



Be Who You are Meant to be: Holiness in the Petrine Epistles

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Abstract

This paper attempts to research whether his generous assessment of the Petrine corpus is correct. Intertextuality is chosen as the research methodology to achieve the goal. In particular, a look at Peter's own letters themselves is fruitful. Peter's writing style helps us to determine repeated emphases that are internally coherent. This paper's main theme is holiness, so the primary question is: "In calling his readers to be holy in all their conduct, what does Peter hope for the people of God in the world?" The answers revolve around the issue of identity: the "identity" of the One who elects, the present identity of the elected people, and the life that identifies them as elect in contrast to the identity of the non-elect. By admonishing his audience to consider these, Peter hopes that they will remain committed to their faith in the midst of persecution and challenges. Instead of despair and apostasy, Christians ought to remember their identity and calling as the chosen people of God. The relationship between the Christian and culture is the overarching theme in the Petrine epistles, making them relevant now as they were first penned.

Keywords: holiness, Peter, Jesus Christ, faith

INTRODUCTION

Peter's audience were facing several major threats. First, they were the object of Jewish wrath. Because of charges of blasphemy, Christians were being expelled from synagogue gatherings and barred from participating in other Jewish festivals. Second, they faced the brutal persecution of Rome. To ensure *pax Romana*, Christians

were treated as socio-political scourges that needed to be wiped out. The last days were truly imminent for them. Annang Asumang, Travis Williams, and Christopher Byrley agree that Christians are admonished to respond to unjust suffering with non-violent and non-retaliatory ways as God's holy people waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ.¹ Third, various confusing and

¹ Annang Asumang, "Resist Him' (1 Peter 5:9): Holiness and Non-Retaliatory Responses to Unjust Suffering as 'Holy War' in 1 Peter," *Conspectus* 11 (2011): 7-46; Travis B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and*

Contextualising Early Christian Suffering (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Christopher Byrley, "The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology," *Persecution and the 'Adversary' of 1 Peter 5:8-21*, no. 3 (2017): 77-98.

contrary teachings circulated throughout the empire, offering alternative truths and interpretations of reality that threatened the faith of Christians. Peter was particularly cautious of these, because these can cause Christians to fall from their “secure position” (2 Peter 3:17). Overall, Peter was anxious that any of these three factors will prompt Christians to apostatize.

Peter encouraged and admonished the Christians to stand firm in their faith. The possibility of apostasy is a major concern of the biblical writers, including Peter.² The threat to life is very real. His benediction in 1 Peter 5:9 reveals so much about his concern for the people: “Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of suffering.” He was certain that Christians are under attack, not by mere flesh or earthly power, but by the kingdom of darkness itself. The difficulties the Christians were facing require them to be very vigilant because Satan is always lurking around like “like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). One might be surprised to find that one of the antidotes Peter proposed against apostasy is for Christians to

continue to live in holiness. In a context where real threat to human life surrounded God’s people, Peter compelled his readers to stay true to their calling as God’s holy people.³ This article, thus, focuses on important holiness themes in his two New Testament missives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This essay follows a singular interpretative matrix: intertextuality. Although the historico-grammatical approach is employed in the Introduction section, and literary comparison is used specifically in interpreting the “partakers of the divine nature” theme of Peter’s thought, this article consistently remains committed to intertextuality as its primary hermeneutic. Intertextuality as a whole has a rich history and has background in both literature and philosophy, but this is outside the scope of this paper. There are also several types of intertextual approaches, but the one espoused here is *aleatory intertextuality*, “which allows a reader to read a text through the prism of all and any familiar texts.”⁴ However, it must be asserted that the textual comparison in this

² B. J. Oropeza, *Churches Under Siege of Persecution and Assimilation: The General Epistles and Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2012).

³Daniel G. Powers, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2010).

⁴T. R. Wright, “D. H. Lawrence and the Bible,” *Cambridge U. Press* (Cambridge, 2000).

article is mostly confined within the Petrine corpus. Although there is great value in looking at the whole New Testament, particularly the Pauline writings, and relating these to Peter's message, such a procedure broadens the scope of the article, which in turn threatens my desired depth of analysis when only the Petrine epistles are considered as the primary texts for consideration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Holiness Themes in Peter

After an initial survey of the Petrine corpus, major themes emerged that now comprise the paragraph headings of the article. Peter's message is consistent throughout: Christians ought to live holy lives now, in the interim, between Christ's ascension and second coming. There is no other alternative for those who are now called God's "chosen people," "royal priesthood," "holy nation, God's very own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). So what are the holiness themes in Peter? By looking at four specific sets of passages, we will see Peter's main thrusts.

Be Holy as God is Holy (1 Peter 1:14-15)

Similar to Pauline indicative-imperative argument, Peter's depiction of his reader's true identity as "obedient children" (1:14) who received "new birth" (1:3; 23: 2:2), "for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1:2) serve as the jumping board for his admonition to be holy (1:15-16).⁵ It must be noted that Peter's call to a holy life is preceded by an imperative: "do not conform to the *epithumiais* you had when you lived in ignorance" (1:14). There are two separate commands: "do not be conformed" [but] become holy (cf. Romans 12:2). In a rhetorical manner, Peter defines the call to be holy by specifying the opposite of what it means not to be one. To be holy requires a change in one's way of life from before, a life no longer determined by unrestrained impulses to sin. Since they have put off their old self and have put on Christ, they must not be controlled by their former impulses but must live in accordance with the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:22-24). This ethical aspect of the call to be holy is reinforced in the phrase "so be holy in all you do" in the latter part of verse 15.

Peter also clarifies that the basic inference for the call to holiness is the

⁵ Coleman A. Baker, "Peter and Paul in Acts and the Construction of Early Christian

Identity," *Currents in Biblical Research* 11, no. 3 (2013): 349–365.

holiness of the One who called them,⁶ not solely upon the current state of believers as chosen and sanctified (1:2), a point which is confirmed and furthered in verse 16. This is indicated by the Greek *kata*, “according” or “just” (NIV).⁷ Peter quotes Leviticus 19:2, a passage where various social and ethical laws were specified. Set within the larger context, the call is found within Leviticus 17-26, the Holiness Code, which comprises of commands not only to priests but to the whole nation of Israel. In alluding to the well-recognized Old Testament passages, Peter establishes the idea that the holiness into which the Christian is called in Christ is consistent with the holy character which God has revealed in his covenant with Israel.⁸ Although there is strong emphasis on the priestly-ceremonial aspects of sanctification, the overtones related to communal relationships cannot be mistaken.⁹ Holiness is grounded in God’s holiness, which his chosen people are called to reflect. Apart from God’s calling and knowing him in God in covenantal

relationship, holiness is not within the realm of human achievement.

Similarly, the life of Jesus and the believer’s life are inseparable in Peter’s thought. In fact, Jesus’ life and death are mentioned throughout the letter: pre-existence (1:11, 20), life of faithfulness (1:2), suffering and death (1:2, 11, 19; 2:4, 7, 21-25; 3:18-19; 4:1; 5:1), ascension (3:22), and his pending, final revelation (1:7, 11, 13; 5:1).¹⁰ In 1 Peter Jesus is not only the object of Christian faith; he is also the pattern of Christian destiny. As the true human dependent on the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ shows the human disposition and action that all humans should possess. Peter expresses the idea of *imitatio Christi* broadly in his presentation of humanity’s life in holiness, but he makes this point even clearer and narrower by alluding to Jesus’ suffering and how it is related to us. Joel Green offers a useful analysis, by presenting that Jesus’ suffering is (a) *exemplary*, providing a model for his followers of innocent suffering (2:19-20; 3:16-17; 4:1-2, 13-16); (b) *redemptive*,

⁶Dirk Van der Merwe, “Conceptualizing Holiness in the Gospel of John: The Mode and Objectives of Holiness,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2017): 1–9.

⁷Mark Dubis, *1 Peter: A Handbook in the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor U. Press, 2010).

⁸Peter R. Rodgers, *1 Peter: A Collaborative Commentary* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2017), 99; Brian Ruffner and Russell L Huizing, “A Trinitarian Leadership Model: Insights from the Apostle Peter,” *Journal of*

Applied Christian Leadership 10, no. 2 (2016): 37–51.

⁹Hendrik Ludolph Bosman, “Loving the Neighbor and the Resident Alien: Leviticus 19 as Ethical Redefinition of Holiness,” *Pretoria* 31 (2019): 71–90.

¹⁰Joel B. Green, *Living as Exiles: The Church in the Diaspora in 1 Peter*, ed. Kent Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).320

providing a model for his followers of effective suffering (2:12, 15; 3:1-2); and (c) *anticipatory*, providing a model for his followers how God will vindicate the righteous who suffer (2:20; 4:13-14; 5:1, 10).¹¹

A People Belonging to God

(1 Peter 2:4-12)

For Peter's readers, their identity as Christians was not only the source of great joy but ironically also the reason they "suffered grief in various kinds of trials" (1:6). 1 Peter 2:4-12 serves both as confirmation and encouragement to their present experiences as "strangers" (1:1; 2:11) and "aliens" (2:11; 3:16; 5:10, 14).¹² Peter affirms that their suffering and alienation are what they should expect being the true people of God (4:12). Peter calls Christ the *lithonzonta*, having in mind the fate of the "living stone" portrayed in Psalm 117:22 and Isaiah 28:16. That Peter also refers to believers as living stones in verse 5 suggests that they too share in the rejection that Jesus encountered (4:13). Paul J. Achtimeier argues that the rejection of Jesus referred to in the passage does not

only point to his past rejection, but his being continually rejected.¹³ The rejection, however, is mutual. The world rejects Christ and Christians reject the way of the world.¹⁴ Positively, on the other hand, Peter is reinforcing that they not only participate in Christ's humiliation, but also in his victory over suffering and death.¹⁵

Aside from calling the believers "living stones," first, Peter calls the Christian community a "spiritual house" (2:5). He may have the Temple in his mind, but not of a physical building where God's presence dwells, but a worshipping community "offering acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" (2:5). The new Temple is composed of *living* beings, who, unlike individual stones, lie down in a pile or scattered in the road. That the house is *pneumatikos*, Peter describes, is understandable, since even the Old Testament Temple is perceived as holy. Therefore, just as God's presence sanctified the temple of Jerusalem, so the Holy Spirit sanctifies the Christian community. Being a spiritual house also underscores the familial relationship between God and the believers as his dear children. The church is not merely a social club gathered around a

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³ Paul J. Achtimeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 154.

¹⁴ Klemes of Gradikion, "The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul Vis-à-Vis Pagan

Authorities," *Orthodox Tradition* 32, no. 3 (2015): 10-18.

¹⁵Jo Bailey Wells, *Belonging to God: 1 Peter and the New Testament Context* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

common interest; it is a community of beloved children gathered around the Father to exist as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ (Heb 2:11-12) in the unity of the Spirit.

Second, and re-echoing 1 Peter 1:1, Peter names the believers *genoseklekton*, “chosen people” (2:9; cf. Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23). The language is taken from Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20-21.¹⁶ The word *genos* implies a common origin, and can refer therefore to Abraham’s descendants, as in Isaiah 43. But Peter’s usage does not refer to a biological race, but a spiritual family (4:17) which has roots in the election of Christ himself (2:4).¹⁷ In line with this, Peter also calls them a “holy nation,” building upon the new covenant theme and suggesting that the true social context of his readers was not the first-century Greco-Roman culture but the new nation constituted by believers in Christ. Therefore, “if Peter’s readers find themselves alienated from their society and suffering a loss of status, Peter assures them that they have become part of a much grander and everlasting community.”¹⁸ Persecution will come because “we are

citizens of heaven” (Phil 3:20) with different mindset and action from the world. But this should not matter much, because we can draw strength from each other as “fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (Eph 2:19).

Third, the chosen people of God are also “a royal priesthood.” This identification has a strong missional connotation. Christians are the people of the new covenant in Christ who are ordained to be priests mediating God to the nations.¹⁹²⁰²¹ Compared to the priestly role of Aaron and his sons, who played limited priestly functions to the Israelites, Exodus 19:6 speaks about the priesthood of the whole members of the chosen nation in relation to the whole earth. One could actually refer back to the calling of Abraham, and the subsequent calling of his descendants in Genesis 12:1-3. Another important factor is that priests, like those of the Old Testament times, were to be sanctified and set apart from the people for their ministry. Wells asserts that “the mark of genuine priesthood is holiness,” that “priestliness is the symbol of human

¹⁶Dubis, *1 Peter: A Handbook in the Greek Text*.

¹⁷Jo Bailey Wells, *Belonging to God: 1 Peter and the New Testament Context*.

¹⁸Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2005), 149.

¹⁹Dean Flemming, “Won Over Without a Word: Holiness and the Church’s Missional Identity

in 1 Peter,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 49, no. 1 (n.d.): 50–66.

²⁰Byron Wheaton, “The Church as Heir of Israel’s Vocation as Royal Priesthood,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 2 (n.d.): 61–79.

²¹Paul Meyendorff, “The Vocation and Mission of the People of God,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 64 (2020): 209–227.

holiness.”²² Applied to the Israelites and now to the Christian community, this means serving God wherever they are and becoming a witness to their pagan neighbours (2:12), by declaring his praise (2:9) and living good lives (2:12).²³ If believers are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, then their way of life should be different from that of their neighbours. The message is to make real their faith.²⁴ Their theological identity should be manifested in their lives.²⁵ The re-occurrence of the word *epithumiais* in 2:11, from which Peter exhorted his readers to not conform to in 1:14, is interesting. The argument is simple: since they are aliens and strangers in their society, they are no longer to act in accordance with their society’s unredeemed customs (1:18) characterized by ignorance of God and misguided desires (1:14).²⁶ Further, as Achtimeier argues, “the phrase aliens and exiles is thus not only a description of their present reality, it is also a description of a status they are to maintain, lest by

abandoning their status and reverting to their former values and custom, they estrange themselves from God.”²⁷

Partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Peter 1:3-4)

One breath-taking passage is 2 Peter 1:4, where Peter tells that believers “may participate in the divine nature.” Although the phrase Peter used is unique, it is not exclusive in the New Testament. Paul wrote about believers’ “adoptions as sons” that they might be “conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Rom 8:23, 29). Even the Pauline expression “in Christ” carries the overtones of this partaking (Rom 6:1-14; Eph 1:20; 2:6).^{28,29} Hebrews 3:14 also called believers “sharers of Christ.”

The doctrine of *theosis* or deification is not very much emphasized or even given proper weight in most Western theology. Eastern Orthodoxy, on the other hand, considers it as its primary religious ideal.³⁰ Goran Medved argues that the doctrine is

²² Jo Bailey Wells, *Belonging to God: 1 Peter and the New Testament Context*.

²³ Valdir R. Steuernagel, “An Exiled Community as a Missionary Community: A Study Based on 1 Peter 2:9, 10,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40, no. 3 (n.d.): 96–204.

²⁴ Jo Bailey Wells, *Belonging to God: 1 Peter and the New Testament Context*.

²⁵ Green, *Living as Exiles: The Church in the Diaspora in 1 Peter*.

²⁶ Achtimeier, *1 Peter*, 176 See also Wells, *Belonging to God*, 223-4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1995).

²⁹ John M. Duncan, “Peter, Paul, and the Progymnasmata: Traces of the Preliminary Exercises in the Mission Speeches of Acts,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 41, no. 4 (2014): 349-365.

³⁰ Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (trans. Liadain Sherrard; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984).

found throughout Christian history.³¹ Objections to it are principally grounded upon the impossibility of sharing in His substance, which is proper. However, Orthodox theologians also do not claim such a divinization as becoming a deity. To say that we are God, or that we can become God, would be a misinterpretation of Peter's message.³² Rather, Orthodox theologians view divinisation as a process achieved "through a step-by-step spiritualization of our human nature,"³³ the movement from divine image to his likeness. David M. Robinson expresses in another way, but referring to same ideal in Wesleyan theology, this basically means to love.³⁴ This position is traditionally attributed to the second century Irenaeus, who differentiated *tselem* and *demut* in his interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27. For him, *tselem* (image) is something we already possess, but *demut* (likeness) is something that we grow into in our Christian lives. In other words, *tselem* refers to those qualities and ontological structures that constitute

humanness, while *demut* refers to the potentiality that is yet to be achieved.³⁵³⁶

The concept of participation in the divine nature in Peter's epistle is generally accepted by scholars as a mark of the relapse of Christianity into Hellenistic dualism, especially that it is juxtaposed with the idea of escape from the corruption in the world.³⁷ In as early as Plato's *Phaedrus*, the concept of "divine [and tranquil] nature" is already found.³⁸ The debate concerning *apatheia* in Epictetus which carries on until today is very much related to the *ipethumiai* mentioned in 1:4. As a Stoic philosopher, Epictetus' goal is to be free from evil desires and therefore achieve a desire-less existence, such as that of God's *apatheia*. On the other hand, taking the Greek influences into consideration, plus the eschatological overtone of the missive (1:11, 16; 3:4, 9-14), the divine "nature" can be immortality or incorruptibility, especially when superimposed upon what sharers of the divine nature are to escape from:

³¹ Goran Medved, "Theosis (Deification) as a Biblical and Historical Doctrine," *Kairos - Evangelical Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2019): 7-38.

³² Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*.

³³"Partakers of Divine Nature." in Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Daniel B. Clenendin (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

³⁴ David M. Robinson, "Partakers of the Divine Nature: Ripley's Discourses and the Transcendental Annus Mirabilis," *Religions* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1-12.

³⁵Dick O Eugenio, "Humanization of Humanity: Christ-Likeness and the Renewal of the Imago Dei," *Mediator* 9 (April 2013): 22-45.

³⁶ Kory Eastvold, "The Image of God in Old Testament Theology," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 21 (n.d.): 239-251.

³⁷ Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, 51; Powers thinks otherwise, in *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, 182.

³⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Five Works of Plato*, ed. A. D. Lindsay (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1927).

corruption. The participation is then viewed as eschatological.³⁹ Epictetus, for example, believed that the attainment of *apatheia* could not possibly be attained in this life. Plato's dream of human immortality only happens at the time of physical death, or the moment of the soul's escape from its prison. The promise of incorruptibility or immortality is significant to the readers because they are assured that they will escape the destruction [by fire] that is soon coming (3:7, 10, 12).

Holy and Godly Lives Now
(2 Peter 3:9-14; 17-18)

The problem is that to interpret the partaking of the divine nature only in eschatological terms misses many important elements in Peter's letter. Even Plato would agree with this. The context in *Phaedrus* where scholars quote his reference to the divine nature has high ethical notes. When Phaedrus asked Socrates if he heard about the myth of Huntress in Boreas, Socrates responded that he had no time for such myths. Rather, he should spend his time, "to the study not of fables, but of my own self, that I may see whether I am really a more complicated and a more furious monster than Typhon, or a

creature of a gentler and a simpler sort, the born *heir of a divine and tranquil nature.*"⁴⁰ Plato thought that a person either possesses a beastly character or a divine and godly gentleness. Participating then in the nature of God implies possessing His ethical nature *in this life*, which is "godliness" (1:3). This parallels the call in 1 Peter 1:14-16: "be holy, because God is holy." The temporal element must not be overlooked. Partaking of God's holy character is not a futuristic possibility in a dimension outside of contemporary history. The command to be holy is for the here and now. The call is transformation and conformation to the holiness of God.⁴¹

The negative concomitant of partaking the divine nature is "escape [from] the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (1:4). As in 1 Peter 1:14; 2:11; 4:2; 4:3; 2 Peter 2:10; 2:18; and 3:3, *epithumiais* is treated as intrinsically evil. Greek philosophical thought cannot be disguised in the passages. Unlike the Greeks, however, Peter believes that the corruption in the world is in the *epithumiais*, not just because the world is material. "How does desire bring the corruption of the world?", one may ask. The answer is that unbounded desires cause corruption, destruction, and decay both to

³⁹ Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, 52.

⁴⁰Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Five Works of Plato*.

⁴¹ Clifford A. Barbarick, "You Shall Be Holy, For I Am Holy: Theosis in 1 Peter," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 9, no. 2 (2015): 292.

the corruptible body of the agent and to the world as well. The “escape” terminology here resonates with the call to non-conformity to the *epithumiais* in 1 Peter 1:14. The escapist proposal, thus, is not geographical or spatial; it is moral-ethical. Christians are not called to leave the world in order to pursue holiness; we are called to live holiness precisely in the world for all to see. Wyndy Corbin Reuschling argues that admonitions to morality in Peter’s writings are related to being “partakers of the divine nature.”⁴²

The virtues Peter enumerates in 1:5-7 thus makes sense. Since they are partakers of the divine nature who are escaping and will escape corruption, they are to possess godly virtues which reflect the nature of God, namely: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (1:5-7; see also 1 Peter 3:8; Rom 5:3-5; Galatians 5:22-23; and James 1:3-4 for other list of virtues in the New Testament). The relationship between partaking of the divine nature and virtues is that the latter emerges from the former. “Participating in the divine nature is not the goal of the Christian life,” Powers adds, “it is the starting point.”⁴³ Since they are called and elect (2:10), and are therefore

the people of God, this is “the kind of people they ought to be” (3:11). The indicative-imperative motif rings here again. Peter says that they are to “make every effort” to add these virtues to their faith (1:5). Paul B. Decock’s inclusion of immortality as divine gift makes the article problematic, but his article still offers interesting insights about the gift and expectation of holy life from Christians.⁴⁴

Peter is not espousing works righteousness; he is asserting our human responsibility. We cannot let it all be up to God. God’s empowerment and enablement must be met by our response. In fact, the command to “make every effort” (1:5) is predicated in the previous verses: “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature” (1:3-4). Our efforts are based on the sufficiency of His provisions. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of humanity are not incompatible. In addition, the growth must happen to all, together, as the whole body. Dennis Edwards is current: “The goal of

⁴² Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, “The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3-11: The Theological and Moral Significance of Theosis,” *Journal of Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 2 (2014): 275–286.

⁴³ Powers, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*.

⁴⁴ Paul B Decock, “Toward Maturity in 1 Peter: Freedom, Holiness, Immortality,” *In die Skriflig* 50, no. 2 (2016): 1–8.

every Christian's life here on earth is to fully mature, becoming the person God intends for each of us to be; simultaneously all believers together are growing into the mature fellowship we ought to be."⁴⁵

The argument is strengthened by the fact that Peter is addressing believers who are in conflict with immoral people "who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature" (2:10). One of the purposes, then, of Peter's vivid and strong descriptions of these "ungodly" and "unrighteous" men (2:4-9) is to prevent believers from becoming like them who are "false prophets" (2:1-3), "ungodly" (2:4-9, 13; 3:7), "slanders of celestial beings" (2:10-11), with "blots and blemishes" (2:13), "full of adultery" who "never stop sinning" (2:14), "seducers and enticers of the unstable" (2:14, 18), "experts in greed" (2:14), who "left the way and wandered off" (2:15-16), "dogs who eat their own vomit" (2:20), "scoffers" of truth (3:3,5), "ignorant and unstable" (3:16), and "lawless men" (3:17). These are the kinds of people that Peter warns his readers to keep away from (3:17). This does not mean that Gentiles, for Peter, are essentially evil and thus are only objects of God's wrath. Peter affirms that Gentiles and sinners may

be saved, and the gospel must also be preached to them.⁴⁶

Peter is alarmed that these people would entice them to fall from their secure position (3:17). The warning he gives in 2:21 is genuine: "Do not fall away!" lest they lose the promise that is already theirs. It seems that their knowledge of who they are and their knowledge of the truth play a big part in their salvation.⁴⁷ Peter tells them that "they know... and are firmly established in the truth" (1:12; 3:17). Therefore, they should "not forget" (3:8), and "bear in mind" (3:15) these truths.

Moreover, in the same manner of argument Peter employed in 1:5-7, the future hope that they have is also the basis of his call "to live holy and godly lives" in 3:11. Peter's intention is obvious to the readers: they should live now the lifestyle of the promised age, a lifestyle that marks one out as a person belonging to the coming kingdom. Holiness is how they make their calling and election sure, as is reiterated in 3:14. In the Old Testament, only pure and spotless animals are appropriate for sacrifice (cf. examples, Ex 29:1; 29:38; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1). In Peter's usage then, as in 3:11, he wants his readers to be prepared and be found worthy in facing Christ, a kind

⁴⁵ Dennis Edwards, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017), 79.

⁴⁶ Jim R. Sibley, "Israel and the Gospel of Peter, Paul, and Abraham," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173 (2016): 18-31.

⁴⁷ Ruth Anne Reese, *Holiness and Ecclesiology in Jude and 2 Peter*, ed. Kent Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

of admonition that is frequent in the New Testament (Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 1:10; Col 1:22).⁴⁸ Earlier, Peter describes his opponents having “blots and blemishes” (2:13) as a description of their sinful character, for which reason they are unfit to meet Christ when he comes again (cf. Hebrews 12:14). These are the marks that Christians must never possess.

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions can be made from this article. First, holiness in humanity is always derived from He who alone is Holy. Our holiness is only by virtue of His gracious election and our participation in his holy family, the people of God. Second, we partake of His nature: passively, through having the *imago Dei*, and actively, by *imitatio Dei* and freedom from the *epithumais*. Third, we belong to a Holy God and to a holy community. Theologically and practically, our lives are therefore no longer guided and marked by our *former* value systems, but are now shaped by our belongingness to the holy nation and royal priesthood. Fourth, since our identity is already changed, and we are called to live such an identity. Fifth, the goal of holy and godly living is primarily not for personal

salvation, but for God’s glorification, community edification, and world mission. Peter embodied these in his life, and he admonishes his readers that in the same way he was transformed by Christ and is able to cling to his faith in him, they too can experience the same.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ Markus Bockmuehl, “The Transformation of Simon Peter,” *Crux* 48, no. 3 (n.d.): 13–22.

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