

Through our time together today we will grow in you, knowing you, understanding you and thus understanding us. Hearing your teaching and by the power of your Holy Spirit having it absorbed into our hearts and minds that we may walk forward from this time together growing and becoming the disciples of Christ that you know we can be. That is our desire. We seek you and you alone through your word, through your teaching, through your Spirit Lord through our prayers. We pray that you take your place as the rightful pastor and teacher of this church and the church universal. May she honor you this and every day in Jesus name. Amen. How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony. For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe. Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls in the mountains of Zion. And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting. Holiness and unity. They're not mutually exclusive of course. We have to define our terms as we always do because you're going to hear the term holy in scripture as we read through this year different parts as God is described and as God describes himself. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. That is a complete otherness that human beings cannot bear to be in the presence. That is, hide me in the cleft of the rock as my back is turned and the Lord passes behind me that I may just have a glimpse or a feel or an impression of his holiness. Holy, holy, holy throughout Revelation you have the cherubim, you have the seraphim, you have the elders. You have like holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. He is that. And when we talk about all of the created beings in the universe, he is one of one. When we talk about the completeness of holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. One of one. So Peter says, "Be holy for as the Lord God is holy." Other places in scripture it says, "Be complete." Sometimes translated, "Be perfect as I am perfect." So how is any of that possible? Well, I know that you are not biblically illiterate and you know exactly how that is possible if you've read the first couple chapters of Genesis. You are created in his image and in his likeness. You are not created as him. He is one of one. But we are created in his image and his likeness. And as we come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior and our Lord and we have repented and we have turned and we have submitted ourselves, our lives, our spirit to the Lord and his will, we are adopted into his family and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. Now we take that image and likeness and God can really work with it now because we are vessels of his Holy Spirit and we reflect holiness among other traits of God. So we want to be clear because this is one of the most misused and can be one of the most harmful terms that Christians can use today when we are speaking not only within the church but outside, to those outside of the church when we talk about being different, when we talk about being set apart, when we talk about being holy and behaving in a holy manner that is reflective of God's will in our lives. That's really what it is. Before we get into the Scripture, of course throughout Christendom and the various denominations and so forth, you will see this concept played out in a variety of different ways. Sometimes it is very unhealthy, legalistic. In my research, see if I can remember this term because it is stuck in my head, my research this week I read that preaching the holiness of God can sometimes be summed up as "lemon sucking sour face moralism." I love that term. Lemon sucking sour face moralism. If that is going to pour that out on you, we are not preaching joy of the Lord, we are not preaching life and life abundant, we are not preaching following God's will, you will not regret it, all of these things. I am preaching moralism. Sit down and do this and wear that and say this and eat that. Often times in an unhealthy way when we are talking about living as a holy people, that is where it goes. It is kind of like the Pharisees when they took the Mosaic law and they just kept adding to it, adding to it, adding to it until people could not walk down the street on a Sabbath because it was work or what have you. So we will take this concept as the New Testament term and add to it and add to it and add to it and chances are it is just a pastor or board of elders that would look very much like control of the devil. And that is that lemon sucking sour face moralism and I don't want to see anything else happen to you guys. Toe the line. That is not joy. That is not what is being talked about here. So let's find out what is being talked about here. 1 Peter 1 is the second half and the beginning of 2 Peter. And this is the concept, all of the concepts that Peter is putting out there, all of the encouragement,

all of the instruction that he is putting out there. We know because we have gone over this a few times, he is putting out into a persecuted church and a persecuted people. And by persecuted I don't mean that there is a government in charge that really would rather not have Christians around. We have been down this road. Is blood persecution martyred to murder? It is a centralized intentional effort to make Christians the enemy. Peter refers to them as foreigners in a strange land. And of course at that time there were literal foreigners in, Christians moving into, to evangelize if you will, if you can use that term, the Roman Empire. But the broader implication is you are Christians, you are of the Kingdom of God. All of the other territory is foreign land. I have heard churches described, and I like this, as forward operating bases in enemy territory. We have been planted where we are and this is our job in this community. But I digress. So, are we there? So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. That addresses every human, every Christian. And it addresses the choices and the intentionality that we have every day as children of the Most High. This is what we're always saying in here. Have you looked in the mirror today? We talked about, have you examined what you do with your time? Have you looked in the mirror today? How much time in prayer compared to how much time on social media, etc. We talk about those things because we must be intentional. And in 2025, when you talk about the temptation that is out there and the access to all of the wickedness and lusts of the world, they're two clicks away from Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a different world. And I urge you, do not fall back into those temptations that you had and you actually lived in before you became a child of God. Because I guarantee that they're still there. If you have an intention for pornography or alcohol or lying, cheating, stealing to get your way to the top or womanizing or whatever the case may be, I guarantee you that even through your salvation, your justification and now your sanctification, those things are still there. And you were created a flawed human being here and in your body. And so my mind has its own propensities and things that I lean towards that I must be very intentional about not leaning towards. I have to be very self-reflective, we all do, because you're not born fully human and fully divine. Sorry. It would be a lot easier, but there was only one person, one person who didn't deserve to die, didn't deserve God's wrath. And he took it because we did. He took it for us because we do. You didn't know any better then, but now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the scriptures say, you must be holy because I am holy. We don't need to preach through that, we've established that definition. You are a reflection by the power of his holy spirit, you are a reflection of holiness, of his holiness. Oh, what does that mean? Well, again, I know that you've read your Bible, I know several people who have read through the New Testament already this year and we've come across this before. God does not leave us hanging when he just says, "Alright, Jeff, you're good to go, go be holy." What does that mean? Throughout scripture, through what Jesus teaches and the apostles teach, sometimes large concepts, sexual immorality, and sometimes very specific behaviors. If you're a thief, stop stealing. Hey, he says that, like that's very specific. Use your hands for good work instead of stealing stuff. Here we go, "Remember that the Heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as temporary residence." There's that term again. "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors and it was not paid with near gold or silver which lose their value." We talked about that last week. "It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless, Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake. Through Christ you have come to trust in God and you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. You were cleansed from your sins when you obey the truth so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. Holiness walks hand in hand with unity." Right there it is. Because holiness begins of course with the converted individual and that converted individual within their family unit and now that family

unit and that converted individual in the congregation and this church being a bible believing, bible preaching church is one with the church universal and so on and so on and so on. That's how it works. That's the great plan, that's the great design. And it begins however if you're going to say to the rest of the world, we are not, I'm stuck on this phrase now, we are not a bunch of lemon sucking sour faced moralists if we're not going to look that way to the rest of the world then how about we seek the will of God for us in our lives and behave accordingly out there, outside of the kingdom of God to the point where people are curious as to why we behave so differently than the rest of the world seems to behave. Let's not put on some sort of Christian parody of being legalistic or being completely open to sin and what, let's look at scripture, understand what God teaches about following him, being indwelt and living a life worthy of your calling and go do it. That's the example that God not only says this might change hearts and minds, he says it will change hearts and minds. It is the power of the Holy Spirit from the church outside of the church that changes hearts and minds and you are the vessel of that by the way that you live and the way that you speak, the behaviors that you do, the way that you treat people, etc. etc. It begins with us. If someone from outside the kingdom of God walks into church town and all they find are all the Christian stereotypes of little cliques over here and then the family that's run the church for 50 years over here, do you know who I am? And this is my seat, you better not get out of my seat. If all those Christian stereotypes come to life, what are we doing? We don't even love each other. We treat each other like garbage and then we want the rest of the world to look at us and say, "Awesome!" Christians are awesome. But you see, the way the world works, the world will seek that one example of what I just described and blow it up a hundred times and define that as Christians. So we've got a task on our hands. We've got a task on our hands and it begins here. We're talking about that today, unity, right? Membership, wanting to be a part of something bigger than yourself, all of those different things. And he's just reiterating the gospel. You wonder why I preach what I preach every single week. I forget who said, it was my son last night when they dropped off the kid. So you preach on Jesus tomorrow? No, I don't. You know, that's what I do. Like every time we get together, we reinforce to each other the gospel, the good news that we are saved and sanctified and joined together as brothers and sisters. That's what we do. That's what we're taught to do. That's what Peter does every chance he gets. That's what Paul does every chance he gets. That's what Jesus does every opportunity. For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the internal, excuse me, eternal living word of God. As the scriptures say, people are like grass. Their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And that word is the good news that was preached to you. So get rid of all evil behavior. Big statement. We can define that even better to make it, right? Let me suggest that even before he gives specific examples, you can, as a Christian, define evil behavior. Evil behavior is anything against the will of God, anything against the teaching of God. And is there any way that I can appoint a discernment that I can use? How about we go to the Ten Commandments? How about the first four that honor God and the last six that honor His creation? So you can literally say, and what I'm about to say is what I'm about to say or do, does it honor God and His creation? If it doesn't, it's evil. And I don't mean evil like, "I'm a witch, I'm a--" It's against God's will. So you do, you are equipped as Christians to do this. It's not a game, it's not a sham, it's not like some sort of big philosophy concept. Here it is. It's very practical. So even before we get into very specific teachings, you as a Christian are equipped to know what to say and do. Does it honor God? Does it honor His creation? If I'm about to rip somebody, that's not honoring His creation. If I'm about to blaspheme the name of God, and gee dang this and etc. etc. That's not honoring God. If I'm about to go out as a Christian and hit the bars and try to pick up women while I'm married, it certainly isn't honoring God. Those are easy ones. How about the way you treat the person at the pizza shop? Ooh, I'm supposed to be nice to that little kid? Yeah, you are. You're supposed to treat them with the human dignity that they have simply inherent by being born in the image and likeness of the Most High God. When I taught alternative education, this was a luxury that I had. So all the teachers that are here, I understand, I would get that push back all the time. "Well you don't

have 280, 300 kids a day to tend to." No I didn't. But I had the advantage of working with individuals for long periods of time. And the way that I broke through was not that some sort of crazy point system. You're five points, you get punished, whatever. It was to be a consistently decent human being day in and day out trying to show them a different way of behaving, even before I was born a gay Christian. I just thought this made a lot of sense. And in my milieu, my area, I was able to do that. And the kid would come in, behaviors off the charts, and they would begin to experience, not only through me, but all of the other young people that I was working with who had been through this, and now we're in, shall we say, the stream of it all. That every behavior was addressed, but not every behavior was punished. There's a difference. And of course the general trend was, "You're not going to punish this behavior?" And the behavior spikes. And then they realized that I come back the next day, exactly as I was the day before, treating them with respect because it's unconditional respect. Their respect is earned, not through me. I have my respect because you are created in the likeness and the image of the Lord. [POW] Sometimes it took a couple of weeks, sometimes it took over a year, but when a person begins to understand that, and consistency and boundaries and all of those things, they learn a different way of behaving. Let me relate this. The Lord is the same yesterday as He is today as He will be tomorrow. We have His living, eternal Word. He's the same every day. Your behaviors are going to change. Your thoughts are going to change. He's the same every day. Come back to the way, a good way of behaving. It's right here. So we stop there and get rid of all evil behavior, and I said, before He even teaches any further, you as a follower of Jesus Christ and an understanding of the fact that God is love and of the Ten Commandments, you can decide and discern that for yourself. Be done with all deceit. Stop lying. Hypocrisy. I'm going to say one thing and do another. Jealousy and all unkind speech. Horrible. God wants horrible things for us with all these rules. Gee whips. God, all the rules. He wants us to stop sleeping around and stop getting diseases. He wants us to not be addicted to drugs and He wants us to be nice to each other. He's awful. Christians are just, oh, rules. He wants you to be a healthy, happy, fulfilled individual who knows who they are in Christ, living their life every day accordingly. That's one thing that gets me, though, because I know that you guys, too, as well, you feel so frustrated at times because it is that one idiot proclaiming Christian who is behaving so poorly that every news agency will jump on. What is that crazy Baptist church? I can't even remember. They jump and there it is across the nation and these are Christian moralists. No, no, no. The vast majority of people I know who love the Lord love each other. The vast majority. And that ended so that, just pray and keep on keeping on. But man, you want to just scream, no, that's not it. That's not Christianity. Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness. I'm going to bring this full circle to last week's teaching that it is an issue, is a spiritual issue. Remember, there obviously there's physical persecution going on. Peter says, do not let these tests of your faith bury you. Test of your faith. And he goes on again. Who are you? You are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. It's a simple, powerful message. Live a life that is holy. Now that in that context of a persecuted empire, a persecuted people is different than what we experience today. To be sure. Can you imagine trying not to, I don't know, kill soldiers when they come to come to get you or create some sort of guerrilla war against the Romans? He's saying no. And God is using this to be sure. He's saying no. Behave according to the scriptures and trust God, because whether it takes a year, a hundred years or two thousand years, people will see the difference. Stay the course with Him, because this is the fulfillment of who you are as a human being.