

November 17 Lesson 12 (NIV)

FAITH THAT IS FOCUSED

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Peter 1:3–12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:22, 23; 1 Peter 1

1 PETER 1:13–25

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.

KEY VERSES

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. —1 Peter 1:14, 15

RESPONDING TO GOD’S GRACE

Unit 3: Faith Leads to Holy Living

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Holiness Encounter
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Focusing Our Minds (1 PETER 1:13–16)
 - A. With Sobriety (v. 13)
 - B. With Holiness (vv. 14–16)
 - Seek Ye First*
- II. Focusing Our Faith (1 PETER 1:17–21)
 - A. In Christ (vv. 17–19)
 - B. In Resurrection (vv. 20, 21)
- III. Focusing Our Love (1 PETER 1:22–25)
 - A. For Fellow Believers (vv. 22, 23)
 - Holiday Humility*
 - B. For God's Word (vv. 24, 25)

Conclusion

- A. Holiness Gaps
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Bithynia *Bih-thin-ee-uh*.

Cappadocia *Kap-uh-doe-shuh*.

Galatia *Guh-lay-shuh*.

Horeb *Ho-reb*.

Nero *Nee-row*.

Pontus *Pon-tuss*.

Introduction

A. Holiness Encounter

Have you ever had what seemed to be a surprising encounter with God's holiness? If so, how did you react? Some may claim to have holiness encounters in certain places (compare Genesis 28:16, 17). Others may claim to encounter God's holiness in certain people (compare 2 Kings 4:9). It seems more likely, however, that we will have encounters with unholiness in this fallen world (compare Genesis 6:5; 19:4, 5; Romans 3:10–18). And before we crave encounters with God's holiness, we may wish to examine biblical incidents of those first!

One example to consider is that of Moses in Exodus 3:1–4:17. At age 40, Moses fled from Egypt and lived in Midian for many years (Exodus 2:12, 15, 22; Acts 7:23). There he did the lonely job of shepherding, moving his flock from pasture to pasture. On one occasion, Moses found

himself at the foot of Mount Horeb, later called Mount Sinai. There he encountered a marvelous sight: a fiery bush that didn't burn up. Curiosity resulted in his standing on "holy ground" (Exodus 3:1–5). Moses had encountered the holy God.

The voice in the bush told Moses he would return to this holy place with the people of Israel to worship the Lord (Exodus 3:12). When Moses did return, he encountered not a burning bush but a mountain on fire (19:18)—the holiness of God on a grand scale! Such encounters and others (Isaiah 6, etc.) have lessons to teach about holiness.

B. Lesson Context

Peter is a perplexing figure in the Gospel accounts. He tended to blurt out whatever was on his mind at the time, sometimes seeming to contradict himself in the process (examples: Matthew 16:22, 23; 26:35; Mark 9:5, 6; John 18:25–27). He was impulsive and recklessly bold, often acting before thinking (Matthew 14:22–33; John 18:10). In short, Peter was an apostle we can relate to.

A dramatic change came over Peter after Jesus' resurrection. He grew spiritually, constantly preaching, teaching, and healing in Jesus' name (Acts 2:14–39; 3:1–8, 12–26; 10:34–43, 47, 48; etc.).

This confident Peter is the same man who wrote the letters of 1 and 2 Peter. In his first letter, Peter addressed "exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). These regions encompass a very large swath of land in northeastern Asia Minor, now Turkey. Such a large expanse of land suggests that a large number of people were also meant to be reached. The majority of Peter's audience were likely Gentile believers (consider 1:14; 2:9, 10; 4:3, 4).

A time of terror, of living day to day and being tempted to abandon the faith, forms the backdrop for Peter's two letters. His first letter mentions being in "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13), a derogatory code term for the city of Rome (consider Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). After a fire in Rome in AD 64, Emperor Nero blamed the Christian population of the city, putting many of them to death. Both Peter and Paul were in Rome in the mid-AD 60s while Nero persecuted anyone who put their faith in any lord but him. Reliable church tradition maintains that Peter was crucified in Rome in AD 67 or 68.

I. Focusing Our Minds

(1 PETER 1:13–16)

A. With Sobriety (v. 13)

13a. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober,

Therefore indicates that this train of thought is a conclusion of previous statements regarding the work of prophets. Their work was not only for their contemporary audiences but also to minister to those who hear and believe the gospel later (see 1 Peter 1:12). To have *minds that are alert* suggests that one is prepared with focused attention.

A *fully sober* mind is an alert mind, undistracted and engaged in one's current situation with seriousness. The Greek word translated "sober" does not necessarily relate to alcohol consumption such as we use that word today. Rather, it is concerned with self-control in a broader sense.

13b. set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

Believers' focus should be on the return of Jesus. This gives *hope* because of the promise of *grace* associated with that event. Grace here refers to the good news of Christ's return—good news for believers, bad news for their persecutors. Hope gives strength to endure hard times, because present troubles pale in comparison to future glory (Romans 8:18–39). With his faith that Jesus can return at any moment, Peter reminds us of Jesus' own warning to be ready for his return (see Mark 13:32–37).

B. With Holiness (vv. 14–16)

14. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

Focused minds must produce focused lives. Peter urges his readers to demonstrate their readiness for Jesus' return by the way they live. Believers must not be distracted by desires to return to sinful behaviors but instead be like *obedient children*.

This seems to be particularly directed to Gentile believers, who formerly engaged in drunkenness, sexual immorality, and idolatry—having considered such things normal (see 1 Peter 4:3; Lesson Context). To return to *evil desires* shows a reverting to *ignorance*, a willful obliviousness to the possible return of Jesus at any time. That would be to ignore the consequences of sinful behavior (Ephesians 4:18). Such ignorance reminds us of Jesus' illustration of the servants who were unprepared when the master returned home (Matthew 24:45–51).

15. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

Being *holy* concerns two different but related concepts. First, holiness implies being separate or different. One foundational difference between God and false gods (idols) is that God made people in his image (Genesis 1:27) and not the other way around (Exodus 20:4–6; Psalm 97:7). Like their God, the nation of Israel was to be unique: a different type of people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).

Second, holiness demands moral purity. God's actions are pure and righteous (Ezra 9:15; Psalm 7:11), so his people's actions should also be pure and righteous. Israel was not to be like the other nations, which lived wickedly (2 Samuel 7:23; contrast Ezra 9:2). To approach a holy God, a person must have clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3, 4). This twofold cleanliness is expressed in right attitudes and actions.

16. for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Peter's instructions are not new revelations for the church but those of the *written* precepts for the people of God. These instructions were first found in the Law of Moses. When the Lord called Israel out of Egypt and guided them to be his chosen nation, he demanded one central thing: holiness (Exodus 19:6; 22:31; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; etc.). They were not to be like other nations with their ruthless kings, immoral practices, and injustice toward the poor. They were to *be holy because* God is holy (Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7; etc.).

In times of suffering such as the church is experiencing when Peter writes, fulfillment of personal longings for material things, health, happiness, and even security seems elusive. But suffering or persecution cannot be allowed to diminish holiness and dedication to God and his ways. If persecution causes Peter's audience to turn away from holiness, they will no longer be lights pointing to God (Matthew 5:14–16). When we choose holiness, we are choosing to be faithful.

II. Focusing Our Faith (1 PETER 1:17–21)

A. In Christ (vv. 17–19)

17a. Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially,

To refer to God as *Father* reflects Peter's internalization of Jesus' teachings. Jesus frequently referred to God as "my Father" (for example, Matthew 18:10; Luke 10:22; John 5:17) and encouraged his followers to see God as Father as well (Matthew 6:9; John 20:17). This relationship implies that the children of the Father will relate to him in trust, obedience, and love.

Fathers must sometimes act as judges of their children's behavior and discipline them accordingly; so it is with God. Many people claim that one of their siblings is the parental favorite and therefore receives special treatment. Not so with God the Father. As Peter himself stressed years earlier, "God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34); no one gets preferential judgment. He expects the same holy thoughts, attitudes, and actions from all his obedient children.

17b. live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

As children, we may have been able to hide some disobedience from our parents. That's not so with God, for he knows all. Therefore, we should have a sense of *reverent fear* that leads us to obedience (Leviticus 19:37; 25:17, 36, 43; Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:2; Isaiah 8:13; etc.).

Since Peter's message of salvation is a message of grace, that we are saved by faith (see 1 Peter 1:5; 5:10), then where does fear of God fit in? Doesn't 1 John 4:18 say "perfect love drives out fear"? Indeed it does. But Peter's idea here is that since the tests his audience faces can lead them to unfaithfulness, a proper fear for God is necessary to yield faithfulness instead (Psalm 86:15; 2 Chronicles 19:9; Hebrews 11:7).

18, 19. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Peter's tack now is to establish the value of his readers' redemption by stressing its cost. Had their redemption been purchased *with perishable things such as silver or gold*, then its staying power would have been the same. It would have no eternal value.

In making this point, Peter is likely addressing Christians from a Gentile background since the phrase *the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors* would not refer to Judaism. That way of life was established by God. By contrast, Ephesians 4:17–19 speaks to the utter worthlessness of paganism.

The subphrase *from your ancestors* can remind us that many sinful and destructive behaviors are carried across generations. People too often find themselves in toxic lifestyles that parallel the life of a parent. But Jesus can rescue us from this cycle as he opens the path to new life available only in him (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; etc.). This new life is possible only because Jesus was without sin, likened to a perfect *lamb* (compare Exodus 12:3–5; Hebrews 9:14).

Remembering this puts Christian ethics in perspective. If Jesus, the one without blame or sin, died willingly to offer salvation to all people, should we not strive for blamelessness ourselves (Philippians 2:14, 15)? This striving is the correct response to the holiness and love of Jesus' life, not an attempt to earn our salvation.

B. In Resurrection (vv. 20, 21)

20a. He was chosen before the creation of the world,

Peter wipes away all the patterns that influence evil behavior by going back to the earliest era: *before the creation of the world*. Even then—before forming the heavens and the earth, before creating men and women, and before the first sin—God had planned for our salvation through the spotless Lamb who is his Son. God’s plans are deliberate and eternal.

20b. but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

The 2,000 years of Jewish history preceding Peter’s ministry anticipated this coming Messiah. The revelation of this chosen one of God has come *in these last times* for Peter’s first-century readers in Rome (compare Acts 2:14–21; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 22:7, 10, 12, 20). We are still in those last times. What follows this epoch is the end: Jesus’ return to judge and save. As Peter’s readers eagerly awaited Christ’s return, so do we.

21. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

This verse forms a balance for the expectation of Christ’s return. Christians hope for this return daily in our painful world. If he does not come in our lifetime, our hopes are not dashed. Our *hope* focuses on the Lord *God*, the one *who raised* Jesus from the grave to glory and will do so for us too.

III. Focusing Our Love

(1 PETER 1:22–25)

A. For Fellow Believers (vv. 22, 23)

22. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

One word defines how Christians are meant to treat *each other* in the faith: *love*. This is more than an act of obedience. Our love for each other should be *sincere*, done with a pure heart, and felt *deeply*. We must do more than act like we love each other. We must truly care for each other as deeply as we care for ourselves (Matthew 22:37–40). Such love-motivated acts are the obedience to truth that Peter wants his readers to practice.

23a. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable,

Peter likely learned from Jesus to speak of salvation as being *born again* (John 3:3, 7). Peter’s speech after healing a man uses a similar idea that he called “times of refreshing” from the Lord (Acts 3:19; compare Romans 12:2). The Christian life is a radically changed life, going from lost to saved, from sinner to saint, from living for oneself to living for Jesus. We commonly refer to this as “conversion,” the starting point for a new, *imperishable* life (compare John 3:3–5).

23b. through the living and enduring word of God.

Becoming a believer is more than emotions, although it can be an emotional experience. We believe because we have learned from *the living and enduring word of God* the truth about Jesus. People cannot believe unless they hear or read about Jesus and his saving work (Romans 10:14). The gospel is still powerful today, 2,000 years after Jesus first preached it. It does not grow old or lose its potency.

B. For God’s Word (vv. 24, 25)

24. For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,

Peter quotes an abbreviated form of Isaiah 40:6–8, which uses the illustration of seasonal *grass* and *flowers*. They sprout, grow, bloom, then die. *People* and animals are like that too. Our life spans are limited, and death overtakes us all.

25a. “but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

Not all things die (see Isaiah 40:8). Peter’s claim of the everlasting power of *the word of the Lord* is bolstered by his use of a prophecy from Isaiah that was already ancient as Peter writes: the Word of God will never die.

25b. And this is the word that was preached to you.

Peter ties the words of the prophet Isaiah to his own ministry. The ancient and eternal Word lives again in the preaching of the gospel, *the word* of God’s grace and mercy. For those experiencing uncertainty and fear in persecution, the promise that the gospel is eternal invites them to experience peace and hope.

Conclusion

A. Holiness Gaps

Not long ago, a friend told me he thought “Be holy, because I am holy” to be the most neglected command in the church. The great apostle Peter did not think holiness should be neglected or dismissed. He held it as a core element of the gospel he preached. Our failures to be holy ultimately misrepresent our belief in the holiness of God. Since God is holy, then we should care about our own holiness. When we behave, think, or speak in unholy ways, we diminish our relationship with God.

Are there holiness gaps in your life, pockets of sinful attitudes and actions you harbor and protect? Are there areas where a holy God is not welcome, where your privacy rights are paramount? Sometimes the holiness gaps are not private at all. Others can see uncontrolled anger, lack of integrity, shameful treatment of a spouse, etc. But no matter how private your hold is on your sinfulness, God is a witness (1 Peter 1:17).

This lesson helps us understand why and how to live in stressful times and maintain our faith. We may not face imminent arrest and death for being Christians, but we have trials all the same. Many things call us to acknowledge them to be “lord” in place of Jesus. Peter’s guidance helps us to focus on what is important, to live without fear, to strive for holiness, and to always remain faithful to our calling as followers of Jesus. His words encourage us to remain confident in Jesus, no matter what problems might threaten. Peter would do the same.

B. Prayer

Lord God, free us from sinful behaviors that weigh us down and cause us to stumble. Through your Holy Spirit, we ask that you empower us to strive for holiness so that we may be more like you. We pray in the name of Jesus, the spotless and holy Lamb of God. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God’s holiness motivates

our desire for holiness.¹
