

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

First Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners

“What It Means to Be Holy, II”

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Take a first look.

I. Consider the power of Artificial Intelligence right now. My goodness, you can turn this (left) ... into this (right) with a few simple instructions. [photo on right is me getting ready to present the message on Sunday. Photo on left is me getting ready to board an airplane. The Viking hat doesn't go over well at the airport nowadays for some reason.]



A few years ago, Facebook and Instagram (now the Meta empire) began to offer the use of filters to “touch-up” photos. As you can imagine, young people who are already worried about acne and other issues considered flaws in their looks began to go hog wild with this, as my Texas ancestors might have said. According to a report on the effects of what Meta calls “augmented reality,” “Preteens are also being affected. Claire Pescott, a researcher on preteens and social media, reports that young girls say things like “I put this filter on because I have flawless skin. It takes away my scars and spots.” She is concerned that for young people trying to figure out who they are, it can be harmful: “I don't think it's just filtering your actual image. It's filtering your whole life.”¹

II. “Augmented Reality.” I consider this a dangerous fad for social media users. It is one thing to add bunny ears to your profile photo, and it is quite another to augment yourself so that the illusion of reality replaces actual reality. Come to think of it, this is an important reminder for the Church today. Real *holiness* is a matter of character shaped by the presence and power of the living God, as the *Holy Spirit* reforms individual character until the reality of Jesus is apparent in us. Augmented-reality- or AI-holiness is, well, *hypocrisy*, in the fullest Biblical sense. It is acting in such a way that others will imagine real holiness without the corresponding inner character. It is pretending with no intention of ever becoming what it is we pretend to be.

III. The Apostle Peter calls us to develop genuine holiness, and he describes what this is in his first general letter to the Church at large.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 1:22-2:3.

Translation:

²² Since you^{p2} have purified your^p souls in obedience to the truth toward brotherly love

¹ Tate Ryan-Mosley, “How Beauty Filters Took Over,” *MIT Technology Review* (4-2-21).

² The superscript “p” indicates that the pronoun is plural or that the verb includes a plural subject.

without play-acting, out of clean hearts, love one another fervently ²³ having been born again not out of perishable seed but imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. ²⁴ For

All flesh is as grass,
And all its glory is as a wild flower;
The grass has withered,
And the flower has fallen,

²⁵ But the word of the Lord remains for eternity.

Now this is the word that was preached as good news to you^p.

[Chapter 2]

¹ Therefore, after putting away every wickedness and every deceit and pretenses and jealousies and all slanders, ² as newborn infants long for the unadulterated spiritual³ milk, in order that by it you^p may be made to grow up into salvation, ³ since you^p have tasted that the Lord is kind.

Review of Part I:

I. TO BE HOLY MEANS TO HAVE A CLEARLY FOCUSED MIND. vv. 13-16

1. *Our minds must be prepared for action*, like a soldier getting ready to enter combat or like a traveler getting ready to set out on a journey.

2. *Our lives must be under the Spirit's and our control*, and not under the control of something else (like drugs or alcohol).

3. *Our hearts must have a future-orientation*, looking ahead to what God has promised for eternity, not just focused on this present life.

4. *Our thinking must embrace all of life*. "Be holy *in all you do*" calls us to such thinking.

II. TO BE HOLY MEANS TO HAVE A HEART OF REVERENCE FOR GOD. vv. 17-21

1. *We revere God because He is truly impartial*, calling everyone to repentance and faith

2. *We revere God because He has redeemed us*.

Part II:

III. TO BE HOLY MEANS TO LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE. vv. 22-25

1. *Obeying the truth of the Good News will lead directly to a "sincere" love for other Christians*. "Sincere" has a simple meaning. It means not pretended. *Sincere* is a positive translation of a negative word that means "not hypocritical."

A—We should ask ourselves: do we have a genuine love for our fellow-believers in Jesus? If not, we should have a healthy doubt of our standing with God.

2. *We are called to "love one another deeply," not in a surface-manner*. This is far beyond simply tolerating each other. Our relationships with other Christians are the only permanent relationships we really have, aside from our walk with God.

³ This word, λογικόν (logikon), is the word from which our English word *logical* comes. It means *thoughtful*, with an emphasis on the cognitive and spiritual aspect as opposed to the physical and literal.

A—So here is the question: How profoundly do we put our relationships with other Christians in a radical position of priority?

I—I heard about a man who was bragging to another man about his lack of church involvement. “He said, ‘The only two times I have been to church were to be sprinkled with water [sounds like a Roman Catholic church, eh?] and to be showered with rice.’

“His friend gave him a sobering reminder, ‘You’ll make at least one more visit—to be covered with dirt!’”⁴

It’s dangerous to starve one’s soul that much. It is rather selfish to rob the Christian fellowship of spiritual gifts and service for an entire lifetime. Also, how will such a boast play out on the day of judgment, when asked to give account of *all* of life?

3. *A genuine manifestation of holiness is natural for those whose lives have been made new by the word of God.* God’s “seed,” the presence and power of His Spirit, is what makes us new. This has come to us through the living Word, Jesus Christ, on the basis of the written word, the Scriptures.

A—Have we allowed God’s Spirit to make us new in response to His word?

I—“Due to a quirk in California law, the death penalty was temporarily overturned in that state in the 1980’s. All death sentences were commuted to life sentences. One of the effects of the decision was that the criminals who had been on death row became eligible for parole.”

The situation only lasted for a few months, however. The death penalty was reinstated, but during those few months, some of the convicts used that window of opportunity to file for parole and received it.

Some of them got involved in crime again. Others did not. One of those who did not want a life of crime was Bill McClelland. When interviewed by a broadcast journalist for NBC, this man who had spent 22 years in jail said about himself, “Bill McClelland is a person who’s been resurrected. He’s got a second chance.”⁵

This is exactly what happens to the person who puts his/her trust in Jesus Christ. We receive not just a parole but a full pardon. We are free to live fully as new creatures in Christ Jesus, and we are called by Him to do so. This new life means desiring the truth and love of Jesus to shape our lives and relationships.

IV. TO BE HOLY MEANS TO MAINTAIN A PATTERN OF GROWTH. 2:1-3

1. *Growing requires getting rid of everything that would hinder progress.* To help the reader, Peter presents a dirty laundry list, or perhaps better a spiritual garbage list. Here is the question for spiritual growth:

A—Are any of these attitudes or practices corrupting our souls and keeping us from developing the holiness of Jesus?

a. *Malice*—Malice is an inward desire to see other people get what we think they deserve. It is often the difference between something seriously criminal and simply bad. To act with “malice aforethought” means that the person wished the harm of another person and then planned to bring it about. The question for us is this: *Are we wishing the harm of another person?* If so, we need to allow the Spirit of God to take this trash out of our souls.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

b. *Deceit and hypocrisy*—These twin evils cause a person never to be authentic. Deceit is living by lies. Hypocrisy is acting as though one is not living by lies. The question for us again: *Are we really what and who we say we are?*

c. *Envy*—Envy is refusing to be happy with God has provided for us. It is always looking at that which belongs to another—abilities, possessions, qualities—and believing that if we just had that which belongs to the other person, we would finally be happy. *Are we holding out in misery because we think our happiness is dependent on having what someone else has?*

d. *Slander*—Slander is telling lies about another person with selected facts and private interpretation, and inuendo. It is also the practice of living by lies, but in this case, the lies are told about other people and not ourselves. It is repeating gossip about others without testing for truth first. *Are we guilty of bearing an unjust and bad report of others in our conversations?*

I—Empty the trash! There is such a person as ³⁰ a hoarder. Hoarding is a psychological malady that prevents a person from ever discarding anything. Rather, such a person piles stuff up until there is no room in the house for anything valuable—or until the valuable things cannot be found amid all the rubble. How much worse the spiritual hoarder, the follower of Jesus whose soul has no room for the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God—“love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control” (see Galatians 5:22-23, FJV)—because garbage like malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander are filling up the psychological and spiritual space where those virtues might thrive, if they were not choked out by such evils. Friends, we must take out the trash if we are to grow.

I—Pull the weeds! No garden can grow without constant vigilance in pulling weeds, adding water, and cultivating the soil so that the garden plants can reach their full potential. And yet another analogy is presented by Peter.

2. *Growing requires regular nourishment.* He says, be like babies that just can’t get enough of their mothers’ milk. Crave it, long for it. Don’t just be tasters, connoisseurs, of the things of God. Take a full draft!

I—Alexander Pope understood this as a young man when he wrote his imminently quotable *An Essay on Criticism*. Early in Part II of that poem, he writes,

A little learning is a dang'rous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

The “Pierian spring” was the river from which the Muses allegedly drew their inspiration in ancient Macedonia. Pope understood this as a young man, writing *An Essay on Criticism* at age 23. The truth is, we can learn just enough to be dangerous, if we don’t continue to learn and grow and gain a wider and deeper perspective.

A—We should crave the nourishment of God’s Word, Christian fellowship, worship, Bible study, and solid Christian books that help us understand and apply what God has revealed in Christ.

I—Think of it this way. It is very dangerous to be vaccinated with a bit of truth and not “come down” with the real thing. We must not let this happen to us! Vaccination is the introduction into one’s body of a bit of dead matter that causes the body to create an elaborate defense against the real thing. Isn’t this just what has happened spiritually and morally to many people in America? We have the highest percentages of people in religious services weekly in the

Western world and yet we still have such a high number of unwed mothers, abortions, thefts, and violent crimes. However, getting people to church matters more than we might think.

I—While I was finishing my preparation for a similar message on Friday afternoon several years ago, a dear older lady and member of CSBC, Rosemary Short, stopped by to pick up a bulletin. She left with me an article written by Andrea Neal and published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (March/April, 1998). The article was entitled, “The Benefits of Religious Practice.”

Note some of the findings of research from around the country. Neal cites several studies published in mainstream journals of social and psychological research to demonstrate her point that getting people to church is good for everyone. She notes that regular church attendance seems to boost the immune system in the body. She shows that regular church attendance is the most critical factor in marital stability, regardless of denomination or doctrinal teaching on divorce. She reports that those who practice a lifetime of church attendance have a much lower risk of cardiovascular disease and many other life-threatening illnesses. Even blood pressure is reduced an average of 5 mm by regular church attendance, 6 mm for those over 55 (which in turn reduces the mortality rate by 10 to 20 percent at least). She shows many other health and social benefits to regular church involvement.⁶

Why would this be? *Could it be that we truly cannot be good or healthy without God?* That we need His presence with us and His power upon us to become the kind of people He has designed us to be?

Take it home (applications).

I. Are we ready to allow God to make us truly holy?

1. We must admit our unholiness apart from God in Christ.
2. We must believe in what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross and in the empty tomb.
3. We must commit our lives to Him.

II. What is the focus of our minds?

III. How is the practice of our love?

IV. What are our growth-habits? Are we consistent in these?

⁶ Andrea Neal, “The Benefits of Religious Practice,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March/April, 1998, p. 38.