

Being Different for Jesus

1 Peter 1:13-21; 2:1

Big Idea: As a Christian God wants me to be different like Jesus, not weird.

Intro: In C.E. Montague's novel, *Rough Justice*, a memorable scene describes a little boy named Bron going to church for the first time with his governess. He watches with interest every part of the service. The preacher climbs into the high pulpit and Bron hears him tell some terrible news. It is about a brave and kind man who was nailed to a cross, terribly hurt, a long time ago, and who still feels a dreadful pain even now, because there was something not done that he wants them all to do.

Little Bron thinks that the preacher is telling the story because a lot of people are there and they will do something about it. Bron is sitting impatiently on the edge of the pew. He can hardly wait to see what the first move will be in righting this injustice. But he sits quietly and decides that after the service someone will do something about it. Little Bron begins to weep, but nobody else seems at all upset. The service is over. The people walk away as if they had not heard such terrible news, as if nothing remarkable had happened.

As Bron leaves the church, he is trembling. His governess looks at him and says, "Bron, don't take it to heart. Someone will think you are different."

- Different - to be alive and sensitive in one's spirit.
- Different - to show emotion.
- Different - to listen to what is going on in God's house, to really hear, to respond.
- Different - to take Jesus Christ seriously.

Shouldn't Christians be different? Shouldn't we be distinct, separate, not the same, out of the ordinary, unusual?

Christ was distinct, separate, out of the ordinary, and he called his followers to be like him.

The Biblical word "holy" describes the contemporary word "different". A holy person is not an odd person, but a different person. A holy person has a quality about their life that is unique. Their present lifestyle is not only changed from past lifestyles, but is set apart from the lifestyles of the unbelievers around them. A holy person takes Jesus Christ seriously.

As believers in Christ we have been called to live this unique life and different lifestyle. Peter wrote,

"But, as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Actually, "called" may be too passive a word. We have been commanded to live a holy life - "energetic and blazing with holiness" – as Eugene Petersen described this life in *The Message*. Someone once said,

"We may choose a married life or a single life, but it is not left to us to choose whether or not we live a holy life."

Holiness is not an option. It is mandatory.

I. The problem with being different (or holy)

"Hold the phone, wait just a minute," I can hear someone saying. This holiness thing is just a little bit too much for me. The problem is that we don't want to be different. Why is that?

A. We value conformity

We don't want to stand out from the crowd. We wear the same style of clothes, talk the latest slang, we conform to the "in" things. Like Bron's governess, what we fear most in life is being different.

We don't want to be perceived as being odd. We have become an assembly-line society. We are terrified of being set apart.

B. We visualize a caricature of holiness

Furthermore, we don't like the idea of holiness because, we think, it communicates an attitude and displays actions that have become known as "holier-than-thou." We disdain a spirituality and behavior that puts one on a pedestal as being better than the rest. Jesus despised this type of mentality and morality in the Pharisees, and we agree with him.

C. We misunderstand what it means to be holy

And to add additional weight to our reasons for not living a life of holiness is because it conjures up images of being a monk or priest. We think that holy people live in far-away monasteries, separate themselves from any kind of fun and frivolity, and trade in their luxury cars, comfortable homes, and well-paying jobs for a Peace Corps stint in a developing county. Consequently, we say, "Not for me."

Real holiness, the genuine and authentic character of being different, is none of those things. Yet it is more than that. What does it mean to be different? The apostle Peter answers that question.

II. The meaning of being different

A. It means that we think differently (v. 13)

1 Peter 1:13 So prepare your minds for service and have self-control. All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ is shown to you.

To be different begins with the proper preparation of our minds. Peter uses a Middle Eastern analogy "gird up the loins of your mind" to describe how to prepare their minds. During his time men wore long, flowing robes. When they were preparing to run or to do physical labor, they usually lifted their robes and secured them with a belt or girdle around their waist. This allowed them the freedom of movement they needed to perform their work.

Today, we would use the expression, "roll up our sleeves." In other words, we are to take the initiative in preparing our minds for the life of holiness. It will require effort and hard work.

Behavioral scientists have discovered that human behavior is determined to a great extent by the subconscious mind. The computer vocabulary graphically describes the potential of human behavior, "Garbage in, garbage out." In the same way, to be different begins with our minds. Our minds must be holy if our behavior is to be holy.

"For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7)

Apostle Paul warns us not to let the world squeeze us into its mold,

"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

B. It means that we live differently (v. 14 - 17)

1 Peter 1:14 Now that you are obedient children of God do not live as you did in the past. You did not understand, so you did the evil things you wanted.

15 But be holy in all you do, just as God, the One who called you, is holy.

16 It is written in the Scriptures: "You must be holy, because I am holy."

17 You pray to God and call him Father, and he judges each person's work equally. So while you are here on earth, you should live with respect for God.

A natural outgrowth of our right thinking is right living. When we begin to think new thoughts, we begin to live a distinct life. Henry Thoreau, a rugged New England individualist of the nineteenth century, once went to jail rather than pay his poll tax to a state that supported slavery. During this period he wrote his essay "Civil Disobedience".

Thoreau's good friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, hurried to visit him in jail. Peering through the bars exclaimed: "Why, Henry, what are you doing in there?"

The sharp-witted Thoreau replied, "Nay, Ralph, the question is, what are you doing out there?"

Who is the different one - Little Bron or his governess? Thoreau in jail or the rest of us outside?

Thoreau was not a churchgoer because he thought the churches of his day were too tradition bound - and perhaps he was right.

Here's a powerful thought question: "If they were going to arrest you for being a Christ-follower, a Christian, would they have enough evidence to convict you?"

C. It means that we love differently (v. 22)

1 Peter 1:21 Through Christ you believe in God, who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. So your faith and your hope are in God.

22 Now that you have made your souls pure by obeying the truth, you can have true love for your Christian brothers and sisters. So love each other deeply with all your heart.

Love sets us apart. Love is the display of holiness. Love is the litmus test for Christians. It is not just any kind of love. It is a:

- Sincere love. It is genuine, authentic. Like God's love for us. Our motive is not to get, but to give.
- Deep love. It is intense, fervent. It means to love with all of our strength. Christian love is not a feeling. It is a matter of the will.
- Pure love. It is spotless, clean. Men speak romantically about loving from the heart, but God speaks realistically about loving from a pure heart.

This is the same kind of love Jesus talked about, *"By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).*

Love one another –

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

In the first century a pagan went to report on the early church movement. He visited a compound where Christians were living together. He intended to write something bad. Instead he wrote, "Behold, how they love one another."

D. It means that we talk differently (v. 2:1)

1 Peter 2:1 So then, rid yourselves of all evil, all lying, hypocrisy, jealousy, and evil speech.

The words we use reveal most obviously if we are truly different or not. We live in a world that uses words to put people down and tear people up. Those who are different use their words to build people up.

Words are powerful. Words have the power to edify, to give life, but they also have the power to discourage and to kill dreams.