This past week I discovered a new phrase: the branded self.

This is a phrase that describes how people (or consumers) seek to define themselves using particular brands, events you attend, the movements you support or oppose, the people you associate with, and so on. It is through these that a person tries to gain the gold standard of our social economy: authenticity.

So imagine a heavily logo-ed athlete or nascar driver. But imagine that all the person wearing all those logos is trying to someone build their own identity based upon the identities embedded in each logo. That is essentially the quest for authenticity through the branded self.

Of course that seems a little foolish. Maybe even a little exaggerated. But authenticity is something everyone is trying to brand themselves with. Here’s part of the problem though: Authentic doesn’t describe much of anything any longer.

Authentic can be used to describe life, happiness, leadership, pilates classes, guacamole, denim jeans, and music styles.

The word authentic is so overused that it carries very little meaning at all. We may brand ourselves with authentic athletic jerseys, attending authentic food festivals, and going to authentic hot yoga classes, but no one know what it really means. We just want it and the aura that we think comes with it.

Despite our conscious or unconscious quest for authenticity we may be on, nowhere in scripture are we commanded to be authentic- in the consumeristic, identity-building way.

But as we will see today we are called to be holy.

TITLE SLIDE

**The Branded Self: How to Replace Authenticity With Holiness**

Now that’s a word that will trigger you. It isn’t an overused word at all. In fact I bet you haven’t talked about what it means to be holy in quite some time.

And rather than carrying little to no meaning it carries with it a lot of meaning.

What I want to show you from this passage is that our understanding of holiness is paramount in our walk with Jesus. And I pray that God would bring about a realization of your acceptance based upon holiness and not the hollowness of authenticity.

So let’s go to our passage now. We are going to continue our series through Peter’s first letter.

If you have a bible you can go to 1 Peter 1 starting in verse 13. If you don’t own a Bible we’d love for you to go grab one and take it home to keep. They’re in the back corner and you have my permission to get up and get one now if you’d like.

Follow along as I read verses 13 to 21.

**Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. 15 But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.**

**17 If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers. 18 For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**

This is God’s word.

We are in a series going through the first letter of Peter. Let’s remember that he is writing to mostly non-Jewish Christians living in an area of modern day Turkey. These believers are clearly experiencing hardship and suffering.

I don’t mean suffering like their wifi went out for 15 minutes or their favorite hot dog place went out of business for several weeks. I’m talking about serious suffering. From the evidence provided in the letter they were experiencing persecution from their local governments and other people in general.

While it would be easy for Peter to capitulate to these believers’ desire to change their circumstances, he doesn’t do that. Instead he reminds them of what is already true and cannot change. The glorious gospel that brings inexpressible joy has been received already.

So it is out of this that Peter reminds these believers (and us) to do three things. The first is:

1. **Be Holy… but that has more to do with God’s character than it does yours.**

The central message (literally) of this passage is very simple: Be holy. I know it isn’t the first command in this section but I believe that it is the one that anchors the whole passage we’re looking at today.

Unfortunately to many of us in this room when we hear that we should be holy we tense up inside and cringe. It feels like the spiritual equivalent of scraping fingernails on a chalkboard.

Holiness is not a topic that many of us sit around and discuss. In fact as I looked on my bookshelf at home I didn’t find a single book exclusively on the subject of holiness. Now I’ll admit that it is easy to find books on things that are outgrowths of holiness but not on holiness itself.

That’s because I think we are steeped in our authenticity-chasing culture that we give up on pursuing holiness like we gave up on studying math, learning to play a violin, or teaching yourself to speak Mandarin. We thought, “Well that seems impossible.” Why even try?

But Peter is commanding these believers to identify themselves with God’s holiness. And he’s using some very Old Testament-y language to do it. Which is weird because he is speaking to people who are likely not from Jewish backgrounds.

Peter seems to be referencing the book of Leviticus. Yes Leviticus. Everyone’s favorite book of the bible to stop reading the bible all the way through.

Leviticus is a set of instructions about holiness. It was given to a bunch of former slaves who were strangers in a foreign land, set free by God, on their way to the promised land.

And Peter is calling this particular group of exiles to holiness. They had been freed from slavery to sin but are called strangers and exiles as they wait for Christ’s return when his promised land would come to them. Let’s see some of the parallels

**Leviticus 11:44a**

**For I am the Lord your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy.**

**1 Peter 1:15**

**But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct.**

And also…

**Leviticus 11:45**

**For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy.**

**1 Peter 1:16**

**For it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.**

I don’t know what you think of when you picture holiness. But my guess is you associate holiness with being preachy, self-righteous, killjoys? Is that what Peter is commanding for us? Absolutely not. Here’s why:

There is nothing more authentic and genuine about God than his holiness. Holiness is the very essence of God’s character. He isn’t like holy. He isn’t kind of holy. He IS holy.

The bible is FILLED with declarations of God’s holiness:

**Psalm 47:8**

**God reigns over the nations;**

**God is seated on his holy throne.**

**1 Samuel 2:2**

**There is no one besides you!**

**And there is no rock like our God.**

**Revelation 15:4**

**Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you because your righteous acts have been revealed.**

Yes. God is holy. But what does that mean?

God’s holiness is understood in a couple of ways. Holiness can mean perfection and righteousness. But it also carries with it the idea of being set apart. God is ‘other’ than us.

One [resource](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9vn5UvsHvM) I looked at this week compared God’s holiness to the sun. The S-U-N, that is. You know that big ball of fire at the center of our solar system?

God’s holiness is like the sun in that He is unapproachable like this star but also a source of beauty and life. Because God is perfectly holy no one who has any speck or molecule of imperfection can be near him. But because he is powerful he is also able to bring life and light to what is dead and dark.

**1 Timothy 6:16**

**who alone is immortal and lives in unapproachable light...**

In order to understand and appreciate this command to be holy we must first expand our minds and hearts to consider God’s holiness. He is massive, strong, loving, gracious, perfect, and beautiful. His holiness is everything you truly long for.

And that’s why you actually want to be holy. Deep down you want a holiness that you know is not your own. And that’s the kind of holiness God longs to give you.

Some of you may know this but I played baseball at MTSU for a brief stint. And to prove how big of a deal I was back then let me put it to you like this. If you’ve ever been to the baseball stadium you’ll see all these plaques on the wall as you enter. And if you look really hard you still won’t find me on any of them.

You see I was a walk-on. I played only one season. I made the team again the next year but decided to step down and just continue being a student at MT. I have some regret about doing that but that’s the choice I made.

After I graduated I started receiving mail from the school. They’re addressed to me and always call me an athletic alumni. I thought they were a mistake at first. But they’ve kept coming. Even with living in 3 different states and many different address MTSU always finds me to give me the honor and privilege of being a former athlete- from free football tickets, the occasional tailgate meal, and special events we’re invited to (that I rarely ever go to) they haven’t stopped.

You see in my mind I don’t deserve that. The authentic me quit the team. But they haven’t stopped giving me the recognition of being set apart as a former athlete. To me it’s incredibly humbling.

MTSU has a way that they are setting me apart, making me holy in their eyes. But it probably has more to do with their desire to make themselves look good. Like getting more people in the gate to football games and hopefully getting a potential financial donor to the school. But when God sets us apart with his holiness then it also makes him look good. It magnifies his grace. And that’s why pursuing holiness is not a burden but a blessing.

You see our problem with holiness is our lack of holiness and our misunderstanding of what it means to see God’s holiness for what it truly is: wonderful.

So what do we do if we are holy? Peter says:

1. **Holiness is shaped by fear… of God.**

Wait what???? Fear? What is that about?

Well look back in 1 Peter 1 verse 17

**1 Peter 1:17**

**If you appeal to the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers.**

The word that gets translated here as reverence is actually the word for fear. Yes the word can mean to worship and behold God with reverence and awe. But it also means to fear him for being a powerful father and judge.

So why does Peter make that hard turn? Perhaps it is because he knows that it would be easy for these believers to whom he’s writing to give up in the face of persecution. They may want to cower in fear before their enemies. And he’s encouraging them by reminding them that God accepts them but they need to give more reverence to the judgment of God rather than the court of public opinion.

I think that is a good reminder. Because so many of us who have forsaken holiness in an attempt to just be authentic are slaves to public perception and measuring up to everyone else’s expectations.

This is a form of fear but the wrong kind that we are to have as followers of Jesus. We’re to fear the Lord, not our peers.

And I think that this fear has everything to do with how we conduct ourselves in light of having a loving but firm heavenly father. You know judgment isn’t all bad either. You don’t just have judges that give sentences and punishment. There are also judges who give recognition and reward. Rather than looking at the negative, let’s also remember that the Lord is looking to us to fear him and live in light of the fear and awe of the reward he will bring to those who have faithfully followed him.

And that’s why your actions matter. Look back in verse 14

**1 Peter 1:14**

**As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance.**

Our fear of the Lord should more conform us to his character and nature and break us away from the mold of unholiness we’ve know. Your words, your actions, your thoughts, and motivations all matter. And God’s desire is that your desires will match his.

And lastly look. We need each other in this fight for holiness and fearing the Lord. Don’t interpret other’s rebuke and accountability to God’s standard of holiness as a form of judgment. View it first as an act of love that they would remind you to maintain a right fear of the Lord. Whether its by...

* Reading your bible
* Purity in your dating relationships
* Calling out your integrity
* Your choice of language
* Or how you use your free time

Part of God’s grace toward us is that he gave us one another to remind us of the truth we so easily forget. That’s why this letter is to a group of people. It was so they could remind one another of God’s holiness together.

So don’t despite someone’s heartfelt and tender rebuke. And even if you get called out harshly by someone you can still take the truth of what they’re saying and appreciate that they love you enough to remind you of the holiness God desires for you. Be grateful and let’s fear the Lord together.

1. **Holiness grows in hope.**

We all have hopes. Perhaps you came in today as someone tired from your quest for authenticity. But your hopes for approval and measuring up have fallen short and flat.

* Your last achievement has already lost its luster
* The last relationship left you empty
* The last party left you hungover
* And your last paycheck left you wanting more

But the holiness that God has called us to does not disappoint. I just hope that you have that kind of hope.

Peter bookended this section with hope so that we wouldn’t overlook it.

**1 Peter 1:13**

**Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

And

**1 Peter 1:21**

**Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**

Peter’s message around holiness was bookended by the gospel. Christ’s death, resurrection, and his return.

I want you to know that kind of hope that becomes the fertile ground for holiness.

You see the quest for authenticity will suck the life right out of your pursuit of holiness. You will always be seeking to identify yourself by self-righteous symbols to your holiness.

But true holiness see its growth when it proceeds out of a clear picture of God’s holiness.

God’s holiness matters so much that he requires that same holiness of us. The problem is that we can’t give him that kind of holiness because of our sin. That’s why we need to hear the gospel. That’s why we need Jesus.

Our fear of judgment of all of our sin and the punishment we deserve was put fully on Jesus on the cross. He died because he took that penalty. And because he was holy and righteous and all-powerful he rose from the grave. He took our sin and he gives us his holiness.

No, we don’t deserve that. Yet he beckons us to find our ultimate and inexpressible joy in delighting in his holiness.

That is the kind of hope we have in Christ. A hope for holiness that is God’s and God’s alone. So will you give up your quest for authenticity and embrace a pursuit of holiness.

And this is a great reminder today as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. We take the bread and the cup to remember Christ’s sacrifice. It has a way of pointing us backward to the cross and resurrection. But it also points us forward to when we will celebrate this with a full meal in Christ’s presence when he returns.

So if you’re a follower of Christ we invite you partake of the Lord’s table this morning. The way we do that is by circling our chairs. And someone in the group, maybe one of our covenant members, will take the lead and remind us of what we’re doing here and offer up a simple prayer.

If you’re by yourself join in on one of the circles. Look around to see if people are sitting by themselves. This is a meal that is to be celebrated together.

And if you’re not a Christ Follower then we invite you to just observe. We don’t expect anyone to celebrate a hope that they don’t have. It would actually be silly for you to do that. Instead maybe you should ponder what is being said and whether you want this kind of holiness that God offers you in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.