

Preaching of holiness - a definite order

1. What God has done for us

2. Challenge & encouragement

3. Details

4. Problems and difficulties

The preaching of holiness works through a definite order. First there is what God has done for us (and Peter has said much of this in 1:1–12). Then there is the general challenge that we should commit our lives to living out what God has done for us especially in Christian love (and Peter has much to say along these lines in 1:13–2:12). Then we get to details. After that there is often extra material, clearing up problems and difficulties. This rough order can be observed throughout the New Testament teaching. Peter is still in the second stage, mentioning various encouragements to holy living: the character of God ('You shall be holy, for I am holy'), the impartiality of God ('a Father who judges ... impartially'), and the delivering power of the blood of Jesus. A fourth encouragement to help us know that we can live for God is the imperishable new birth. He has mentioned it already¹. It greatly encourages Christians: they have something within them that cannot be lost or shaken, an imperishable life that came to them through their response to the word of God.

¹ 1:3

1. The greatest aspect of Christian godliness is the habit of Christian love

• Purification by faith and obedience

1. **The greatest aspect of Christian godliness is the habit of Christian love.** Peter begins with a call to show Christian love; this is always the greatest and most sweeping way of appealing for godly living. '*Having purified your lives by obedience to the truth, ready for sincere love of the brothers and sisters, love one another intensely, from the heart*¹'. Peter mentions the response first ('Having purified ... by obedience...'). This self-purifying has nothing to do with baptism (despite what is sometimes suggested). The New Testament knows nothing of ceremonies that purify the heart. It is faith that purifies the heart. The purification took place by obeying the truth. When the gospel was preached and the people responded in obedience, God by His Spirit purified the heart and made new people from these former sinners. The result was that they were in a position to start loving people ('ready for sincere love'). Peter urges them to work out in practice the potential that is already within them.

¹ 1:22

2. Peter's words imply that before conversion our lives are unclean

2. **Peter's words imply that before our conversion our lives are unclean.** They need to be 'purified'. This is the teaching of the Bible generally. Our inner life before we get to know Jesus is polluted. Our attitudes, our motives, the generally self-centred direction of all our activities – it all has a polluting and defiling effect on our lives. We may be fairly respectable on the outside but the verdict of Jesus is that within there may be an entirely different state: 'You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence'¹.

¹ Matthew 23:25

3. The next stage in the progress towards godly living is that the word comes to us

• Promised in the Old Testament

3. The next stage in the progress towards godly living is that **the word comes to us.** Peter says that something happens to us through 'obedience to the truth'. 'The truth' comes to us in the preaching of God's gospel. The next verse explains further: '*You have been born anew, not by a perishable seed but by an imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God*¹'. It is the message about Jesus, the story of what God has done through Him. Jesus has come not to be ministered unto but to minister to others. Jesus has laid down His life as a ransom. Jesus has risen from the dead, and is now king of the universe. The judgement of God upon the world will come when Jesus comes again. Meanwhile all men and women everywhere are commanded to change their minds about every aspect of life and submit to Jesus as Lord and Saviour. That is 'the message', 'the word'. It was promised in the Old

¹ 1:23

• Preached in the new

4. When you embrace this 'word' it does something to you

• A new kind of life is planted within

5. This new life within you is an imperishable 'seed'

• You will never be un-regenerated

6. Then we must grow and develop in this new life that is within us

Testament, preached by the first generation of apostles, and is embodied in our New Testament writings, and gets continually preached by the ministers of the churches.

4. **When you embrace this 'word' it does something to you.** It changes your entire life. You are 'purified' and enlivened. You become alive in a way that you have never been alive before with a love for God. It is what Peter calls being 'born anew'. You are given a new heart, a new spirit, a new direction to your life, a new appetite. You have new abilities, new attitudes. The life of God has taken up residence in your life. The character of the disciple is started off in your life. The beginnings of the Beatitudes are created in your life: a sense of need, concern about sin, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity, a peaceful spirit. The beginnings of that kind of life are planted within you. But only the beginnings! The new life has to be cultivated.

5. **This new life within you is an imperishable 'seed'.** 'You have been born anew, not by a perishable seed but by an imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God'¹. This 'seed' of new life will never leave you. You will never be un-regenerated.

Peter underlines this point. The 'seed' will never be lost. For,
*"all flesh is like grass
 and its glory like the flower of grass.
 The grass withers,
 and the flower falls,¹
 but the word of the Lord abides for ever."
 That word is the good news which was preached to you.'*²

6. What has to happen now is that **we grow and develop in this new life that is within us.** The word keeps on coming to you. The life is within you. You grow in grace. This is where the Bible comes in. The word of God outside of you (the Bible) activates the word of God inside of you (the new nature given in your new birth). Peter writes a letter – a tangible written document – our 1 Peter. It prompts growth in what is already within us: the new nature, the imperishable seed. It enables us to respond to Peter's call to love one another intensely, from the heart.

1:23

1:24

1:25



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