

Introduction

I'd like to begin by giving you five advertising slogans and asking you to identify either the company or product they advertise: #1 – "Head for the Border" (Taco Bell); #2 – "A Little Dab'll Do Ya" (Brylcreme); #3 – "We'll Leave the Light on for Ya" (Motel- 6); #4 – "Eet More Chikin" (Chick-fil-A); and #5 – "99.44% Pure" (Ivory Soap). Let's think for a moment about that last one and what it means. The Proctor and Gamble Company coined it after laboratory analysis showed that its Ivory Soap was just that, 99.44% pure. It replaced the old slogan, "It Floats."

That may be Ivory Soap's slogan but it certainly isn't God's, believe me. His slogan isn't "99.44% Pure." It's "100% Pure" and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to two passages that teach us just that, Leviticus 19:1-2 and 1 Peter 1:13-16.

What "Pure" Means

I start by defining what "pure" means. All of us value purity in almost everything, especially food. That's why the Food and Drug Administration or FDA establishes required guidelines for food like the following. Apple butter: If the mould count is 12% or more or if it averages 4 rodent hairs per 100 grams or if it averages 5 or more whole insects (not counting mites, aphids, or scale insects) per 100 grams, it cannot be sold. Mushrooms: If there is an average of 20 or more maggots of any size per 15 grams of dried mushrooms, it cannot be sold. Fig Paste: If there are more than 13 insect heads per 100 grams of fig paste in each of 2 or more subsamples, it cannot be sold. And finally hot dogs: You don't want to know or you'll never eat another one again. It's great isn't it? The FDA assures that we aren't eating too much mold and rodent hair or too many insects and maggots in our food.

Anyway, those guidelines show us what it means that something is pure. It's in an uncontaminated state. It's food without mold, rodent hair, insects, and maggots, air without fumes, infields without stones,

gardens without weeds, soap without chemicals, and so on.

God Is Holy (100% Pure)

That helps us understand one of the compelling qualities of God. In Leviticus 19:2, which 1 Peter 1:16 quotes, He declares through Moses, “**I the LORD your God am holy.**” That’s the compelling quality. He’s holy.

The Hebrew word translated that means “separated or cut off from.” God is separated from two things. The first is creation. He’s different in kind than anything else that exists. The second is evil. The first of those refers to His transcendence and the second to His purity, both of which make up His holiness. I’m addressing his purity today. His purity is His moral condition or state and has two aspects.

One is that He’s totally and utterly separated from evil (what is morally wrong). There’s no evil in Him of any kind. Human holiness, by way of analogy, helps us grasp this. Take Mother Teresa, for instance, who was a paragon of virtue. Imagine her walking by an abandoned and starving child on the streets of Calcutta and killing him. We can’t imagine that because she was, in her nature, separated from murder. It wasn’t in her to kill. Now consider the “teeniest, tiniest” evil you can think of, like telling a little white lie. God is less inclined to do that than Mother Teresa was inclined to kill. He is in fact not inclined at all to do that. As Paul says it in Titus 1:2, He “cannot lie.” He’s incapable of doing that evil or any evil. He never thinks, feels, or does what is wrong because He can’t.

God’s purity has a second aspect. He’s totally and utterly good (what is morally right). There’s only good in Him. Let’s go back to human holiness again. Imagine Mother Teresa being honest and paying for all of the groceries in her cart. We can imagine that because she was, in her nature, honest. It was in her not to steal. Now consider the greatest good you can think of – like giving your life for another. God is more inclined to do that than Mother Teresa was inclined to pay for all her groceries. He is in fact fully inclined to do that and in Jesus did. He

always think, feels, and does what is right because He can't do otherwise.

I'd quickly say that the analogies I just used are inadequate. That's because God's holiness isn't just human holiness bettered or perfected. It's so much different in nature than human holiness in fact that we know nothing that's even remotely like it. But we understand the best we can and I hope the analogies help you do that. I'd sum it up this way. That God is holy means that He's morally pure. He isn't 50% pure like the air in Beijing or 99.44% pure like Ivory Soap. He's uncontaminated and thus 100% pure – all good and no evil, all right and no wrong.

Whatever Is Holy Is Healthy

Now, God's holiness, like all of his qualities or traits, has profound implications to our lives and us. The English word "holy" reveals one of those. It's derived from an Anglo-Saxon word, "halig," which means "well" or "whole." That teaches us a fundamental truth of our existence. Whatever is holy is healthy. And whatever is unholy is unhealthy. Moral purity makes us physically, psychologically, and spiritually well. Moral impurity makes us physically, psychologically, and spiritually ill.

The reason for that is the very nature of our universe itself. When God created it, all of His qualities were naturally expressed in the realities that made it up. Since He's holy, therefore, holiness is consistent with the realities of the universe and unholiness inconsistent. Consequently, being and doing what is right makes things go well for others and us. But being and doing what is wrong makes things go poorly for others and us. Examples abound everywhere in and around us.

Take sex, for instance. Since God made it, it reflects qualities of His, including His triune nature. Two basic realities underlie it as a result. One is psychological. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 6:16 that sexual intercourse is a life-uniting act. We cannot touch a person's body in sex without touching his or her soul as well. The other basic reality is microbiological. Microorganisms that can injure or kill us are passed by illicit sexual contact. Holiness, therefore, makes things go well for us.

Sex in marriage is fulfilling and safe. But unholiness makes things go poorly for us. Sex outside of marriage is unfulfilling and dangerous.

It's true. Whatever is holy is healthy. Moral purity makes things go well for others and us. Conversely, whatever is unholy is unhealthy. Moral impurity makes things go poorly for others and us.

Be Holy (Pure)

So, be holy! That's God's call to us. He declares in both passages I read that He's holy and we should be too. That implies that we can be and that is one of the defining truths about us. We can be holy in our very nature and Peter tells us how in verse 13.

Look at the phrase "**the grace brought to you at the revelation of Jesus.**" "Grace" refers to the Holy Spirit. "At the revelation of Jesus" refers to when He came to us, which was when we decided to follow Him. The phrase means then that Father God gave the Holy Spirit to us when we decided to follow Jesus. Peter's point is this. Becoming holy is primarily the Holy Spirit's work not ours. He continually transforms the very core of our being so that we become holier and holier there.

But we also have a part to play and Peter reveals it. Look at the word "**prepare**" in verse 13. The KJV translates it literally and correctly, "**Gird up the loins.**" It's a metaphor. First century men in the Middle East wore long gowns and pulled them up whenever energetic effort required it. Our modern equivalent is rolling up our sleeves. So the idea is "pull up your gown" or "roll up your sleeves" and get to work. Mean business in other words. That's the gist of the metaphor and what we have to do to be holy. We have to mean business - in two respects.

Mean Business in Our Minds

The first is found in the word "minds" in verse 13. We have to mean business in our minds. The word "sober" in verse 13 helps us define that. It refers to alertness and connotes mindfulness. We need to be

mindful of what's holy and unholy.

Sadly, most Christians today aren't. They're unmindful instead. In his priceless book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer says it this way, "**We have learned to live with unholiness and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected thing.**" Tozer wrote that 50 years ago but I can tell you this. It's truer today than it was then.

There was once a Friends pastor who was not only highly successful but prideful, angry, and malicious as well. He was incessantly at odds with people and often resorted to anger and yelling to get his way. To make a long story short, his behavior became so intolerable that he was finally forced to resign. The Administrative Council then wrote a congregational letter explaining why he did and in it stressed this. He didn't resign because of "**moral failure,**" meaning sexual sin. That an astonishing statement isn't it? Do you get what it clearly implies? Pride, anger, and malice aren't moral failures.

That illustrates exactly what Tozer said. Most Christians have learned to live with things like pride, anger, malice, gossip, lying, resentment, and so on. Those things aren't moral failures, they think. They're things all of us naturally do and we should expect them.

But they are moral failures, just like drunkenness and adultery are and the first thing we have to do to be holy is to see them that way. We have to be always alert to and ever mindful of what's holy and unholy – both in the world and in us. We should mean business in our minds.

Mean Business in Our Behavior

There's a second thing we have to do to be holy. It's found in the word "behavior" in verse 15. We have to mean business in our behavior. Verse 14 explains how we do that. On the positive side, we intend to "obey," meaning do what is right. On the negative side, we intend not to "conform to former lusts," meaning do what is wrong. Notice I said "intend." Meaning business in our behavior is a matter of intent. We intend to do what is right and not to do what is wrong.

And you know what? That's the basis upon which God judges us. He doesn't judge us on how holy we *are*. He judges us on how holy we *could be* if we intended it. Listen carefully to what William Law says about that in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*: **"The question is not, Can gospel perfection be fully attained? but, Have you come as near it as a sincere intention and careful diligence can carry you? If you have made as much progress in the Christian life as you can, then you may justly hope that your imperfections will not be laid to your charge. But if your defects are the result of your negligence and lack of sincere intention, then you leave yourself without excuse."** Those are strong words but true. God doesn't judge us on how holy we *are*. He judges us on how holy we *could be* if we intended it. So, let's intend it – to be holy in our behavior.

Now, intending that requires two things of us. First, we learn what is right and wrong by studying the Bible. Second, we try and train the best we can to do the right and not to do the wrong. I once counseled a new convert who was still using filthy language. One of the issues in his mind was whether was wrong or not. So I read Ephesians 5:4-5, which teaches that it is. Having learned it was wrong, he then tried the best he could not to do it. But it was such a strong habit, he failed. So I told him to train by practicing spiritual disciplines like solitude, fasting, and silence, which he did. His efforts showed it. He intended to be holy.

And so should we. Learn what's right and wrong by studying the Bible. Then try and train the best we can to do the right and not do the wrong. We mean business in our behavior if we do.

Conclusion

I close with a question. God is 100% pure, morally. But how pure are you and I? Are we 50% pure or 70% or 99.44%? But that isn't a valid question is it. As William Law taught, the valid question is this. Are we as pure as the Holy Spirit can make us? Let's mean business in our minds and behavior. The answer will be "Yes" if we do.