

Steps to Holiness

Good morning everyone! It is a privilege for me to be with you here in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm happy to share some of my thoughts with you which come from my heart and I hope that you will understand my English. I just do my best. :-)

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Today the teaching of sanctification is often limited to a common emphasis on discipleship. That's certainly not wrong. However, the Bible is more specific and teaches *steps to holiness*.

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Colossians 3,1-17 → 6 steps
1 Peter 1,13-22 → 5 steps

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First Step

In 1 Peter 1,13 Peter looks forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ. This is the coming revelation. We have to prepare ourselves for this particular day.

1 Peter 1,13: Therefore, *preparing your minds for action*, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

→ self control 1. mind, thinking

1 Peter 1,13: Therefore, *preparing your minds for action*, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (see also Acts 2,38)

Our preparation begins with our minds. Actually, we don't have to be surprised about that. Christianity starts with thinking. Peter began his first sermon in church history with the word *repent*. In Greek the word for *repent* (μετανοέω) means thinking in another way. To become a Christian starts off by thinking in a new way. Thus, it should not come as a surprise to us that to prepare ourselves for the second coming of our Lord also means to begin to think differently? We should be prepared and our preparations should begin with our minds. In other words, don't go astray with your thoughts.

Jesus put it this way: "If your right eye wants to sin, cut it off!" (Matthew 5,29) I haven't heard yet of anybody who has literally done what Jesus suggests here. That's probably better, because if we would cut off our **right** eye we would realize that our **left** eye would continue sinning. Therefore, I'm convinced that Jesus didn't mean this literally. However, he certainly wants us to cut off sinful thoughts.

Very often sin begins with our thoughts, with sinful thoughts. But with the power of the Holy Spirit you can control your thinking. Like Martin Luther said, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." Take the spiritual sword of God's Word, choose a Bible verse which speaks into your temptation and cut off sinful thoughts! Remember how Jesus fought in the desert. He said repeatedly: "It is written ..." (Matthew 4,4.10) to cut off sinful ideas.

Second Step

The next step to sanctification is to overcome passions of ignorance.

*1 Peter 1,14-17: As obedient children, **do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance**, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,*

1 Peter 4,3 speaks about such passions as "sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry". These things are addictions that will ruin our lives. They characterize the behavior of the world. And we are tempted to conform ourselves to the world. The people and the media tell us all the time, "It's normal." Yes, it might be normal in this world but these things are not conform to God's norm or standards. But it is God's standards that will become normal – as soon as Jesus comes back. Therefore, we shall be holy because the coming Lord is holy.

	2. passions of ignorance
→ self control	1. mind, thinking

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→ overcome addictions	2. passions-of-ignorance
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Third Step

1 Peter 1,18-19 reveals the third step to holiness.

*1 Peter 1,18-19: knowing that you were ransomed from the **fruitless ways inherited from your forefathers** (πατροπαραδότου = fathers), not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

We shall overcome *the fruitless ways inherited from your forefathers*. In the Greek text we read only about *fathers*. *Forefathers* is an interpretation by the translators. The meaning of this sentence implies several things.

For some of us there is no distinction between the *passions of ignorance* and the ways from our fathers or mothers. My father for example taught me the passions of ignorance.

But most fathers teach their children good things. Yet no one is perfect. Neither are fathers or mothers. Parents fail. That's the reality. They passed onto us not only good things but also attitudes and habits that aren't helpful. We have to overcome such unhealthy things. If your father was an angry man, you may think that to get angry is normal and OK. It is not. "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (Jacob 1,20) Perhaps your father worked very hard and taught you with his way of life that you have to earn God's approval. To realize that we all have to struggle with fruitless ways from fathers or forefathers is a first step to be aware that we have blind spots. Thus, a good prayer could be: Lord Jesus, please show us "the log that is in our own eye" (Mt 7,3).

	3. fruitless ways from fathers
→ overcome addictions	2. passions-of-ignorance
→ self control	1. mind, thinking

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→ overcome upbringing	3. fruitless-ways-from-fathers
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Fourth Step

The next step to holiness isn't that obvious.

1 Peter 1,20-21: He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

It's through the resurrection and glorification of Jesus that we believe and hope in God. On Easter we celebrate the power of resurrection. It's the most important feast in Christianity. But we should not underestimate the significance of Jesus' glory. The glory defines the character and culture of eternal life, and through Jesus we can experience his glory already in this life (John 5,24), as Jesus lived in glory even before his resurrection (John 12,28).

In John 17,22-23a Jesus says:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Jesus prayed for the unity of Christians. For this unity he gave us his glory. Without his glory we'll have great difficulty to be one. Why?

To answer this question I have to explain to you the *Sinking Island Syndrome*. You don't know this syndrome? Don't be surprised. The *Sinking Island Syndrome* is my own invention. I created this expression to explain a strange thing in the gospels. The disciples of Jesus used to ask which one would be the greatest. The strange thing is that they asked this question in the most embarrassing moments. It always happened after Jesus had predicted his suffering/death. When I realized that, I asked myself: Why would the disciples ask such a question always after Jesus' prediction of his death?

I came to the conclusion: After Jesus' prediction of death the disciples had the feeling to live on a foundation that will soon drown like a sinking island. Perhaps you object, "But Jesus didn't just predict his death. He also predicted his resurrection." Yes, that's true. But the disciples didn't get the meaning of resurrection. Obviously they only heard "death". And they concluded: Jesus, the foundation of their lives will soon drown. Thus everyone did what every animal would do: Climbing on the top of the sinking island. Because "the greatest one will drown last".

This habit of mankind is the reason why we need glory for the unity of Christians. Only when we know that our foundation won't drown at all, we will quit to strive for better places. Instead, our faith and hope will be in God. In God's new world the lowest will be the greatest and the greatest will be the lowest. God's glory will relieve the true values. God's glory changes the world top-down and bottom-up. When we relate to his glory already in this life, then we will be satisfied/pleased also with lower places. This attitude, it's called humility, is a requirement to serve our brothers and sisters. Only humility will give us the strength to overcome envy!

→ overc. <i>Sinking Island Syndrome</i>	4. glory, envy
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John 17,22-23: I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity.



Sinking Island Syndrome

↓

second prediction of suffering/death (Mark 9,30-32):
Who is the greatest? (Mark 9,34)

third prediction of suffering/death (Mark 10,32-34):
Jacob and John ask for best places. (Mark 10,37)

Lord's Supper (Luke 22,19-20):
Who is the greatest? (Luke 22,24)



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Fifth Step

The brotherly love is the last step in 1 Peter 1,13-22.

*1 Peter 1,22: Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, **love one another deeply**, from the heart.*

Shouldn't the love for *everybody* be the final point? In reality we can't separate the brotherly love from the love for everyone because brotherly love is the most effective way to help not only our neighbors but to change the whole world. You're skeptical? So was I. But let us read John 17,22-23 once again.

*John 17,22-23: I have given them the **glory** that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete **unity**. **Then** the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

The glory leads to unity and unity will convince the world that Jesus is God's Son and that we are his people. Jesus didn't speak much about methods. But here he did. The formula to effective evangelism starts with glory. Jesus' glory leads to unity and unity will convince the world.

Now we realize the kind of glory which Jesus speaks about in John 17,22-23. It is a glory that changes our character. It is the change of our character into God's image that enables unity which will convince the world.

Summary

So we have at least five steps to go. Where are you struggling right now? Do you want to go one step further? Or perhaps you have to go back a step to secure your foundation by overcoming passions of ignorance or futile ways from your father or forefathers. If you know what you have to do then I challenge you to stand up while I'm praying. When you are determined to go a step further in your sanctification then please stand up right now. Of course you can also come forward to the mercy seat. Please feel free. Just do what your heart tells you right now.

Lord Jesus. Thank you so much that you came to rescue us. We believe in you and you gave us your Holy Spirit to overcome sin and bad habits. We don't have to fight with our own limited strength. We rely on your power. And in your power we will go a step further.

Jesus, please come into our lives. Pick us up where we are right now. Lead us nearer to you and to your heavenly father. Give us the grace to overcome obstacles. We are willing to cut off sinful thoughts. We are willing to overcome passions of ignorance. We are willing to overcome futile ways from our parents and forefathers. We want to rely on your glory and overcome envy. We want to strive for brotherly love. Please teach us your ways! We are yours! As we stand here we confirm: We are determined to follow you on your ways. Amen.

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