Hi,

I hope you had a great Labor Day. Today’s updates:

* My noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today on [my Facebook ministry page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

***Leviticus 11:44-45 (NRSV)***

**For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.**

***1 Peter 1:13-25 (NRSV)***

**Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”**

**If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.**

**Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For**

**“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”**

**That word is the good news that was announced to you.**

Friday, we learned that 1 Peter is a letter written by the apostle to Christians suffering in diverse ways for their allegiance to Jesus. Not surprisingly, Peter begins the letter by reminding these believers that their anchor is Jesus, he is their “living hope.” In Jesus, Peter writes, the suffering believers have “an inheritance that is imperishable . . . [and] are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:4-5). This beginning, focusing on the hope that is Jesus, makes sense.

But then, Peter takes a turn that isn’t nearly so obvious. He is writing to encourage and comfort suffering believers and, yet, turns immediately from the hope that is Jesus to a call for discipline and holy living. We wonder, how exactly is that comforting or encouraging? Why does Peter put hope and holiness together?

*Holy?*

In her commentary on 1 Peter, Pheme Perkins acknowledges many Christians’ discomfort when we begin talking about holiness:

“Many Christians find the injunction to ‘be holy as God is holy’ objectionable. After all, we are fragile human beings in need of God’s forgiveness, not saints. Matthew’s version [in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect’], which uses the word ‘perfection,’ is even more offensive to those who have grown up with a sense of being unable to fulfill the expectations of a demanding parent. When asked why they felt so angry that such statements were in the Bible, a group of adult parishioners quickly identified the tensions they could not resolve in their lives: (a) mothers who have to work, struggling to meet all the claims on their time; (b) fathers whose careers have been sidetracked in the economic downturn; (c) parents whose adult children are in various sorts of difficulty, and the like. Life is just too tough to have God requiring perfection, they insisted. No doubt 1 Peter’s audience could come up with a list of hardships to justify such a conclusion. The letter seeks to encourage them not to slide away from the new life they had adopted as Christians. In today’s terms, when the list of obligations and demands on our time seems impossible to manage, God is often the first to go.”

*The first to go*

I think that Dr. Perkins may help us to answer our question: What does holiness have to do with hope?

Growing in holiness is no less and no more than growing in Christlikeness, having the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5), walking as Jesus walked (1 John2:6) . . . simply loving God and loving neighbor every day and in every way.

Ask yourself this: How well would Jesus be weathering this pandemic? Pretty well, I’d bet. What I’d like to be is more like Jesus! Yet, the pressures and anxieties that threaten to drive God from our lives, to squeeze out our commitments to discipleship, can only be pushed aside by as Peter puts it, disciplining ourselves and setting all our hope on the grace of Jesus Christ. The world wants to force us into its ways of excess and panic, but we are to not to allow ourselves to be conformed to such ways. Instead, we need to make a newly energized commitment to putting God first and learning the ways of disciples.

Peter helps us to remember who we are, into whom God has made us. We have been “born anew . . . through the loving and enduring word of God” (v. 23). Indeed, this will be a theme on which Peter expands in our passage for next week: 1 Peter 2:1-10.

The truth is that we do live as “exiles” (v. 17) in this world. We know that we are to be the light of the world, the city on the hill (Matthew 5:14), yet we are more than a bit like strangers in a strange land. Becoming more like Jesus necessarily means that we will fit less well into a world that does not know him.

Peter, like the rest of the New Testament writers, wants us to grasp the larger vision of God’s work in this world and our place in his work. Disciplined and holy living are how we can live the glorious new life God has given us, how we can truly be evermore Christlike.

*In it together*

Of course, such living doesn’t come naturally to us. The ways of the world are seductive. The heightened pressures of these times can actually, as Perkins reminds, force us away from God. But Peter reminds us that in this, we are not alone. It is within a community of fellow believers that we strive to be holy as God is holy, knowing that the practice of our faith is a bulwark against despair and fear. Peter calls us to “genuine mutual love” in which we “love one another deeply from the heart” (v. 22) Tough times come and go. Our lives are a chaotic and sometimes bewildering combination of tragedies and joys, of enthusiasms and boredoms. But quoting from Isaiah, Peter writes: “The grass withers and flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (v. 24-25 from Isaiah 40:6-8).

And the word of God is a word of love. Before all else, God *is* love. When we are struggling through difficulties of any sort, preparing our minds for action (1:13) means living God’s future now, a future without fear or tragedy, a future in which we simply love God and love neighbor every day and in every way, for that is truly holy living.

*A bit more: The Holiness of God*

*Holy* is one of those Bible/church words that I suspect most of us use without ever being sure exactly what we mean. The truth is that even theologians struggle to convey the breadth and depth of its meaning.

In the simplest sense, holiness is what makes God, God – and makes us not God! Gerhard Vos writes, “He is holy in everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less in His righteousness and wrath.” Aulen writes, “Holiness is the foundation on which the whole conception of God rests. . . Every statement about God, whether in reference to his love, power, righteousness . . . ceases to be an affirmation about God when it is not projected against the background of his holiness.”

In other words, God’s righteousness is his *holy* righteousness. His mercy is *holy* mercy. God’s wrath is his *holy* wrath. But even this still doesn’t get us very close to what we mean by holy.

Allen Coppedge helps us to see that just as it takes many differing portraits to adequately portray God (say, Good Shepherd and Loving Father, to name two), so it takes several ideas to try to capture what we mean by God’s holiness. Coppedge suggests that holiness has six major components: separation, brilliance, righteousness, love, power, and goodness. I find this to be as good a working list as any. For example, the biblical portrait of God as creator tends to emphasize the separateness of God as a key aspect of his holiness, while the portrait of God as a shepherd emphasizes holiness as goodness.

Through it all, we need to remember that God is holy (Lev 11:45; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and the holiness of any creature, such as you or me, or any place, or any building is derived from God. Our own holiness (in which we are to grow!) has meaning only in relationship to God!

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott