

# “Hope-Fully Devoted”

*Third in a series on Peter's First Letter*

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1.13-21

May 2, 2021

Because of all this, fasten your belts — the belts of your minds! Keep yourselves under control. Set your hope completely on the grace that Jesus the Messiah will bring you when he is revealed.

Like obedient children, do not be squashed into the shape of the desires you used to have when you were still in ignorance.

Rather, just as the One who called you is holy, so be holy yourselves, in every aspect of behaviour. It is written, you see, “Be holy, for I am holy.” If you call on the Father — the One who judges everyone impartially based on what they do — live with reverence throughout the time in which you are exiled here.

You know, after all, that you were emancipated from the useless practices inherited from your ancestors, and that this ransom came not through perishable things like gold or silver, but through the precious blood of the Messiah, like a lamb without spot or blemish.

He was destined for this from before the founding of the world, and was revealed at the end of the times 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 in God.

My translation, using N. T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament* and various commentaries.

*Guess mine is not the first heart broken  
My eyes are not the first to cry  
I'm not the first to know  
There's just no getting over you*

*I know I'm just a fool who's willing  
To sit around and wait for you  
But baby, can't you see there's nothing else for me to do?  
I'm hopelessly devoted to you*

Sung by Sandy in *Grease*<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “Hopelessly Devoted to You” was written by John Farrar and sung by Olivia Newton-John.

I was working on the piece we heard \_\_\_\_\_ read from Peter's letter, and this song ear-wormed into me. Its title "Hopelessly Devoted to You" —with an important tweak— meshes with something that's vital to being people of Jesus.

That's right . . . Holiness.  
(Okay, work with me on this.)

II

"*You shall be holy, for I am holy,*" says God. It's in the Scriptures of Israel. In his letter, Peter remembers it for us.<sup>2</sup>

*Holy, holy, holy* and the *Lord God Almighty* fit together perfectly. Holiness has to do with separateness. Holy God is completely good, so is separate from evil. Holy God is perfectly pure, so is separate from the profane. Holy God knows only truth, so is separate from falsehood. Holy God is light, so is separate from spiritual darkness. Holy God is altogether trustworthy and faithful, so is separate from our sin and rebellion. Anything unholy is away from God, because God is perfect holiness.

God is holy. To be God's person, you shall be holy. . . .

Huh. . . . Okay. . . . Really? You know you. I know me. Holy? Or, does it seem a stretch, and then still out of reach.

Do you want to be called "holy?" Do "holy" people have a good time? Are "holy" people pleasant to be with? That word has a off-putting feel to it.

So often it's not only been about steering clear of things and activities that are not good. It's been about staying away from certain people. Ever heard the old rhyming advice? "*Don't dance, don't drink, don't cuss, don't chew; and don't you go with girls that do.*"<sup>3</sup> ("Chewing" means chewing tobacco.) We've gotta keep those innocent boys safe! "Holiness" becomes a list of "dos and don'ts" that drive away the you-know-whos from good people.<sup>4</sup>

It happens other ways too. *Don't buy those products. Don't shop in that store. Un-friend people with the 'wrong' politics. Shame those with backward lifestyles.* Sure, we want to

---

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:2.

<sup>3</sup> The rhyme comes in many forms that include different vices. See the "Dictionary of Christianese" entry: [www.dictionaryofchristianese.com/don't-drink-smoke-or-chew-or-go-with-girls-who-do](http://www.dictionaryofchristianese.com/don't-drink-smoke-or-chew-or-go-with-girls-who-do)

<sup>4</sup> Dennis R. Edwards, 1 Peter, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2017), 66.

make political and cultural change. Still, there can be a sense of keeping ourselves pure. That's holiness thinking.

Holiness of all sorts can easily become legalistic, ungenerous, and oppressive.

### III

There is a deeper sense, however, to what "holiness" is all about. It's deeper than separation, or purity.

Devotion.<sup>5</sup> (This is when I started humming that song from *Grease*.)

Devotion is a "love word." When you love, you devote yourself to your beloved. You give yourself. You commit yourself. Acting well toward them, blessing them, lifting them, delighting them. These are your desires. That's devotion.

God is devoted. God's nature is devotion. Within the life of the Trinity who is God, each — Father, Son, Spirit — is fully devoted to the others. God creates, and God is devoted to God's creation. God is devoted. God is holy.

Something within God's creation becomes holy when it is devoted to God and God's purposes.

So a particular room becomes holy because it has been devoted, given, set apart for worshipping God. A chunk of bread, a glass of wine, a basin of tap water become holy when they are devoted to experiencing the presence and grace of God. They are no longer ordinary. We treat them with reverence and care because of their purpose. They are devoted. Holy.

You become holy when you are devoted, dedicated, set-aside for God and God's purposes. Yes, even you. Me too.

Think of a sanctuary. Its walls might be cracked, its windows dirty, its floor a mess, and

---

<sup>5</sup> Scot McKnight develops this theme in his book, *A Fellowship of Differents* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 2014), xxx. Dennis Edwards summarizes McKnight: "Scot McKnight challenges the popular notion that 'holiness' means 'separation,' or 'distinction.' He says, 'Holiness cannot be reduced to separation or difference. At a deeper level, holiness means 'devoted.'" God's devotion is to God (each person of the Trinity fully devoted to each other). It is this complete and holy devotion that leads to a separation or distinction that leads to a separation or distinction from that which is common or profane. God does not *possess* holiness; he *is* holy. Consequently, God acts in ways consistent with his character; his deeds are holy because he is holy." Edwards, 62.

its smell, funny. But when it's devoted to celebrating the Presence of Almighty God, its purpose elevates it.

Think of the sacrament. The bread can be stale, the table cheap, and the wine cheaper. But when they are devoted to conveying the Presence of Almighty God, that purpose elevates them.

Think of . . . you — cracked, dirty, a mess, stale, cheap, smell funny. But when you are devoted to the purposes of Almighty God, you are elevated. You become holy.

#### IV

Devotion still includes separation.

When you are devoted to someone, you need to separate from whatever distracts or erodes your devotion. I'm devoted to Barb, so I need to separate from whatever would harm her or our marriage. I'm devoted to our children, so I need to separate from, for instance, overwork that steals time together. Too often I've not done well at that. Overwork can become unholy.

I am devoted to God. So I need to separate from what robs my relationship with God, distracts my following of Jesus, keeps me from sharing in God's purposes. That's hard. We're surrounded by "spiritual thieves." They steal us from God.

In the Bible reading, Peter talks about the empty practices and ways of thinking they had inherited from their families and cultures. We all do. We need to be freed from so much we've always known and taken for granted. That is a separation.

Peter talks about the desires they used to have when they were "ignorant" about God. Desires are not bad. God makes us to love, and love desires the beloved.

Desires are like arrows. They direct our love. Desires can point us in a good direction — point us to love rightly. But only when our deepest desire, our greatest devotion, is for God.

It's like a compass. Only when God is our strongest pull — the most powerful magnetic attraction — can we travel in the direction we need to go. If other desires, other pulls, are stronger, the compass goes wonky, spins us off, and we are lost. Our devotion gets disoriented, unholy. We need to become reoriented toward loving devotion of God.

V

Devoted to God, we become devoted to what God is devoted to.

Jesus shows us. Remember, devotion is at the heart of holiness. Jesus gives us a different way of seeing holiness. Who is he devoted to? Everyone, certainly. But he was accused for being in the company of the wrong sort of people: the dancers, the drinkers, the cussers, and the chewers. These folks that good people, holy people, are supposed to steer clear of . . . Jesus rushed toward them. You and me too.

Guess what happens! His holiness becomes their holiness. They are graced to be brought into the company of God's holiness in human form, flesh and blood. Jesus' devotion to them makes them devoted. Holy. Jesus' devotion to you makes you devoted. Holy.

Listen to this. Jesus, perfect holiness, went to a place of deepest unholiness. What can be more unholy than a cross: torture, humiliation, degradation, and godforsaken destruction. Holiness went and died! In holiness thinking, a corpse is impurity and uncleanliness.

Perfect holiness . . . Jesus . . . became unholiness, to make you holy.

God makes you holy. That love-rooted devotion Who is God enwraps and enfolds you. God the Holy Spirit fills you. God devotes you.

That's your hope.

So back to Sandy's song, *Hopelessly Devoted*. It's not quite right. So make the change.

You are Hope-fully Devoted — full-of-hope devoted — to God. Hope-fully devoted for God. Hope-fully devoted by God.

Because Holy God is devoted to you, wholly. Amen!