

Holiness

The stiff and wooden qualities about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire.

-A.W. Tozer

If Christians are asked “What is holiness?” Often the responses would be things like “godly living” or “moral actions.” Technically, holiness is defined as “apartness,” sacredness, or separateness.¹⁹ Separated from the common behavior is a good way to think about holiness. We are holy, when we live according to what God desires from us because we are not responding to our circumstances the way the common world does.

As was written before, practically, sin is withholding love. Therefore, holiness may be thought about as *loving thoughts, words and actions despite all consequences*. Loving actions are always moral actions. Loving actions are always holy.

God is perfect in holiness. God is absolutely set apart—in every way. Due to God’s uniqueness and our sinful natures, we may only be holy due to God’s equipping. When we think, speak and act like God, it is because of God. God equips us for holiness. It was God’s will to make us holy. It is God’s plan to

¹⁹ R. Laird Harris, et al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 786.

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make us holy. God executed His plan to make us holy.

It is the Spirit who produces fruit in our lives. It's because of Him that Christians have new desires and abilities to think like him, to speak as He would, and to act like Him. This is all due to what Paul identified as the key to Christian living when he wrote to two churches. To the church in Galatia Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). To the Philippians he wrote, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13, NKJV).

When Christians think of a "holy" person, we usually think of God. It is not a label we readily choose to use for ourselves. I don't recall a person ever describing themselves as holy. But we must realize that, we have the ability for holiness due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We know our sin nature is always lurking in our minds and hearts, and we are familiar with its draw and power. Nevertheless, we are called to be holy in all we do. Whether we are a widow, layperson, garbage collector, pastor, banker, or whatever our position, if we are a Christian, we are called to holiness in our actions.²⁰ Peter reminded the church of this when he wrote, "But, like the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in all of your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). Peter gave no restrictions to holiness. It is to be broad in scope and therefore, impact our everyday behavior. It should *affect every aspect of our lives*, including work, family, recreation, church life, and more.

Unfortunately, just as with the other virtues, holiness slips quickly. Our natural self is in direct opposition to holiness. Often, we give ourselves free passes. Therefore, all of our conduct requires a constant holiness check-up. For example, we tend to allow a sin like gossip into our life easily. Left unchecked it may become a part of our everyday action. The Bible instructs us to, "... let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29b). We may also allow unforgiveness to live in our hearts, but the Bible teaches us, "... be kind to one another, compassionate,

²⁰ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 21.

forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32). When we stop regularly looking at ourselves carefully, holiness will soon slip into the background of our interactions with one another. Also, when we are constantly evaluating others, we will be drifting from holiness ourselves. A constant critical nature towards others is much of our problem.

Apartness

Since Christians are supposed to be set apart, what is it we are supposed to be set apart from? The answers, generally speaking, are common behaviors, responses, immorality, and the world’s ways. “For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Cultures are filled with depravity, and press in on the minds and hearts of Christians daily, deteriorating our biblical doctrine and holiness. We witness this daily in cultural compromises of great denominations. We also see these compromises in our lives and our brothers’ and sisters’ lives as well. Compromises start slowly, but they gain speed and territory in our hearts quickly. They can start with ideas of, “Let’s go with the flow,” “Let’s be accepting,” “Let’s not be intolerant.” All these may be okay in certain situations, but we should not be naive. The world desires to replace biblical holiness with its idea of *kindness*. Today this kindness can only be described as being categorically opposed to biblical doctrine.

James wrote about this to address the Church’s naivete in his day with, “Do you not know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever decides to be the world’s friend makes himself God’s enemy.” (James 4:4 b). Many a local *modern church* has tried to have it both ways. The biblical doctrine states that we must choose who we are going to serve: the world (and its ideas and culture) or apartness from the world. The Church should be distinct. We, as individuals, must also decide. We choose in every situation.

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Practical Holiness

God's perfect holiness is static; it never changes. But too often, Christians are adopting common ideas from their cultures for their new, personal definitions of holiness. Some are beginning to deny a standard for holiness at all! They instead are succumbing to moral relativism that has prevailed in many institutions and media outlets in our society for many decades.

Some are shifting their moral compasses —at least publicly—so they are not ridiculed, singled out, or do not suffer in some way.

Christians must take heart and submit to God's standards of holiness/morality as defined by the Bible. We as Christians will have to decide in the days ahead who we are going to follow: the world or God. We need to continue to speak the truth in love.

Dedicated/Consecrated

Holiness sets us apart for dedicated service.

Let us make no mistake: we participate in the process of holiness. God does the work, gets the credit, and, therefore, He gets the glory, but we are active in the process as well. We are as holy as we want to be right now.

Paul instructed the young preacher Timothy in this way,

“Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:20-21, ESV).

Paul used a metaphor of a “great house” to describe Christians. We must continuously get rid of the wood and clay items of our lives—the unholy items—to be useful to God. Only the dedicated/holy items can make us useful to God. It is only the holy things we do that strengthen our usefulness to God. If we are actively choosing worldliness, we may rest assured that God will not

use us as He would have otherwise. Our level of usefulness to God is directly tied to our commitment to our holiness.

All of our being and all of our actions should be the goal of holiness. One of Paul's most quoted passages of Scripture is, "Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2). Our bodies (our entire self) are supposed to be a consecrated (set apart) sacrifice to God.

Serious Sanctification

Holiness sanctifies us. Sanctification is a broad topic and we have space here to cover one aspect of it.

The Bible teaches that all Christians are going to be judged. Every thought, word, motive, and deed will be evaluated (cf., 1 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 22:12). Every word, thought, or deed brings either life and kingdom advancement and will be rewarded or is a dead work and will be "burned up" (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). So our sanctification, as it is used here, are those collective, saved, holy moments from the time we were born again (when the Holy Spirit came into our beings) until the time of our deaths. These moments—again—are a product of God, but we participate in the process in essential ways. To increase our saved moments, or our sanctification, we need to learn and remember these things:

- We quickly confess our sins to God (our worldly, fleshly participation).
- We remember what God has said about His people, holiness and His kingdom that contradicts our base desires and lifestyles (Bible verses that speak directly to our sinful choices).
- We repent (we change our minds toward our sinful choices again and commit to God's standards).
- We continually commit and recommit to holiness and humble ourselves.

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- We ask God to change our actions as we submit to the process.
- We rely entirely on God to change us.
- We need to add personal “exertion and work as well as faith” to the process.²¹ It is hard to die to ourselves.

Paul wrote to the Roman church, “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” (Romans 6:19b). Only the words, thoughts, and actions that are holy honor God and shine light into darkness. “We must face the fact that we have a personal responsibility for our walk of holiness.”²² In addition, we are not to make excuses for our sin. “We must take our sin more seriously, expeditiously seeking to remove it from our hearts and minds” by confessing what is our sin and seeking God’s help for holiness.²³

Adam and Eve took a bite of a piece of fruit in their disobedience. They almost assuredly thought, “How bad could it be?” Oh that they would have seen the consequences of their sin! Do we see clearly the consequences of our sin?

One of the persistent problems in our responsibility of being sanctified is that we put up with certain sins; we conclude through inaction that our sins “aren’t that bad.” Sin is bad...period.

The list of our sins we tolerate as individuals could be lengthy: things like unwholesome talk, bitterness, unforgiveness, gossip, deceit, porn, fornication, and adultery. What are the sins you are living with today? These are your opportunities for change.

²¹ J. C. Ryle, as quoted in Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 17.

²² Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 17.

²³ Person email from Trent Jenkins to Monte Robinson.

Self-righteousness

We should not become haughty as God changes us. There is a real temptation to forget it is God who changes us. We don't change ourselves. If we forget this we will begin to think and act like the self-righteous Pharisees. We start thinking we are better than lost people and even condemn them. This verse is all we need to put our thinking right in regard to our nature apart from God: "Just as Isaiah predicted, 'If the Lord of armies had not left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have resembled Gomorrah'" (Romans 9:29). If the Lord were to remove Himself from the earth, all of humankind ends up in the same sinful situations. There is no room for pride in our holiness messaging. God makes us holy through His initiative, His work, His Scriptures, and His power. Therefore, humbly we should share the message of salvation with the understanding in all sinful things, "But by the grace of God go I."²⁴

Judging the Lost

Scripture commands us not to judge those outside the Church. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "For what do I have to do with judging those outside [the church]? Are you not to judge those inside? But God will judge those outside. Remove the evil person from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:12, 13). Constable's comments are good here:

"Paul's authority as an apostle did not extend to 'judging' and prescribing discipline on unbelievers ('outsiders') for their sins. He did, of course, assess the condition of unbelievers (e.g., Rom. 1; et al.), but that is not what is in view here. His disciplining ministry, and the ministry of other Christians in judging and disciplining sin, took place only within church

²⁴ A variation of "There but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford", in reference to a group of prisoners being led to execution. Attributed (although uncertain) to John Bradford (1510–1555). See "there but for the grace of God go," accessed April 24, 2020, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/there_but_for_the_grace_of_God_go_I.

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life. 'Judging' here means more than criticizing. It involves disciplining, too, as the context shows."²⁵

Failure Awaits

All of our actions can be transformed by holiness. With that said, we remain daily susceptible to failure and immorality as we are housed in these mortal bodies. In these bodies, sin remains crouching and ready to wrestle itself back into play. We need God's grace always, and yet, God commands us to be holy. We will need God's grace at death as much as we need it now. But the right thing to do today and every other is to continue to ask for help from God daily to mold us into the image of His Son.

Scripture Passages

Romans 7:14-20

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

Questions and Exercise

1) Look at the Romans 7:12-20 passage. We are reminded that the flesh will have some weight in our lives as it did for Paul. There is grace for us in these moments. But Paul also wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, that we should separate from and not even have lunch with those that would call themselves Christians and are engaging in the sins he listed for the Church. Write out a short paragraph to balance these ideas.

²⁵ Thomas Constable, "1 Corinthians Notes," accessed Oct. 23, 2019, <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1corinthians.pdf>, 94, 95.

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

2) Being honest, what are things you regularly do that you know are unholy.

Write a number for every one of them or use tally marks.

3) What is your number one weakness in the area of holiness?

4) What could you do today to break yourself from these sins?

Aim Point

1) Go to BibleGateway and search the word holy. Print some verses that stand out to you. Place them where you will see and read them this next week.

2) If you would like to read more on the topic of holiness, I recommend Jerry Bridges' book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*.