

Christ Died to Make Us Holy And Why Some Preachers Avoid It

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the vital connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ and the sin-killing work of Christians, urging pastors to preach for holiness and godliness. It addresses the lack of emphasis on radical Christ-likeness in modern gospel-centered preaching, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of the gospel's impact on daily living. The message stresses the effective connection between justification by faith and progressive sanctification, urging believers to pursue holiness empowered by God's grace.

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:15, 1 Peter 1:18, 1 Peter 2:24, Ephesians 2:10, Isaiah 53:5

Topics: "Holiness", "Christ-likeness"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, my prayer is that this message would prove to be in the lives of these friends a fulfillment, or at least part of a fulfillment, of David Platt's message in that you would cause Christians, millions of Christians, to so think and so feel and so act that they would bring all of their lives into harmony with the enjoyment and the exaltation of your glory among all the nations. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

I want to begin by stating my aim in six different ways. If one of them doesn't click, maybe the others will. They all mean the same thing.

First, my aim is that those of you who preach and teach the word of God would do so in a way that makes clear the effective connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ and the sin-killing work of the Christian. Second, that you would make clear the effective connection between cancelled sin and conquered sin. Third, that you would make clear the effective connection between the horrors of Christ's suffering and the holiness of Christ's people.

Fourth, that you would make clear the release of people from guilt and how it effectively connects with the securing of their lives of righteousness. Fifth, that you would make clear the effective connection between justification by his blood and progressive sanctification by that same blood. And sixth, finally, that you would make clear the effective connection between the tearing off of the flesh of Christ in crucifixion and the tearing out of your eye in the battle against lust.

Now I choose to pursue this aim, stated those six ways, because it seems to me that in the last 40 years or so of the gospel-centered emphasis in America, there has not been a biblically proportionate emphasis on or execution of preaching for holiness of life and godliness and righteousness and radical counter-cultural Christ-likeness. Instead, it seems to me that to be gospel-centered has filtered down to the pew to mean something like this. Preach the gospel to yourself every day, which is heard to mean something like rehearse the good news every day to yourself that you are loved, you are accepted, you are forgiven, no condemnation, no judgment, no hell, no judgment, acquitted, vindicated, clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Now here's the problem with that emphasis. Suppose that you have been condemned to be hanged tomorrow morning by the neck until dead, and in the morning when they come to your cell, they let you go instead of taking you to the gallows, and they tell you that there's been a substitute. That would be, up till this point in your life, the happiest day of your life.

You would dance for joy, and you would be full of tearful thanksgiving for the substitute. It would be absolutely overwhelming, all-embracing joy. And perhaps a year later, you would experience it still.

It would be so vivid. It would be so vivid, intense happiness, thankfulness. Perhaps five years, you wake up every morning, and you go to bed every night, and you say, I'm not condemned.

I'm not going to be hanged. I have a reprieve, no condemnation, no execution, no gallows. I'm not going to be hanged.

I'm not going to be hanged. 30 years later, 40 years later, you see the problem, I hope. There are vast reaches of the human heart, depths, heights, breaths that can never be filled and never be satisfied with that truncated gospel.

We must have more than the message of justification. I told Kevin, this is his message 2.0, so don't hear anything I say diminishing the glory of that first message or the glory of justification, unless you think it's everything. We must have a message that's more than no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, no hell, no guilt.

Justification by faith is a means to something more and greater. Propitiation of the wrath of God is a means to something more and greater. Forgiveness of sins is a means to something more and greater.

Escape from hell is a means to something more and greater. Redemption from slavery is a means to something more and greater. Ultimately, finally, the more and the greater is God, God himself.

1 Peter 3.18, Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, to see God, to know God, to have God as your companion, to enjoy God, to be irradiated by the glory of God, to finally in some suitable measure reflect God, to become at last a fitting echo of the excellency of God. So brothers and sisters, it is a million times greater than justification to have God, just as walking into heaven is a million times greater than walking out of hell, because God is there. There's no comparing the

pleasure of walking out of prison with the pleasure of walking into the arms of your wife after 30 years.

Now, between the glories of justification and forgiveness that launch us by the blood of Christ and the final glorification at the end, with his perfected vision of God and sinless enjoyment of his fellowship, between that first beginning and the final goal of our redeemed existence, there's this thing called the Christian life, a life of faith and hope and love and truth and righteousness and purity and holiness and courage and counter-cultural conformity to Jesus over against a life of selfishness and pride and greed and lust and rebellion and a hundred forms of worldliness. There is a kind of preaching that focuses on holiness of life, but in a way that fails to make plain the effective connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ and the sin-killing work of the Christian. It fails to make plain the relationship between Christ's canceling of sin and our conquering sin.

It fails to make that connection, and the result is that it loads Christians with burdens they cannot bear, and people become despairing or they become self-righteous achievers. That's one way to do it, and there's a way to preach that is so allergic to biblical imperatives, so allergic to biblical commands and warnings that it never preaches with the sense of urgency about the demands of holiness. It never says you gotta tear out your eye for it's better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell, congregation, Christians.

It never says that. It never says pursue the holiness without which you will not see the Lord, beloved. It never says strive to enter through the narrow door, for many I tell you are going to seek it and they won't find it, congregation.

They don't preach like that. They're just allergic to that kind of imperative and warning and firmness of command. It only preaches grace that pardons, not grace that empowers.

It only preaches grace to forgive our sin, not grace to kill our sin. Now, my aim in this message is to commend another way between those mistakes of preaching and teaching that doesn't commit either of those errors. I want to show the effective connection, and I want to help you show your people the effective connection, yes, go beyond show, by grace through preaching to establish, establish in your people the effective connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ and the sin-killing work of your people, between canceled sin and conquered sin, between the horrors of Christ's suffering and the holiness of living for him.

Now, of all the texts, and praise God there are many, of all the texts that I could choose to preach from to make this point, I'm not going to preach from Romans 8.4. I'm not going to preach from Colossians 1.22. I'm not going to preach from Hebrews 10.10. I hope you study those to buttress what I'm about to do. I'm going to preach from 1 Peter chapter 1 and chapter 2, because they are amazing in this regard. So, let's start with 1 Peter 1. You will need, I mean, if you think preaching is what I think it is, you will need to have your Bible open, either on your phone or your, or your print edition, because I have particular things I want you to see.

And if you don't see them for yourself, you will be weaker. You will be. If you take my word for it, you will be weaker.

Verse 14, chapter 1, as obedient children do not be conformed to the former ignorance. Verse 15, chapter 1, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy.

So, four observations about those verses so far. We haven't gotten to the key yet, but got to see this first. Number one, holiness is commanded.

Be holy. Geneseter, imperative, become holy, people. You say that to your people? Become holy.

Number two, second observation, God's holiness is the ground of our holiness. Verse 16, be holy for I am holy. Third observation, God's holiness means that he is so separate from all that is ordinary.

Indeed, all that is created, that he is in a class by himself, one of a kind, like the rarest of diamonds. And we call this separateness transcendence. And the Bible adds the moral dimension, and we call his holiness transcendent purity, or transcendent goodness.

And God's holiness means that he is separate, therefore, from all that is finite, all that is defiled, transcendent purity. And since his purity is not measured by anything outside himself, he is the measure of all purity, and all goodness, and all worth. For God to be actively holy, actively holy, therefore, is to have all of his attitudes, and all of his words, and all of his actions to be in harmony with his infinite transcendent purity and worth.

That's God's holiness. So, fourth observation, our holiness derives from his. Namely, all of our attitudes, all of our words, all of our actions should be in harmony with his infinite worth.

Now, 1 Peter 1 14 fills this out in some particulars. Verse 14, chapter one, as obedient children do not be conformed to the passions. Now, the word passions there is simply desires.

There's no different Greek word for desire and passion. It's just epithumia, sometimes good desire, sometimes bad desire. It's just desire.

So, the human heart is a desire factory, and right now he's saying there are desires that accord with your former ignorance. So, don't be conformed to those. Unholy desires, he says, flow from ignorance.

Amazing. Of what? Of God. The worth of God.

The greatness of God. The all-satisfying beauty of God. The holiness of God.

If you're oblivious of the greatness, and worth, and beauty, and holiness of God, your desires are going to be wrong. They won't be holy. So, human holiness is the transformation of knowledge, replacing that ignorance, and the transformation of desires that once accorded with that old ignorance.

So, human holiness is to know the true greatness, and beauty, and worth of God, and have desires that conform or in harmony with that knowledge. Attitudes, words, actions that follow from those desires. Now, we're at the key verse.

Verse 17 and 18. Here comes the connection between the horrors of Christ's suffering and the holiness of God's people. Let's read it.

And if you call on Him as Father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear. Now, that's an imperative. Just like be holy.

In fact, it means be holy. Right? These are not separate commands. Like, be holy for God is holy, and conduct yourselves in godly fear are not separate.

They're the same. He's repeating Himself. And they're commands.

Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. Now, let's notice two things very carefully. Two ways that Peter makes the connection between the blood ransom, blood ransom, and holy conduct.

He connects them in two ways. Number one, in verse 18, he says, you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers. He does not say you were ransomed from guilt.

He does not say you were ransomed from condemnation. He does not say you were ransomed from Satan. He does not say you were ransomed from hell.

He said you were ransomed from ways. And the word ways there is anastrophe, the same as the word conduct. Live in holy conduct because He bought it.

He bought it. He bought it with blood. Be holy in all your conduct.

And the parallel, verse 18, you were ransomed from futile conduct by the precious blood of Christ, which means that when Christ died, He shed His infinitely valuable blood to purchase by a ransom payment our transfer from futile conduct to holy conduct. He bought that. He paid for that.

Not with perishable things, like silver and gold, the most valuable things we can get a hold of, but with the most precious thing in the world, the blood of the Son of God. That's what He paid for our holiness in this life. That's what He paid for attitudes, and He paid for words, and He paid for actions in harmony with the infinite worth of God.

And the purchase was effective. Now you may remember when I gave you the six statements of the aim of this message, in every one of them I had this phrase, effective connection. Here we're at the explanation of that.

Effective connection between blood shed by Jesus and holiness performed in His people. It's an effective purchase. I want you to preach a kind of preaching, teach a kind of teaching that makes plain to people that effective connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ and the sin-killing work of the Christian.

Christ's ransom payment was not a failure. It wasn't. He did not shed His blood in vain when He purchased your holiness.

He obtained what He paid for. The holy conduct of God's people is sure, which is why the Bible repeatedly makes plain, if you don't have this holiness, you have no warrant to think you're among the redeemed or the ransomed. You don't.

This is serious, right? Perhaps you can feel something of the weight I feel as I come to this message and I look out across the landscape of preaching in America. I said there are two ways that He connected the blood ransom with our holiness. So the first way has been that by His blood, He effectively ransomed His people from futile conduct into holy conduct.

He effectively obtained the holiness of His people. Here's the second connection, namely the logic between verses 17 and 18, the logical connection. In the second half of verse 17, second half of verse 17,

He gives a command.

Are you with me? Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. That is, be holy for God is holy. Then comes a participle, and it's a ground.

It's an adverbial participle functioning as a ground. Knowing, conduct yourselves in fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways. So the logic of the two verses is imperative.

Conduct yourselves in holiness because you know you were ransomed from unholiness. You were ransomed from futile ways into holy ways, and that's the preaching I'm pleading for. That's the connection I'm pleading for.

You say that, you make that plain, you take week after week after week to open that logic to people. Peter cries out to his congregation, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, he cries out with a clear imperative like you do to your people. Conduct yourselves in godly fear this week.

Be holy because God is holy. Bend your whole life into harmony with the infinite worth of God in Christ. Make holiness complete in the fear of the Lord.

Second Corinthians 7.1. And then he gives you a ground. He heralds the command and he gives the ground because your freedom from the old futile ways and your new way of holy living has been bought infallibly by the most precious reality in creation, the blood of Jesus. Now it's not enough, it's not enough to say that God paid the ransom for his wife, so God's wife is kidnapped.

She's across the plaza and he's gonna get her for himself and he pays an infinite price and it's not as though she steps out free from her captors and goes and shacks up with another man. Nah. That didn't happen at the cross.

It doesn't happen. He doesn't fail in his purchases. He's not impotent.

His blood is not ineffective. It was not in vain. The ransom bought a new life for his people, a new holiness for his people.

They will walk in the way he bought. If they don't, they have no warrant to believe they're his. You create that kind of urgency for your people? You make them uncomfortable like that? Whoa, wait a minute.

What about Kevin's message? What about your sermon last week, Piper, on justification and forgiveness and acceptance and love and tenderness and patience? Oh, I hope you love the whole Bible. The lines are drawn by what attitude people have to the whole Bible. Oh, you recall Ephesians 2.10? For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The new way of holy living for the redeemed has been prepared. And part of that preparation is he bought it. He bought it at the cost of the most infinite valuable payment.

He bought the works for which you were created again. They will happen. He's not a failure.

Now, let's go to chapter two. Let me underline for you the logic that we've seen by just pointing it out in another place, and then I'm going to give you five reasons pastors do not preach this way. As I assess it.

First Peter chapter 2 verses 20 to 24. Let's start in the middle of verse 20. Peter's talking to slaves, but what he says applies to all Christians.

So here we are now in the middle of verse 20, chapter 2. If when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, that means endure in faith, endure in love, endure in holiness of life. This is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called.

Now pause there and let that sink in in relation to be holy for I'm holy and conduct yourselves in faith at the time of your exile, because this is another way of saying God's will for your life is to return good for evil, right? This is the call on your life because Christ suffered for you. So God's call on your life to be holy, humble, patient, radically counter-cultural, returning good for evil is based on the suffering of Christ for you. And that's what we saw in chapter 1. Now somebody's going to say, and they should, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute.

You are taking for you, to mean in your place. Now I don't think that's what it means here in verse 21, because the defining participle that follows is this, Christ suffered for you, comma, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. So Piper, why do you take the word suffered for you to mean suffer in your place when the defining participle is suffer for you in the sense that he gave you an example? Why do you do that? That's a good question. And my answer is, I take it that way because that's where Peter goes with it.

That's where he goes with it. Verse 24, the death of Jesus for you in verse 21 is not simply, it is true, it's not simply to give you an example for how to return good for evil, but even more fundamentally, he bore your sins. That's what for you means also.

Verse 24, he himself bore our sins. That's substitution. He bore our sins in his body on the tree.

So that's the ground of the call on your life to be holy, that is return good for evil. So there's an imperative in providing, this is your call, Christian. This is your call, don't return evil for evil.

That's your call from heaven because he bore your sins. And if you only think there in terms of example, you're missing something. And then to make it crystal clear that we're on the right track, he continues in that sentence in verse 24 with a purpose clause to show that the substitution sin bearing is designed to produce sin killing.

And that we might, with me in verse 24, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. So there was this sin bearing work of Christ, and now there's this sin killing work of the Christian as they die to sin and live to righteousness. There's the connection.

Just like we saw in chapter 1 verses 17 and 18, be holy because God is holy, because he ransomed you with an infinite shedding of blood. And now here the same, the same logic, the sin bearing work of Christ in verse 24 becomes the ground for the sin killing work of the Christian. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree in order that because he did that, we would be holy, righteous, pure, radically different than we were before.

So my message is preach this, preach the pursuit of holiness this way. Preach the effective connection between the sin bearing work of Christ and the sin killing work of the Christian. Preach the effective

connection between Christ's canceling of sin and our conquering sin.

Preach the effective connection between the horrors of Christ's suffering and the holiness of Christ's people. Preach the effective connection between the tearing off of the flesh of Jesus on the cross and the gouging out, the tearing out of your eye in the battle against lust or greed or whatever the battle is in unholiness in your life. Now I'm going to close by addressing five possible reasons why pastors may not preach with the kind of blood bought urgency for the holiness of their people that they should.

And I'd be very happy if you're not in any of these five categories, and I would be just as happy if you escaped because of hearing these categories. Number one, perhaps some pastors have simply not seen the connection between the sin bearing work of Christ and the sin killing work of the Christian. It was just a blind spot.

They missed it. No barbarians showed you how to read the Bible by looking for in order that's and because and therefores and participles and you miss glories because you miss grammar. So if that's your case, then perhaps you're fixed right now or you've been on your Twitter, which a lot of you have been.

Number two, perhaps some are reluctant to press the conscience of their people with biblical demands for holiness because they fear the rebuke of Jesus to the lawyers when he said, whoa, to you lawyers, you load people with burdens hard to bear and you yourselves do not touch those burdens with one of your fingers. And you don't want to hear that rebuke from Jesus and neither do I. But to such pastors, I would say, I would plead that you not try to address a real biblical danger in an unbiblical way. The point of this message is that the Christian fight for holiness is connected to the forgiveness of sins in a gloriously unique gospel way.

No other religion in the world comes close to what I'm talking about in the connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ, finished, perfect, effective, and the warfare that you have against sin. Nobody even comes close to teaching what the New Testament teaches here. One way to say it would be the only sin that you can conquer in life is a forgiven sin.

I'd love to preach another one-hour message on why that is true, but you can — it's in this message, you just have to think it through. The only sin you can successfully strive against without incurring the judgment of God on your legalism is a forgiven sin. This is glorious.

It's a glorious way to become holy. So brothers, get to know this strange, wonderful, unique gospel dynamic for how to move from the sin-bearing work of Christ to the sin-killing work of the Christian, and show your people — show your people how to live it. It will take a decade or two.

I mean, after 33 years, I had people who didn't catch on to anything I said. Some people are just so locked in to their way of thinking about being a Christian that you could just pour your heart out in your best explanations, in your best care, and they're stuck in the same categories they were 30 years ago. Don't worry, lots of people will come along.

You just hang in there. Number three, some pastors avoid preaching on the urgency and necessity of holiness because their own secret lives are morally compromised. They are wasting time on trifles.

They are watching movies that fill their minds with worldliness and ungodliness. They are dabbling in pornography or worse. They are dishonest in their financial dealings.

They continually overeat in bondage to food. They neglect the teaching of their children in things of the Lord, and they don't pray with their wives. They are starting to medicate with wine at night, which they once called freedom.

Their casual mouth has become crude. They've grown weary of fruitful Bible study, and they are becoming second handers and using other people's sermons. Is it any wonder that these pastors preach grace to forgive and not grace to conquer? Any wonder? There's no mystery there.

The grace to defeat sinning rarely touched on, but the grace that we're okay, we're okay while he lives in sin. They lift high the cross, covering all their sins, and never make the biblical connection with the crucified one conquering pornography. He was crucified to conquer your pornography.

He was crucified to conquer your laziness. He was crucified to conquer our gluttony. He was crucified to conquer our dishonesty.

He was crucified to bring back the joy of creating your own sermons. Number four, some pastors avoid anything approaching the kind of preaching that would confront people with their sin and would risk making them unhappy. There are pastors that are so deeply infected with the coddling culture that we live in, coddling culture of contemporary America.

They're not only hypersensitive to being offended, but in the pulpit they're fearful of stirring up anybody's displeasure. There are reasons for this. There are reasons for this reluctance to preach the urgency of holiness, and one of them is a deep, deep-seated insecurity in the pastor.

Never has grown up out of it. Our insecurities can come from lots of different places, so I would encourage you to get to know your insecurities really well. Be honest about them and dig deep into sovereign grace, and if necessary, get a counselor to help you so that you become a free person, free from bondage to people-pleasing.

Finally, number five, some pastors are so fearful of being labeled conservative or fundamentalist or progressive or woke or whatever the circles you care about would look down upon that they're going to avoid any kind of biblical command that would put them in some camp that they don't want to be a part of. That's a bondage. That's a bondage.

So, for example, they're just not going to deal with racial discrimination because they're going to get called woke. They're not going to deal with modesty or nudity in movies because they're going to get called fundamentalist. They're not going to deal with the fact that we are citizens of heaven before we're citizens of America because they're going to get called unpatriotic by the veterans in the congregation.

The remedy for this kind of bondage, brothers, this is a serious bondage today. The remedy for this kind of bondage to the opinions of others is first to become more like Jesus of whom his enemies said, teacher, we know that you're true. You don't care about anybody's opinion.

I love it. For you're not swayed by appearances. But truly teach the way of God.

Don't you want to be free like that? Pastor, we see you don't really care. And the second part of the remedy is to be so radically committed to all the Bible, all of it, all that the Bible teaches, so that just when people think they have you pegged and in some camp, you bring something out of your Bible treasure that just throws them totally off balance. Don't you love to do that? I do.

They'll love you for it if you hang in there. I mean, preach the whole thing. You got to displease everybody sometime or you're probably not getting it right.

All the Bible so that you, pastor, will become after maybe five years, ten years, you will become known. Our pastor is nobody's lackey. Nobody.

He doesn't live to please men, right or left, rich or poor, white or black, male or female. You march to a biblical drum and let the chips fall where they will. They'll love you for that.

I mean, Bible people will love you for that. Partisan people who are more Republican or more Democrat than Christian, they will love you for that. You don't want them to love you.

You want them to be converted. So my prayer for you is that when all of these obstacles are out of the way, and I'm sure there are others that I haven't thought of, when all these obstacles are out of the way, you would preach and teach and live in such a way as to help your people experience the effective connection between the sin-bearing work of Christ and the sin-killing work of the Christian, or to link it back in to Kevin's message, between the glorious, justifying work of the blood and the glorious sanctifying work of the blood. And maybe then you would sing with fresh understanding, would you be free from the burden of sin? There's power in the blood.

There's power in the blood. And would you or evil a victory win? There's power, wonderful power in the blood. Let's pray.

So God, please, I long so much to be more holy, more consistently in harmony with your infinite worth, or as David said, the enjoying and the magnifying of your glory among all the nations. We want to be a holy, holy people with all of its implications about returning good for evil and all of its implications about unity, all of its implications about love. Be holy, for I am holy, knowing that you were ransomed from your former manner of life, your futile ways to walk in holiness.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

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