

Looking Like Your Passport by Jeff Strite

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

OPEN: How many of you have ever had a passport?

You realize that when you visit a foreign land, you **MUST** have a passport, because without that document you cannot move around inside their country. That passport says who you are, what nation you belong to... and it has a picture of you inside.

ILLUS: I read the true story of a woman who traveled a lot and eventually needed to get a new passport. She posed for a new picture, and as she handed in her 10-year-old passport she took one more longing look at the picture inside. Then she looked up at the clerk and sighed.

"I like this original picture better."

The clerk smiled and said "Trust me. Ten years from now, you'll like this one."

ILLUS: One of the websites I visited noted that there's a universal loathing of passport photos. Everybody seems to hate their pictures. Some people even believe that the passport office employs the same people that take your pictures down at the license branch.

One person complained "(I) look like a convicted and unrepentant mass murderer"
Another wrote "I looked like a very happy pig."

Everybody seemed to agree. They didn't think they looked like their picture. But whether they liked their photograph or not... they had better look like that picture. Because if they were to travel abroad and crossed a border into another country they would be asked to present their passport to the proper authorities. And if they didn't look like their picture... they're not going anywhere.

Now, Peter tells us here that we are "strangers in this land". Thus we need to have a passport. And Peter describes the picture that appears there that the world will look for on our passport – a picture he insists that we **MUST** look like. Because if we don't look like that picture... we're not going anywhere for Jesus.

That picture is our passport in this world.

That picture tells people who we are and whose Kingdom we belong to.

And everybody knows what that picture is supposed to look like.

In fact – if we don't look like that picture, people have a word to describe us.

HYPOCRITE!

A hypocrite is someone who tries to look like somebody that they're not.

And God says: this picture I'm showing you in I Peter IS your passport to this world.

This is what you are supposed to look like.

So... what are we supposed to look like?

1st I'm told I should... "Be holy, because (God is) holy." I Peter 1:16

(PAUSE) Does that strike anybody else as being a little odd?

The idea that I can be holy?

I thought only God was holy.

But apparently we can be too. God said we could. In fact you and I are instructed to "Be holy in all that (we) do." I Peter 1:15

But, how do we do that? How can we be HOLY?

Well, it helps to understand that holiness is a very simple concept.

Holiness means to be "set apart."

The Greek word for "holiness" comes from the same root word as Saint and Sanctify and it means essentially the same thing. When we become Christians we are "set apart."

ILLUSTRATION – Our sound crew, back in the back, is "separated" from the rest of us by a wall. They are "set apart" or "holy" compared to the rest of us.

Now holiness is a two-step process:

1st God makes you holy. When you became a Christian, God set you apart from rest of the world. You were "over here" and they were "over there". You get to go to heaven... they don't. Not because you are more "righteous" than they are, but because you accepted God's free gift of salvation.

2ndly NOW that you're a Christian, God expects you to set yourself apart from the world. He expects you to behave, and think and live differently than those of the world.

That's what Peter is saying when he says "Be holy in all that you do."

"Set yourself apart from this world. Don't be like them."

Don't go down to the bars.

Don't join in the foul jokes and the cursing matches.

Don't watch the same movies/TV shows/ or read the same books.

ILLUS: Recently there's been a popular book making the rounds called "50 Shades of Grey". How many of you have heard of it?

It's on the best seller list and the news media has touted it as the next great novel. They say it is amusing, intriguing and a powerful "erotic novel".

Now, it may be erotic. It may even be well written and intriguing. But it's just an evil story in fancy language. It's an evil novel, written by an evil person, and it will be turned into an evil movie.

There are many evil novels on the market. And there are many evil movies in the movie theatres. But I chose this particular book because of its title.

"50 Shades Of Grey"

What they're implying, is that there are 50 shades of "naughtiness." Or more literally: 50 different shades of evil.

And God says to you... don't go there.

Don't accept 50 shades of evil as it should be normal.

God says "I don't want you to accept 50 shades of grey. I want you to embrace ONE shade of white... one shade of purity."

Peter says it this way:

"Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." I Peter 1:14

Paul says it this way: ... You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." Ephesians 4:17-19

Don't be like these folks!!! Don't live like these folks. Don't think like these people. Be holy and set apart from this world. Granted, we may not be able to do it perfectly all the time – but that's our objective. That's our life goal.

Now, if you'd let me, I could come into your house and monitor the movies and TV shows watch. I could police the shelves in your home for books you would be permitted to read.

But do you REALLY think that would do any good?

Naw.

It wouldn't work. After a while you'd come to resent my presence.

You'd get to hating me.

You'd find yourself avoiding me.

Holiness is not something I can do for you.
You've got to be the one who decides to be holy.
You're the one who has to decide to separate from this world.
If you don't love Jesus enough to do that... I can't help you.
God tells you (and me) that we've got to decide to "Be holy for I am holy."

So the first thing we do is to be holy.
2ndly we need to live as someone who's Redeemed

Holiness is all about how you live
Being redeemed is about why we should do that.

Peter says: "You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." I Peter 1:18-19

We should be holy because Jesus has paid a high price for us.
We belong to Him and we do what we do because we love Him.

You know, we get shocked by how people in this world behave.
We hear a non-Christian tell a foul joke and we get offended.
I especially get annoyed by people who put insulting and offensive bumper stickers and other decorations on their vehicles.
We see porn magazines at the factory and we get upset.
A person that doesn't go to church is rude to us, or insults us, or hurts us in some way – and we can't figure out why they'd do that.

I KNOW why they do that stuff.
They don't belong to Jesus. Why shouldn't they behave like that?

ILLUS: One atheist once said "there is no one here but ourselves to suffer for our sins, no one to redeem us but ourselves: we are obliged to settle our own disputes and do what we can. We need no holy guide books, only a very human moral compass" (Polly Toynebee in "Guardian Unlimited" - not sure of the date)

If people in this world don't belong to Jesus they literally live by their own moral compasses. And their bad behavior is simply a reflection of where their compass points.

ILLUS: I talked to a friend recently whose boss got upset with her and cursed at her. Not only was the problem not my friend's fault, but in the midst of the cursing, the boss took God's name in vain and my friend found that deeply offensive.

I asked her if that boss went to church... and she replied "No. She lies a lot and she even lives with her boyfriend."

And so I replied "Well then, why SHOULDN'T this person curse? I mean, they don't belong to Jesus. They don't look to God for approval or acceptance. They're just acting the way they feel is best. This boss's cursing may be offensive, but her lifestyle may be immoral. But which is worse? Her cursing and lying... or her spending eternity in hell?"

You know, there are many Christians that are more worried about someone being immoral than they are about that person going to hell. They don't seem to realize that the lifestyle of some people is simply a symptom of a disease inside of them.

The disease is sin, and the result of their sin will be an eternity in hell. And we should be more offended by that than the bad behavior these folks exhibit.

That boss doesn't belong to Jesus. She lived by her own "very HUMAN moral compass". There might be external forces that might make her live a more moral life: peer pressure, punishment HER employers, loss of her job, etc. But none of those actually change WHO she is... because she's the god in her life.

She's the one who sets the compass settings.

She belongs to herself.

She answers only to herself.

Until we come to grips with the fact that these folks don't need more morality in their lives... that they need Jesus and Him being Lord in their lives... people will continue to go to hell without the hope that God intends to offer them.

The world isn't "holy" because the world is not "redeemed."

We are redeemed, and so God is telling us in I Peter that we need to make the choice that we BELONG to Jesus. And if we belong to Jesus then we need to live holy lives because we know that "(we) are not (our) own; (we) were bought at a price. (And) therefore (we should) honor God with (our bodies)". I Corinthians 6:19-20

There's one more part of your passport photo you need to promote. Peter is telling us we need to be holy and we need to realize we're redeemed... but there's one more thing we need or those two will not be enough.

Peter says we need to remember that we are "Born again."

Verse 23 says “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” 1 Peter 1:23

Now I could go into detail about how you can be born again. I could spend a great deal of time in this sermon talking about the fact that you need to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God. And that you must accept the fact that you’ve sinned and fallen short of God’s glory and need to repent of your past. And that you need to make Jesus the Lord and Master of your life and allow yourself to be buried in the waters of Christian baptism and rise up a new creature. But that’s not really the focus of this message.

The question this morning is this: What does being “BORN AGAIN” look like? What do I have to do to make sure that the world recognizes that I’m “Born Again”?

Peter answers that question in these words: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth (in other words: “now that you’ve set yourself apart to be holy/righteous/pure) so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again” 1 Peter 1:22-23a

In other words: the MARK of our being “born again” is if we show love to one another. If we do not show that we love one another, then the world will not believe we’re born again. And they’ll have good reason to doubt us.

The Apostle John says it this way:

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” 1 John 4:20

I find it interesting that Peter talks about the need for us to be holy in an unholy world because we’ve been redeemed/bought by God. But then he implies that it’s impossible to be holy without being loving. It’s impossible to be moral and have hatred in your heart. It’s impossible to practice righteousness if say nasty things to/about a person.

In 1 Peter 2:1 God tells us what we need to do to remove the obstacles of true Christian love:

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”

In other words, a TRUE Christian is one who can look at someone who’s offended them and say: “I don’t like what you done... but because you are made in the image of God I’ll

love anyway.”

ILLUS: I want you to take a moment and think of the person you love and respect the most.

GOT IT?

Good. Now answer this question: Have you ever had an argument with them? Have you ever gotten so angry with them you couldn't stand to be in the same room with them? Has that ever happened? Did you still love them?

ILLUS: I have a relative who wanted to get into an argument about politics. He said some very mean and hateful things about politicians that I happen to respect. You could tell his blood pressure was way up there (his neck was turning red) and he literally shouted at me to make his points. To this day he holds these views and considers me a fool for how I vote.

But I love this man. He's someone who I respect in many ways. And his opinion DOES matter to me. But I wasn't going to get into a fight with him. When he tried to engage me in an argument I simply said this:

“I love you, and I'm not going to argue with you.”

Paul tells us how to deal with people who want to argue with us:

“Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not (PAUSE) quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.” II Timothy 2:23-24

- Have you ever gotten resentful of someone in the midst of an argument? Me too. –

“Those who oppose him he must (PAUSE) gently instruct” II Timothy 2:25

- “Gently instruct”. That means we don't abandon our principles or our holiness or our commitment to God. But instead of trying to beat someone over the head with truth, we “gently instruct” them.

in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” II Timothy 2:23-25

Why shouldn't we argue?

Because we trust God.

We don't worry about winning an argument, because we trust God to “grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”

We still present our faith in Jesus... but we do it IN THE HOPE that God will step in.

ILLUS: When I first entered the ministry I thought it was job to talk people into becoming Christians. I knew all the right arguments and I could effectively talk someone into making a decision for Christ. But I found myself being frustrated with the end result.

Then I read Jesus' words from John 16:8 "And when (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of (their) sin, and of (their need of) righteousness, and of (the fact that because of that sinfulness and their lack of righteousness, there will be a day of) judgment"

(Obviously, the words in the parenthesis are my interpretation of those phrases)

I don't have to convict anyone of anything. That's the Spirit's job.

I don't have to win the arguments. God will do that.

Even if I "lose" in any discussion, God can win, because He's capable of working through me when I decide it's more important to show love than to carry the day on the battlefield.

ILLUS: I read the true story of a man named Joe White who got into a discussion with a Muslim named Imod. Instead of trying to argue with him about his religion. Instead they talked about their lives and their families and developed a friendship.

At one point in the conversation White asked him: "Imod, may I ask you a question? According to your Muslim faith, what will happen to you when you die?"

Imod quickly responded, "When I die, there will be judgment. As I stand before Allah he will put all of my good deeds on my right side and all of my bad deeds on my left side. If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds," his countenance brightened, "I will go to heaven."

As he concluded his statement of faith I probed, "And what if your bad deeds outweigh your good deeds?"

"Well," his countenance lowered, "I suppose I will go to hell."

"Imod," I spoke tenderly, "that worries me deeply for you."

"Because?"

"If I had to live my life worrying that if my bad deeds outweighed my good deeds I would go to hell, I would be scared to death."

"What does your faith teach you?"

"Well, my faith clearly teaches me that when I die there will be judgment.

But upon judgment God will not look at my good deeds and compare them to my bad deeds. God will look at me based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who lives in my heart, and because of Him, I will go to heaven."

Imod replied "No one ever told me that before,... By the way where are you going to church tomorrow?"

(Joe White, One2Won Crosstraining, Session 8)

CLOSE: That Muslim saw a picture of a Christian who looked like his passport. He saw a person who was committed to holiness. A man who made it clear he was redeemed by Christ and belonged to Him. And who showed love for Imod in such a way that it was obvious, this man was “born again.”