

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

First Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners

“What It Means to Be Holy, I”

1 Peter 1:13-21

Take a first look.

I. GREETINGS, AGAIN, RESIDENT ALIENS, SOJOURNERS, TENT-CAMPERS OF EARTH. I remind you that Christians are called to be holy, not “holier than thou.”

Here’s a parable to help us with this.

A 67-year-old woman scheduled for routine cataract surgery in November [of 2016] thought it was just dry eye and old age causing her discomfort. But the real cause of her discomfort was much more concerning: 27 contact lenses, stuck in the woman’s right eye in a “blue mass.”

Rupal Morjaria, a specialist trainee in ophthalmology, said the woman hadn’t complained about any visual trouble before the operation. But when the anesthetist at the hospital started to numb her eye for surgery, he found the first cluster of contacts. Morjaria said, “He put a speculum into the eye to hold the eye open as he put the anesthetic in, and he noticed a blue mass under the top eyelid.”

Eventually they found a mass of 27 lenses. “We were all shocked,” Morjaria said. “We’ve never come across this.” A representative from the American Academy of Ophthalmology said he’s seen patients have one lens stuck, but never 27. “This is one for the record books, as far as I could tell,” he said.

The woman had been wearing monthly disposable contact lenses for 35 years, but it’s unclear how long they had been gathering in her eye. Sometimes when she would try to remove a contact from that eye, she couldn’t find it. The patient had just figured she’d dropped it somewhere, Morjaria explained, but it was actually getting stuck in her eye with the others.¹

Oh, my goodness! What was originally meant to help this woman to see better was causing her vision to fail! Perhaps this is the difference between “holier-than-thou” and truly holy.

1. “Holier-than-thou” is a matter of pride based on comparison: “I don’t drink, smoke, cuss, or chew, or run around with girls who do, but you ... eeww.” That is the spirit of “holier-than-thou.” “Snooty” could be a descriptive word for such an attitude, or “condescending.” The spirit of “holier-than-thou” lacks humility.

2. To be *holy* means something else entirely. In fact, Peter does a good job both of calling Christians to holiness and describing what that means.

II. WE NEED TO HEAR HIS MESSAGE TODAY. We are still called to be holy, no matter how many caricatures exist of the real thing, and no matter what the world says about us.

Peter will help us here, if we have ears to hear his call.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 1:13-21.

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

¹ Nancy Coleman, “Doctors find 27 contact lenses in woman’s eye,” CNN (7-19-17).

1. *Our minds must be prepared for action.* The word picture that is lost in the translation is somewhat literal in the old King James Version. It reads, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” Isn’t that a cool turn of phrase? Here is the picture. The soldier is preparing for combat on the field of battle. He is wearing a ... well, short skirt, a loin-cloth. He girds it up—his loin cloth—by tucking it into his belt. Think about it. How could his fellow soldiers ever explain that he was killed in combat because he tripped over his skirt?

Actually, A.T. Robertson reveals that the Asian custom was more general. Any time a person was in a hurry or setting out on a journey, he/she would gather up the robe and fasten it in something of a girdle, and then take off. This is a hard picture to put into words, so the NIV opts for the simpler, “Prepare your minds for action.”

A—We must be ready to act on what we believe at any time. It isn’t enough just to hold various doctrines neatly tucked away in our “I believe” notebooks. Our faith should be a blazing reality in action.

I—In *Beginning to Pray*, Anthony Bloom writes, “I remember a certain number of my father’s phrases. In fact, there are two things he said which impressed me and have stayed with me all my life. One is about life. I remember he said to me after a holiday, ‘I worried about you’ and I said, ‘Did you think I’d had an accident?’ He said ‘That would have meant nothing, even if you had been killed. I thought you had lost your integrity.’ Then on another occasion he said to me. ‘Always remember that whether you are alive or dead matters nothing. What matters is what you live for and what you are prepared to die for.’ These things were the background of my early education and show the sense of life I got from him.”²

I would say that was a very good early education. What do you think? We must quit tripping over the values and assumptions that come at us from every side through non-Christian classmates and workmates, through movies and television programs that espouse a false worldview, or through magazine articles or books written by people who don’t know the Lord, or God forbid, through social media. We must tuck those matters away and have our minds fully focused on what God has revealed about our lives through Jesus Christ.

2. *Our lives must be under the Spirit’s and our control.* This is the only way we will be truly prepared for the kind of action that we must take. “Be sober,” says the KJV. This is the literal meaning of the word here: “don’t be intoxicated by wine.” The idea can be extended, as the NIV translates, to having self-control. Obviously, when you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, *you* are no longer in control of your actions and neither is the Spirit of God; that alcohol or drug is.

A—To be holy means that we yield our minds and our self-control to no one and nothing else but God’s Spirit dwelling within us.

I—Those things that would influence the way we think and feel are usually quite subtle. Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey wrote some time ago in *Christianity Today* about the power of TV advertising under the title “Madison Avenue’s Spiritual Chic.” They write, “In a commercial for IBM’s Solutions for a Small Planet, Catholic nuns walking to vespers talk about surfing the Net. Gatorade features Michael Jordan running in Tibet and meeting an Eastern holy man who intones, ‘Life is a sport; drink it up.’ Snickers shows a politically correct football team inviting a Catholic priest to bless the team, followed by a rabbi, a

² Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*, (Paulist Press, 1988).

Native American, a Buddhist, and a long line of other spiritual leaders. The tag line: 'Not going anywhere for awhile? Grab a Snickers.'

... Of course, commercials have always sold more than products. When an ad features a well-dressed businessman, it's selling an image of success. When an ad features a sultry model, well, we all know what it's selling. But it is profoundly disturbing to see religion reduced to one more handle for manipulating viewers acquisitive desires. When our kids hum the catchy jingle of the latest commercial, is their spiritual impulse being diverted into consumerism? Are they absorbing Madison Avenue's false values?"³

Good question. We tend to become what we give our attention to. What are our eyes, ears, and inner longings focused on? What is controlling the shaping of our attitudes and vision?

3. *Our hearts must have a future-orientation.* Our hope must be set fully on the grace that is to be given us when Jesus Christ is revealed in the end. This means that there is more grace to come. We are saved—rescued, kept safe—by grace—past, present, and future.

A—We must not let some element of personal merit spoil our motivation. We live because of God's grace and mercy. We serve by the power of His grace. We look forward to the goodness of His grace in the future.

I—L. D. Kennedy told this story in *Proclaim* magazine a few years ago: "A former murderer, haunted by conscience, had great difficulty sleeping. Often he would drive around in his car at night until he was so exhausted that he would fall on the bed and drop off to sleep.

"Finally, this troubled man attended a church service in Toledo, Ohio, where he heard the gospel. He went forward, claiming the forgiveness, cleansing, and peace of Christ. At the same service the pastor's eight-year-old son David made his profession. The pastor, George R. Gaddie, was deeply impressed as he reflected on how an adult murderer and his young son had to be saved alike.

"Since 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23), both moral people and great sinners need to be born again."⁴

4. *Our thinking must embrace all of life.* We must resist the "evil desires" of our lives without Christ and "be holy in all [we] do." One of the key words here is "all." This means that our expression of what it means to be set apart for God should affect our attitudes and actions at home, at school, at work, at play, and at church. It should affect our thinking about every subject of discussion. Thinking "Christianly" about politics and government, war, crime and punishment, and about other moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, reproductive technologies, immigration, and more is a necessity for believers. "Be holy *in all you do*" calls us to such thinking.

I—Former star player for the Seattle Seahawks Steve Largent became a member of Congress after his football career. Here is what he said a few years into his role as a representative of Oklahoma in the federal legislature. "I think I have a very fundamental responsibility to be a leader of integrity to my community that I represent. I always say that the most important responsibility that I have is to live up to the nametag that I get when I go to various places that says, 'The Honorable Steve Largent.' The legislation that I introduce or support, I think is secondary to that. If I conduct myself publicly and privately in a way that is honorable, not just to the people of the district that I represent but to God, then I will feel like I

³ Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, "Madison Avenue's Spiritual Chic," in *Christianity Today*, January 12, 1998.

⁴ *Proclaim*, Spring 1999, p. 22.

have been successful.”

He commented also about his faith and the winning and losing in legislative battles: “I’ve already read the end of the story, and we win.... That really gives me a sense of peace about what I’m doing. Even though we spend \$1.7 trillion and have the most powerful army in the world, God’s more powerful and has more money. I think when you’ve been exposed to the Creator of the universe, then the federal government doesn’t seem very powerful.”⁵

I share this in light of recent revelations about a Member of Congress from California with grand political ambitions but also with a history of sexual misconduct (Eric Swalwell), who was finally dumped by his own Democrat political party. Considering such behavior, it means even more to discover that there were and still are people such as Steve Largent who are seeking to live a holy life and serve the people of the United States—at the same time. They serve honorably because they are ultimately serving the living God, *then* the people of the United States.

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.* We know that the same grace that has been offered to us is offered to anyone who will turn to Jesus Christ. We also know that the same justice will be offered to those who refuse His grace and mercy.

A—Such impartial justice calls us to be ready to bear witness to people who are different from us.

I—From time to time in the past, a group held a mock marriage ceremony between two males or two females in the SUB at Central Washington University. We must not forget, that based on the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, there is no support of such sexual relationships, in personal practice or in the realm of marriage. Anyone who argues for such acceptance is simply denying the clear teaching of Scripture and historical Christian authors on the subject. But the impartial nature of God’s justice calls us to a spirit of humility. We don’t look at such people as the scum of the earth, far below all of us respectable people; we see them as fellow sinners in great need, as with us, of the restoring grace of God. “But for the grace of God, there go I” must never be forgotten, even in such a consideration as the practice of our sexuality.

God has the power to transform all of us into holy people. Paul put it like this:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV): ⁹ *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders*
¹⁰ *nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* ¹¹ *And that is what some of you were.*

But you were washed, you were sanctified [i.e., made holy], you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

May I humbly remind us all today that if that last statement were not true of every follower of Jesus, none of us would be saved: *We* “were washed,” [we] were sanctified, [we] were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

2. *We revere God because He has redeemed us.* This is the complete picture of the reason for our awe before God. He is absolutely *just*, which truth should cause healthy fear in the hearts of the stubbornly wicked. But He is supremely *merciful* to those who humble

⁵ From *World*, February 14, 1988, pp. 14-16.

themselves before Him to receive His grace and mercy. He took the just punishment for our sins upon Himself in the person of Jesus Christ [vv. 18-21]. To be “redeemed” means that He has paid the price necessary to set us free from sin and from the fear of death and judgment. What more can He do than this to convince us of His love for us? Remember Romans 5:8 and think about it in conjunction with what Peter writes here: “*But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*” (FJV).

A—Have we received this mercy and undeserved love for ourselves?

I—James L. Densman is a pastor. He writes, “While on a mission team to Romania, I met a Hungarian Baptist Pastor named Zoltan Vekas. Zoltan lived in Satu Mara, Romania. One of our many discussions centered around the Gypsies. He said to me that he enjoyed being with the Gypsies. I asked him to explain. He began to tell me how the Gypsies are nomadic people and are accepted by no one. They are rejected by all classes and never find a warm welcome or a word of encouragement. He said that when he was with the Gypsies, he felt most like Jesus must have felt. The Gypsies have no place to call home. No one loves them and no one wants them.

“I returned to Romania the following year,” says Brother Densman, “and had the blessing of preaching in a Gypsy camp. I used John 3:16 for the text. I spoke about the love of God for all mankind. One Gypsy woman stood through the entire service weeping. I was told that her tears were a result of the knowledge that God loved her so much that He would send His Son to take her place on the cross.”⁶

Take it home (applications).

I. On what are our minds focused today? On our own “happiness”—by which we usually mean our sensations of pleasure, both physical and psychological? Or, on our sense of purpose before God?

II. Is our hope in Christ shaping the lives we lead right now? Or are we so focused on our immediate needs and wants to think about eternity?

III. Have we paused lately and seriously considered the way in which God has shown us His love through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? We have that opportunity every time we worship, and especially every time we take the Lord’s Supper together.

⁶ *Proclaim*, Spring 1998, p. 20.