasure, but now He's a resurrected treasure! His name is Jesus, and just knowing you will see His face should give you enough hope to endure anything this life has to throw at you. Set your hope firmly on Jesus, and the more hope in Jesus.

(4) Holiness involves your conduct: Dare to be different

Peter writes, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." Holiness involves *acting* differently than people who aren't followers of Jesus Christ. I don't think holiness involves how you wear your hair or the style of clothes you wear. Holiness is such a radical kind of lifestyle that you are different than others—but it's a good difference. Hollywood often portrays born-again Christians as religious fanatics with a Bible in one hand and a bloody knife in the other. We've all known kooky religious nuts who said they were hearing voices and God was directing them to live weird lives. That's the connotation some people have of being "holy." That's why they don't want to be holy, thank you.

Being holy makes you different, but it doesn't make you weird. To be holy, you don't have to shave your head and carry a huge cross around in the streets. Or you don't have to take a vow of chastity, poverty, silence, or move to a monastery. Being holy means living such a God-filled life of kindness and gentleness that your life becomes winsome to others. Consider the lifestyle of the most holy man who ever lived. Jesus hung out with drunkards and prostitutes. He told stories. He made people laugh. He was without sin, and he never compromised His Divine nature, but He had the kind of personality that the scriptures say "the common people heard him gladly." The only people who didn't like Jesus were the uptight religious leaders who were more interested in an external kind of holiness that was displayed by the way they dressed and the kind of food that ate or didn't eat.

We aren't to give in to the evil desires of those who don't know Christ. I read an article in the Tyler Paper on November 30 entitled "Crowd Tramples Woman During Post-Holiday Sale." It happened in Orange City, Florida. The article states, "A mob of shoppers rushing for a sale on DVD players trampled the first woman in line and knocked her unconscious as they scrambled for the shelves at a Wal-Mart Supercenter." 41-year-old Patricia VanLester had to be hospitalized after she was trampled on by the crowd who ignored her. Her sister said, "She got pushed down, and they walked over her like a herd of elephants.... all they cared about was a stupid DVD player." As I read that I wondered, "Weren't there any Christians there that morning?" That's the way the world without Jesus acts—gimme! I don't care about anybody but ME, let me get my DVD! It's easy for me, or you to say, "Oh, if I'd been there, I would have taken time to help her." But look around you, there are hurting, lonely people all around you—do you care about them? That's what it means to be holy. To show kindness to strangers. God could be saying, "I the Lord God am Different, so you be Different!"

(5) Holiness involves your judgement: Respectful fear of God

Peter concludes with the best motivation for being holy. He says, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." Holiness means living in reverent fear of God. Peter says God is our Father. When I was growing up, I loved my dad, but I also respected him. I knew that if I broke his rules, that punishment was going to follow. To live in fear of God doesn't mean that we cringe in fear and turn away from Him. It means that we have a holy awe and respect for Him.

I'm amazed at how many people don't live in fear of the Living God. The rock group, the Rolling Stones have been around for a long time. Their lead guitar player is a guy named Keith Richards. A few years ago, many of the Stones' outdoor concerts had to be cancelled due to rain. Keith Richards was interviewed and was asked what he believed about the devil. He said, "The devil doesn't bother me, it's God that ticks* me off. Him and his rain. You wait until I meet the big guy*. Doesn't he know who we are? We're the Rolling Stones!" (*words substituted for profanity) (by Neil Hagerty and Jennifer Herrema, *RAYGUN* Issue number 22 January 1995). That's a guy who doesn't have much fear of God. I promise his attitude *will* change, I just pray it will change before he dies.

CONCLUSION

We need to be holy men and women because one day we will be judged by the Lord, because one day, God is going to judge you impartially. As Christians, we won't be judged to determine whether we go to hell or heaven, that's already been settled. This judgement is when God examines what we did with what we were given.

It's like when I used to play high school football back in the olden days. This was before the days of video, but each game was taped and on Monday our coach replayed the previous Friday night's game on a old 16 mm projector. I can remember sitting there with the lights out hearing the clackety-clack of that projector. If someone missed a tackle or dropped a pass, he rewound the film and played it a couple of more times. I can remember one particular time when I was playing linebacker and I blitzed into the backfield and had a chance to tackle the ball carrier for a loss but that little guy was fast, and as I lunged to tackle him, he just seemed to disappear and I grabbed an armful of nothing. When the coach replayed that mistake a couple of times he said, "Dykes, what were you thinking?" I almost said "Coach, I was thinking, 'man, that guy is fast.'" But instead I didn't say anything.

I can remember playing on Friday nights, making a mistake and thinking, "Uh, oh, I'm going to have to give an account for that on Monday!" We lived in reverent fear of our coach. Friend, one day, each of us who are followers of Jesus will be called upon to give an account for how we lived this life. And one thing that should motivate all of us to be holy is that we will have to give an account to the Lord.

OUTLINE

I. HOLINESS IS THE PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

HOLY = Set apart (DIFFERENT)

In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. *Psalm 89:7-8*

"Day and night they never stop saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!'" *Revelation 4:8*

II. OUR HOLINESS IS THE REFLECTION OF GOD'S NATURE

Holiness involves your:

- (1) Mind: Decide to be holy
- (2) Will: Practice self-control
- (3) Future: Hope based on God's grace
- (4) Conduct: Dare to be different
- (5) Judgement: Respectful fear of God



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes