

*November 24, 2019*

*Finding Trouble: Embracing Holiness*

*1 Peter 1:13-25; Romans 12:1-2*

For the past few months here at FPC, we have been Finding trouble. And I imagine if you are new or visiting this morning you may be wondering, “what in the world are we talking about?”

Well, the trouble we have been finding and challenging ourselves to step into is the best kind of trouble. That is, trouble that comes as we follow Christ and step out of our comfort zones into places, or with people where we find ourselves in over our heads.

Situations that stretch and deepen our faith to rely and trust on God for His help, for His strength, and For His leading.

We have talked about a variety of way to find this kind of trouble such as fighting against global slavery, praying dangerous prayers that move us out of our spiritual safety zone. We looked at giving generously and connecting with people that may differ from us in age or life circumstances. We talked about addiction, crossing barriers, and last week, we talked about facing death courageously.

And for many of us we know how easy it can be to just remain comfortable and not ruffle any feathers and to go with the flow. But we also know growth happens not by being comfortable or complacent but when we are stretched and when we feel in over our heads. When we are in place where we have to trust and rely on God and realize our need for Him.

As we wrap up this teaching series on *Finding Trouble*, I want to look at one more way to find trouble. Embracing holiness.

In our passage from 1 Peter, Peter is writing to encourage and remind Christians they are chosen by God and set apart for Him. Because of God’s grace and Christ’s sacrifice our identity and hope is to be found in our calling to live a holy unique life, to be Christ like and live different than the world around us.

And this is a truth for us today; that we are in the world but not of it and our lives should reflect this. From our thoughts to our words, to our actions. As followers of Jesus, we should be different then the world around us.

We are to be holy.

*As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct (or everything you do); for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15)*

We are to Be Holy- We are to Live a life energetic and blazing with holiness. - as Eugene Peterson puts it in the MSG.

But this command and this calling is where we can easily find ourselves in trouble. Both the good trouble that draws us closer to God and not so good trouble that pushes us further from God's truth. And it all comes down to this word and concept – "Holiness."

The trouble with holiness has to do with our understanding or misunderstanding of it. For some, holiness feels like something inaccessible or pretentiousness. It often gets associated with the self-righteous attitude of "holier than thou."

For others, holiness gets confused for legalism and becomes a list of do's and don'ts. Right? "Don't drink smoke or chew or date girls or guys that do."

Others of us fear that "becoming holy" will turn us into those type of Christians who become detached from the realities of life.

And yet holiness is such a central part of the Christian life and what God calls us to. Not just calls us to but commands us to be Holy as He is Holy.

So, what does it mean for us to be Holy? And how do we find good trouble in pursuit of holiness. Well first let's just talk about what holiness is.

Holiness comes from the Hebrew word that simply means "set apart." Something that is distinct, unique, set apart from the rest.

To help illustrate this I brought a friend with me this morning. This is Penny the Pig and it belongs to our youngest daughter Penny. And maybe you see just a stuffed animal. But for Penny, it is not just any stuffed animal.

Penny the pig, is above all the rest. Set apart from all her other stuffed animals, nothing compares or comes close to Penny the pig.

I was talking with Penny the other night about this and asking about the other stuffed animals and she said, Only penny can scare away the bad dreams. Only Penny the Pig is special. Penny the pig is "set apart."

Now I wouldn't go so far as to say Penny the Pig is Holy. Then again after 5 years of wear and tear she is becoming holey. But Penny the Pig is "set apart" to be used by Penny in unique way.

To set something apart for a particular or unique use, is what the Bible means when it talks about being holy.

And throughout the scriptures we come across this concept of holiness over and over again. Set apartness. Remember the sabbath and keep it holy. Israel, God's chosen and holy people. Set apart from others. Set apart in how they lived to be a light to others. Holy days, Holy practices, Holy things.

Holiness in the New Testament is often described in contrast to what it isn't. It is not being conformed to the sinful ways of the world. A life of holiness is in contrast to a life of impurity or immorality, Ephesians 4:24 reminds us Holiness is a life characterized by dying to the old self, and putting on the new, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

When holiness is used in reference to God it describes that there is no one, no thing that comes close to God. God is set apart and distinct and not like anything we can imagine. God is the standard of holiness

And God who is altogether Holy sent Jesus to die for our sins. He has chosen us to be in relationship with Him, to be His children and calls us to be Holy as He is Holy.

So to answer the question, what does it mean for us to be holy?

To be holy is to be separated from sin and set apart to God. To be holy is to say, "I am yours God, I belong to you. Your kingdom come your will be done." This is where we find ourselves in good trouble.

For one it is so counterculture, to do this right? Our society says we are to be independent, and to not be used by anyone.

Holiness says, "God, Use Me! I am set apart for you and You alone."

Holiness is an attitude of the heart. We invite and allow God and His Holy Spirit to lead us, to use us and to transform us to be more like Christ. Holiness is for our good and for His glory. It sets us free from the bondage of sin and draws us close to God!

And I want this. I want to be Holy. I want to be obedient and glorify God in my life.

But just like so many days with good intentions:

I get up early, have my coffee and quiet time. I pray and ask God to help me be more like Jesus. To be more patient. To be obedient. And then the kids get up. They complain about having cheerios again for breakfast.

"Let's be thankful for what we have" I say.

Then they start arguing with each other like kids and siblings do.

“Can’t you guys just get along.” My patients begin to decrease, and my anger and frustrations begin to rise.

I step on a Lego that was supposed to be cleaned up. The final straw!!!

The peaceful quiet time I spent with Jesus is now a distant and destroyed memory overrun by anger and resentment. And it’s only 7:30am. So much for being Holy...

Perhaps you have had similar days. Maybe different circumstances but the end result still the same, feeling defeated, failed in being holy, in loving well. In all these things.

So, if holiness is central to our calling and life as followers of Christ why is it that we struggle with it so much or why do we feel constantly defeated in our struggle with sin?

These are some of questions Jerry Bridges addresses in a wonderful classic book, *The pursuit of Holiness*. Which I highly recommend.

One problem he identifies in our struggle with holiness is that our attitude toward sin is often more self-centered than God-centered. That is, we focus on our own victory over sin rather than the truth that sin grieves the heart of God. We are more concerned with not failing in our struggle with sin rather than how it breaks the heart of God and causes more and more separation.

And when we are self-focused and driven by our own strength and power and victory over sin we will most always fail and be defeated.

IF you want to find trouble then take to heart the reality of our sin compared to God’s standard of holiness, we just can’t even come close.

And if that leaves you feeling overwhelmed, in over our heads due to the reality of our sin and pride. Then that’s good and that the trouble we need to find ourselves in because humanly speaking we can’t do it. Our sin will easily overtake and overrun us. We are dead in our sins and we need Him.

But we are not without hope. Through Jesus, God did what we couldn’t. Conquer sin and conquer death. And in God’s grace we need to be reminded that what God calls us to and requires of His children, He also provides and supplies.

God requires holiness, but His Spirit provides the power to turn away from sin. God calls us to holiness and God provides what we need to be holy.

We also need to be reminded that we are called to be holy and not become holy. Becoming holy makes it about something we do or attain. If I do enough good things and get enough gold stars, then I can become holy. Holiness is about what Jesus did and what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.

In light of what Jesus has done, we have already been made Holy. Our sins are forgiven, we have been made clean.

We read in Colossians 1:21-23

*21. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. 23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it.*

Another problem Bridges Identifies that keeps us stuck and struggling in pursuit of holiness is we do not take some sin seriously. We categorize sin into that which is unacceptable and that which may be tolerated a bit or that we minimize and allow ourselves to get away with

In the face of a Holy God. Sin is sin is sin. Granted the consequences and effects of sin may differ but all sin breaks the heart of God and is in contrast to His will for us. "Are we willing to name it and call sin "sin" not because it is big or little but because God commands us not to and all sin separates and breaks the heart of God.

Overtime and the more we rationalize and minimize sin the more we become defeated by it and find ourselves stuck and struggling in being holy.

For me, pursuing holiness is a one day at a time adventure and struggle. I wake up each day wanting to walk the path that glorifies God, but I stumble, I mess up. But thank God for His grace and love and His Spirit at work in my life.

Jesus knew it would be a daily struggle. That is why he says, "Take up your cross 'daily' and follow me." We have to intentionally and purposefully choose each day to die to self and live for Him.

To be holy and live holy is being set apart for God's work and His making new. He does not expect or require for us to do the work only He can do. HE does require obedience and faith. And He call us to holiness and to bear His image.

The call to holiness is the call to be image bearers of the character of God through our lives. Our whole lives. In this way, God takes everything we are: our characteristics, our interests, our dreams and desires, our hopes and redeems and makes new. He sets them apart for His glory. And our good.

So our call to holiness is not a quest for perfection. Rather, it is a journey of being perfected of being conformed to the image of Christ. It's a pursuit.

As Jeff Bridges points out holiness is a process. "As we begin to conform to the will of God in one area of life, He reveals to us our need in another area" It's a pursuit of holiness rather than attaining holiness.

And to pursue it we need to develop habits of holiness. I just want to highlight 3 habits of Holiness from our 1 Peter passage.

The first habit of holiness is : **We need to "set apart" our thoughts and mind to God. Think differently. Think Holy**

*Prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. (1 Peter 1:13)*

The Greek here is *girding up the loins of your mind. I love that. It's a picture of having our minds ready and alert.*

In the ancient mid-east men wore long, flowing robes. When they were preparing to run or to do physical labor, they would lift their robes and secure them with a belt or girdle around their waist. This allowed them the freedom of movement they needed to perform their work.

For us today, we might say "roll up sleeves of your mind." In other words, we are to take the initiative in preparing our minds for the life of holiness.

We need to be alert and have our thoughts be holy and pure. Fill our minds with the things of God. A common saying is "Garbage in, garbage out" In the same way we need to set apart our thoughts to God. Fill our minds with the things of God. That which is Holy and pure. Our minds must be holy if our behavior is to be holy.

Which is the second habit of Holiness. **Live as obedient children.**

*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. In everything you do. (1 Peter 1:1-15)*

Paul also urges us in Romans 12:2 with this same language.

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, (that is do not let your life be shaped and molded by the ways of the world) but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Which as you can see connects back to the first habit of holiness. Holy thinking moves us to Holy living.

Living as obedient children to God is submitting your will to God's will. It is full obedience to God. Often though we find ourselves saying, "I'll obey or follow God with everything except for."

We all tend to hold on to things in our lives that make holy or set apart unto ourselves and not God. We all have our Penny the Pigs. Those areas of our lives we struggle with giving up, giving over to God. Things we hold onto – control, bad habits, power, money, things and stuff, behaviors, and so on.

But according to God and His Word that it not obedience. There is no, "I will obey or give God everything, except for..." That is not the holiness God requires and calls us to.

Don't be discouraged though. To be holy doesn't mean to be perfect and have perfect obedience. Jesus is the only one who did that. But to be holy means to be completely submitted in the sense of saying, "I give control of my life to You God. I take my hands off my life. I give you the rights to my whole life." To be Holy is to say God, I am wholely Yours.

When we commit to this and pursue holiness and live as obedient children we experience joy!

Jesus tells us in John 15:

*"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, (when you live as obedient children) you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.*

Pursuing holiness and living in obedience is not a drag or a kill joy but as we discover it is the complete opposite. In obedience we are filled with joy. Joy that will overflow.

Overflows into our thoughts, our lives, our actions.

Overflows into a third habit of holiness. **Love one another:**

*Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth<sup>d</sup> so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply<sup>l</sup> from the heart (1 Peter 1:22)*

Love deeply means to love with all of our strength, mind, and soul. It is this Love that sets us apart.

*By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35)*

Love is the display of holiness. A set apart Holy Love. It is sincere. It is genuine and authentic. It reflects God and God's love for us.

We love because Christ loved us and we should love others as Christ loves us. This is a habit of holiness that moves us to living holy as God is Holy.

Love one another - sincerely, deeply, and purely - and people will know that you are different. They will know that you are followers of Christ.

God desires and intends for our lives to be a life of Joy. Those who walk in obedience and pursue holiness will experience this joy.

Are we willing and wanting to find trouble and embrace holiness? Let's pursue holiness. Let us be Holy as God is Holy and commit ourselves to be wholely His.