

Christ's Last Words to His Church Series: His Powerful, Penetrating & Purifying Gaze

Christ's Ancient Power and Absolute Purity
& Our Progressive Sanctification

Revelation 1:14

As we open to Revelation 1:14 this is the second set of twin descriptions of Christ: His head and hair are white, like wool and snow; and His eyes are like burning flames of fire.

When John turned to see who it was that spoke to him, he turned and so the Ancient of Days Himself, in all His power, in all His holiness, and with those eyes ablaze with an inescapable and penetrating gaze. That is how Jesus Christ the Risen Lord appears at this moment, as we gather before Him. Let that sight get imprinted upon your heart:

Christ's Flaming Eyes of Penetrating Holiness

In the Old Testament world, and the New Testament era, white signified purity as well as signifying great age. By combining head, hair, snow, and wool we see a picture of Christ's being both the all-powerful Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9-10) as well as the pure and holy One. The first point John makes as he details Christ's appearance is to emphasize:

The eyes as a flame of fire speak of both power and purity. We see portrayed both the purifying work of fire as well as the unquenchable power of fire. Fires that are allowed to burn hot enough can refine and purifying metals such as silver, gold, brass, and iron.

The same fires can consume, and eat through even to the weakening of metal and crumbling of rock. When fires powerful flames are combined with the idea of Christ's eyes, it speaks of an unstoppable, all-powerful, purifying gaze.

Remember this is the second set of twin descriptions of Christ. Our loving, merciful God first reminded us in v. 13 that He is supremely the Compassionate Priest: "One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band."

Jesus is always first the One we can come to, cry out to, and share our struggles with.

Hold on in your hearts to this great truth: Jesus does not condemn, rather He showers us with compassion and intercession. Always remember:

Christ's Arms of Compassion and Love

So God first wants us as His servants who struggle through life to see: Jesus is a Compassionate Priest who ever lives to pray, encourage, help, and encourage us in our walk through life for Him.

This morning we are God's servants, and He wants us to understand this second facet of Christ's character that will focus and change us as we meditate upon Him.

Revelation 1:14-17. Stand with me, and as I read, notice what John saw about Jesus.

*Revelation 1:14-17 **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.***

Pray

The sight of Jesus looking at us with those power-filled, fiery eyes is not immediately a comforting sight.

But it is a truth we need to understand and respond to. As the Psalmist says about Christ's coming: mercy and truth have met in Jesus (Psalm 85:10).

We must never forget that there is only one of God's attributes that is stated in triplicate. You know which one I mean, right? Both Isaiah in chapter 6, and here in Revelation 4:8 we hear the anthem of Heaven, repeated over and over again around the Throne:

Holy, Holy, Holy is how that attribute is declared.

We never see God surrounded by angels singing Sovereign, Sovereign, Sovereign.

Nor do we see them saying a three-fold Omnipotence, any other attribute.

The compassionate, lovingly gentle intercessor of v. 13 is also the all-powerful Ancient of Days who with His white head and hair, and piercing eyes seeks to refine all sin from our lives.

This description of our Savior here in His Church calls us to deeply ponder the desire God has for our holiness.

This picture of Revelation 1:14 declares that:

Jesus Desires my Sanctification: Are you Experiencing Christ's Holiness?

v. 14a His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,"

When we see God represented by Christ in the Old Testament He is called the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7), and He is described as "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isaiah 6).

This description of Christ combines those two elements into one.

The Ancient aspect and the Holy aspect are combined into a white head and hair, as white as wool and snow.

Jesus always kept this holiness aspect before His disciples as He spoke of His plans for them, and us.

- Do you remember when He promised the Comforter who would come to them, that Jesus described Him as the **HOLY** Spirit (John 14:26; 16:7-14).
- Do you remember what Jesus said to the disciples after the Resurrection? *Receive the **HOLY** Spirit (John 20:22).*
- Then, just before His Ascension, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46; Acts 1:4-8) before they did anything else for the coming of the what? The coming of the **HOLY** Spirit.
- Finally, on the Day of Pentecost God poured out His what (Acts 2:4)? He poured out the **HOLY** Spirit upon Christ's Church.

Notice what the first part of the Name of the third person of the Trinity always is: the **HOLY** Spirit.

So it is the Spirit of God living within us that is to cause us more and more to reflect the Holiness of Christ. He is the Spirit that causes Holiness, and He sent to live with us.

Christ's flaming eyes are representing His desire that we experience the purifying work of His Spirit at every level of our lives.

The workings of the Spirit inside of believers is not automatic. God's plans for our earthly sanctification must be unleashed by our participation.

God has chosen for the Spirit of God to reflect His pleasure with our faith and obedience, or His displeasure with our unbelief and disobedience.

That is the work of sanctification.

Sanctification Means Purity of Mind & Body

Since the Third Person of the Godhead is usually introduced by the word "Holy" before the word "Spirit", it is clearly His primary ministry to purge and cleanse saints from their sins. The work of the Spirit is described as sanctification, or increasing our individual conduct in holiness or godlikeness.

When we are saved it is the Holy Spirit that does the complete cleansing of our hearts and lives, totally severing all the connections that had fed the lusts of habitual sin that characterized our pre-salvation lives.

Paul describes this sanctifying work to the new believers in Corinth by reminding them that, "You were washed, *you were sanctified*, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and *in the Spirit of our God*" (1Cor. 6:11; see also Titus 3:5).

During the ministry of John the Baptist one promise he made was that Christ's coming would bring the work of the Spirit with fire. That metaphor of fire pointed to the cleansing and purifying work that Jesus would bring when people were saved and baptized "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

When the Spirit of God is present He empowers us to reflect God more and more. Paul summarizes the direction of a believer's life as "being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another," we should be reminded that "this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Remember that God never commands me to do what He hasn't already given me the grace to accomplish by faith through His Spirit! Listen again to the theological description of this powerful doctrine:

*"Our participation in the process of **sanctification** comes only after we've been totally accepted and made right before God through faith in Jesus.*

So yes, we work hard at obeying God's word. We read our Bibles. We pray. We meditate on Scripture. We memorize Scripture. We share the gospel. We serve in our church. We fast.

God commands us in His Word to do many things, and our obedience is both pleasing to Him and brings His blessing to our lives. But not one adds to our justification, our standing before God, our eternal life.

*Only grace sustains lasting change and **sanctification**. Through the cross we overcome not only the guilt of sin, but the power of sin as well¹.*

We can not sanctify ourselves, we must rely upon and desire for the Spirit of God to

¹] C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

conquer more parts of our lives by His power (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2, cf. Rom. 8:4; 15-16), so that we realize each time we face the tug of sin, and feel the coldness to spiritual things that sinful desires, attitudes, and choices bring: we respond “*by the Spirit*”. When we ask the Spirit to “protect me” we find we are able to “put to death the deeds of the body”. That is what growing in personal holiness is all about (Rom. 8:13; see 7:6; Phil. 1:19).²

When Jesus was describing the salvation He purchased for us on the Cross, He used the simile of the Spirit being ‘like a powerful river’. Salvation means we have more than we could ever need when the Holy Spirit resides within, not less. So John 7:39 means we would be able to feel and know, and others would notice also the powerful work of God’s Spirit pouring out into our daily lives.

Sanctification Means the Blessings of God Are Tied to Our Responses

Throughout the Bible we see examples of the Spirit of God blessing or removing blessing based on whether the events pleased or displeased Him.

But it is most clearly stated in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit can be so grieved that He ceases to bless those that grieve Him.

- Paul warns the Ephesian Christians, “Do not *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30), and exhorts the Thessalonian church, “Do not *quench the Spirit*” (1 Thess. 5:19).
- Paul gives a serious warning to Christians not to defile their bodies because the Holy Spirit lives within their bodies: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).³

Our choices will either grieve and offend the Holy Spirit’s work in us, or they will please and unleash His further work.

God the Holy Spirit does not force us to obey Him (see 1 Cor. 14:32).

But when we resist what He desires to do, He withdraws the blessings He was prepared to pour out upon us. The motivation for sanctification comes as we remember this sight of Christ:

² Paraphrased from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, p. 639-44. Other elements of the atmosphere that the Holy Spirit can impart are truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:7), wisdom (Deut. 34:9; Isa. 11:2), comfort (Acts 9:31), freedom (2 Cor. 3:17), righteousness (Rom. 14:17), hope (Rom. 15:13; cf. Gal. 5:5), an awareness of sonship or adoption (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:5-6), and even glory (2 Cor. 3:8). The Holy Spirit also brings unity (Eph. 4:3), and power (Acts 1:18; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:7; cf. Acts 1:8).

³ Excerpts from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, p. 647. It is noteworthy that Jesus was completely without sin and the Holy Spirit “remained on him” (John 1:32) and was given to him without measure (John 3:34). Poured out blessings are seen in: Judg. 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14 vs. withdrawn blessings as we see in: Judg. 16:20; 1 Sam. 16:14; Isa. 63:10.

His Eyes Can See Me Always: Christ's Penetrating Gaze

v. 14b "His eyes like a flame of fire".

Jesus wants us to see that He is watching for us to respond to the Holy Spirit, so that we reflect His purity, His power, and His Holiness. That reflection is called our sanctification.

The more we reflect His Holiness the more sanctified we've become, the less we reflect His Holiness, the less sanctified we have become.

Our final passage is First Thessalonians 5:23, if you'll turn there in your Bible we are going to read the sanctification plan God gave to Paul.

The Lord wanted to start a recovery program in a rough, tough, vice-filled, seaport city named Thessalonica.

In AD 50 or 51, the Gospel had arrived in this thriving commercial transportation hub where intercontinental caravans met at the docks of a huge seaport. In less than three weeks, a group of drunkards, sex-addicts, greedy and dishonest business people, as well as normal well-adjusted lost pagans and Jews had come to Christ.

What did God tell Paul to do? Teach the new saints the truth of Sanctification.

Before we read this Scripture, repeat these 5 words after me: "God's Recovery Program is Sanctification", okay, here we go: (repeat).

Now listen to that Sanctifying Recovery Program God designed:

First Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The moment salvation began in those lives, the sanctification work had also begun.

God's plan for every believer is always sanctification.

Why not choose right now, as if you were on a bench in the Thessalonian church, and Paul was speaking and reminding you of the eyes of Jesus powerfully, penetratingly burning with purifying power.

If we could have heard Paul applying this verse 23 in the last chapter of First Thessalonians, we know based on the truths of sanctification he taught everywhere else, it would have sounded like this. In fact, why not make this a time when each of us say to the Lord, this is:

My Surrender to Personal Sanctification

God desires that each of us surrender to this process He wants to use right now, to make us useful and fruitful to Him:

“Sanctification is a process of becoming more like Christ, of growing in holiness. This process begins the instant you are converted and will not end until you meet Jesus face-to-face. Sanctification is about our own choices and behavior.

It involves work. Empowered by God's Spirit, we strive. We fight sin. We study Scripture and pray, even when we don't feel like it. We flee temptation. We press on; we run hard in the pursuit of holiness⁴.”

Sanctification is like being healthy spiritually. Just like our body needs proper nutrients combined with exercise, so our souls need regular intake of the Word mixed with choices to obey.

These two elements: the Word and active obedience to the Word is how the Holy Spirit works. He uses the power of His Word and fellowship with other believers, to peel away our desires for sin, renews our minds, and changes our lives.

The sight of Jesus looking at us with those power-filled, fiery eyes is not immediately a comforting sight. But it is a truth we need to understand and respond to.

The compassionate, lovingly gentle intercessor of v. 13 is also the all-powerful Ancient of Days who with His white head and hair, and piercing eyes seeks to refine all sin from our lives.

This description of our Savior here in His Church calls us to renew our desire to respond with these 4 choices to renew our sanctifying habits:

1. **I want to:** Listen to God DAILY through His Word.
2. **I want to:** Respond to God throughout the day in prayer.
3. **I want to:** Make sacred vows to obey.
4. **I want to:** Share those plans with another believer so they can encourage your walk.

Make those your offerings of obedience to God today!

⁴ C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

Appendix

Salvation is the start of a new life and walk, and as the Spirit of God lives within He longs for us to grow more and more into a holy lifestyle. One of the expressions of the Presence of the Spirit is described as the "*fruit of the Spirit*" within us ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control," Gal. 5:22-23).

One of the ways that non-believers described the New Testament believers is that they evidenced a power greater than them, at work within. People couldn't explain it, but they did see something that was unexplainable, and they saw it flowed from believers. As Jesus said at His birth, when He came it was to bring God to be with us, and it is by the Spirit flowing out of us like a mighty river that God chose as the vehicle.

Sanctification Displays God's Presence

The Holy Spirit is 100% Co-equal and Co-Eternal with God so He manifests all the attributes of God. The purpose of God's Spirit is to radiate through us God's Presence. Just like a phone receives and transmits the wireless signal, so we as believers can broadcast the Presence of God into each situation where the Spirit of God wants to make Him known. There are many ways God's Word describes this happening by the Spirit:

- Sometimes the Spirit of God makes an atmosphere of conviction, and people feel the weight of their sin (John 16:8-11).
- Other times the Spirit of God makes an atmosphere of love, and people feel God's loves poured out upon their hearts (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Col. 1:8).
- Sometimes the Spirit of God makes an atmosphere of joy that can be felt: "The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17; cf. Gal. 5:22).

Each time the Holy Spirit works He is making His Presence known by displaying His character through us as believers.

Sanctification: Gives Us Assurance

God's Word describes one of the chief benefits of the Spirit is assuring us, as He bears witness "with our spirits that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). The Holy Spirit gives evidence that God is at work within us: "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (1 John 3:24).

Not only does the Spirit testify that we have become the children of God, He also lets us know God is in us. This assurance transcends merely having intellectual perception, because when God overflows into our hearts we can perceive Him subjectively with the

emotions of joy and peace also.⁵

On the other hand, in the life of Christians whose conduct is pleasing to God, the Holy Spirit will be present to bring great blessing. We can know close fellowship and partnership with the Holy Spirit in our lives (2 Cor. 3:14; Phil. 2:1). In fact, so full and abundant will be his presence that Jesus could promise that he will flow out of our inmost being like “rivers of living water” (John 7:38-39).

Therefore it is important that all our ministry be done *in the Holy Spirit*, that is, that we consciously dwell in the Godlike atmosphere created by the Holy Spirit—the atmosphere of power, love, joy, truth, holiness, righteousness, and peace. But greater than these characteristics of the atmosphere created by the Holy Spirit is the sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit himself—to *be in the Holy Spirit is really to be in an atmosphere of God’s manifested presence*. This is why people in the New Testament can walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31), and why it is possible just to be “in the Spirit” as John was on the Lord’s day (Rev. 1:10; cf. 4:2).

It is surprising how many particular activities are said in the New Testament to be done “in” the Holy Spirit: it is possible to *rejoice* in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21), to *resolve* or decide something in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:21), to have one’s *conscience bear witness* in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1), to have *access to God* in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18), to *pray* in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20), and to *love* in the Holy Spirit (Col. 1:8). In the light of these texts, we might ask ourselves, for how many of these activities during each day are we consciously aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence and blessing?

It is also possible to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18; cf. Luke 1:15, 41, 67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9). To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the immediate presence of God himself, and it therefore will result in feeling what God feels, desiring what God desires, doing what God wants, speaking by God’s power, praying and ministering in God’s strength, and knowing with the knowledge which God himself gives. In times when the church experiences revival the Holy Spirit produces these results in people’s lives in especially powerful ways.

Therefore in our Christian lives it is important that we depend on the Holy Spirit’s power, recognizing that any significant work is done “Not by might, nor by power, *but by my Spirit*, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). Paul is emphatic in telling the Galatians that the Holy Spirit was received by faith in the beginning of their Christian life (Gal. 3:2) and would continue to work according to their faith in their lives subsequent to conversion: “Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?...Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal. 3:3, 5).

Therefore we are to walk according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:12-

⁵ Excerpts from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, p. 644.

16; Gal. 5:16-26) and set our minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-6). All our ministry, whatever form it may take, is to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁶

⁶ Excerpts from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem, p. 648-649 [670 words].