



WEEK 6 - Holiness

INTRODUCTION

In his book on *The Holiness of God*, R.C. Sproul writes, "One of the strange facts of history is the consistently good reputation Jesus of Nazareth enjoys even with unbelievers. It is rare for an unbeliever to speak unkindly of Jesus. People who are openly hostile to the church and who hold Christians in contempt are often unsparing in their praise for Jesus."

It is almost universally acknowledged that Jesus Christ is winsome. Winsome is one of those words that sounds exactly like what it means. It means to have a warm personality,

to be someone people are attracted to because of how you treat them. In other words, you win some with your actions toward them. As followers of Christ we should also be winsome.

Now, when we think of the word holy, we generally don't associate that word with being winsome. It often has negative connotations, like holier than thou or being self-righteous. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that is often opposed to holiness, which is why many people admire Jesus from a distance.

What comes to mind when you hear the word holy? For some of us what comes to mind is probably impossibility. For others, moral purity. If you don't have a Christian background maybe someone like Ghandi comes to mind. Maybe you see a holy person as someone who has committed their life to a worthy cause.

Now, there's a little truth in all those answers to holiness. We will never stop struggling with sin until we die. So, the impossibility people have a point. Jesus was without sin, so holiness has a moral purity to it. So, the moral purity people have a point. But holiness also

means to be separated. In our case, we are set aside or separated for God's will or His cause. So, the commitment to a worthy cause people have a point.

It's important for us to understand what holiness is because God says, "You shall be holy, because I am holy."

Sproul also points out that holiness is the only character trait that God emphasizes about Himself in triplicate.

The angels cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Holiness is the only attribute of God that is emphasized in this Hebrew way, to the third degree. "Only once is a characteristic of God mentioned three times in succession." No where does it say He is love, love, love. It doesn't even say He is grace, grace, grace. But it does say He is holy, holy, holy, that the whole earth is full of His glory.

And then we're told that we should be holy because He is holy. Now, is that even possible?

I mean, if God is impossible to please, then why try? Why attempt obedience if He can't

be pleased? If all our righteous acts are filthy rags, then why strive for holiness? Why try to live a holy life?

If those questions express your thinking concerning holiness, then you are probably a very discouraged Christian.

Today, my hope is that you will leave a very encouraged Christian, which many will think an impossible task being that's today's topic is holiness. How can you expect people who hear a sermon on holiness to leave encouraged?

Well, today we're going to look at four components of holiness — the possibility of holiness, the purity of holiness and the partition of holiness.

1 Point #1 - The foundation of your personal holiness is

your positional holiness.

1 Corinthians 6:11

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Isaiah 61:10

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

2 Point #2 - The second component of holiness is radical otherness.

This is the partition of holiness.

During His earthly ministry, here we have Jesus Christ, the holiest person who ever lived, because you can't get more holy than living a sinless life — and yet sinners ran to Him. People with the lowest reputations sought Him out, because Jesus cared for people. He healed many of them. He had compassion on them and was willing to help them.

That is our initial reaction to Jesus. We go to Him to meet some need in our lives. And we find that He is there.

- We generally don't seek out Jesus because we're so broken over having sinned against Him. More often than not, we don't even seek Him for the sake of knowing the truth about Him. We go to Him to have a relationship restored or to save our marriage or to meet some emotional or physical need we have.

But we go to Jesus Christ because He is unlike anyone else who ever lived. We go to Him because He is the risen Christ. But this is the first component of holiness — radical otherness.

The Apostle Peter shows us what happens when we begin to understand who Jesus is, to see just how radically different He is than everyone else.

Luke 5:4-11

4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

They became holy unto Jesus. They separated their lives for Christ. No longer is my life for seeking fame and fortune or financial security or career advancement. It is now for Christ. We are radically set aside for the purposes of Christ. That's the first component of personal holiness.

Now this is vital. We must have a right understanding of who Jesus is, because when we have a right understanding of Jesus we begin to see that we deserve nothing and that's why His grace is amazing. That's where we have to begin because holiness is one of the most difficult subjects to get right in practice.

You are now separated for God's purposes.

3 Point #3 - Holiness is possible for all Christians.

1 Peter 1:14-16

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

EXPLANATION

Peter is simply saying that our conduct should reflect God's own nature. "God reveals the nature of holiness by His Word."

Let's turn to one of the most quoted Bible verses regarding unholiness. It's often used to beat Christians over the head with how unholy they are and how impossible it is to please God.

First, that is not the intent of this verse. However well-meaning the teachers and preachers using this verse have been — they have left a pile of downcast Christians in their wake. Or they have helped perpetuate common misconceptions about holiness, the primary misconception being that holiness is impossible.

Isaiah 64:6

6 We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf,

and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV)

6 But we are all like an unclean *thing*,
And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.

And then, after quoting this verse, what is often said is, “Nothing I do can please God. All my righteous deeds are like filthy rags to Him.”

Well, that is quite an encouraging thought. It's makes me want to rush out and write an inspirational calendar. What exactly are we inspiring people to do here? Slit their wrists?

Let's look at this verse in context.

Isaiah 64:4-6

4 From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.

This is a God who takes action on your behalf. That's comforting to know when you're having a bad day.

5 You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

This is a person who is joyfully doing the will of God. And God meets him. God takes joy in your every act of obedience. Let me take that further. God takes joy in your every act of obedience, no matter how imperfect.

It's not impossible to please God. Have you done anything to love your neighbor recently? Well, that pleases God, because He says to love your neighbor. Have you prayed for anyone recently? Well, that pleases God, because He says to pray for all people.

ILLUSTRATION

Let me ask you something, if you have children. Are you a better parent than God? Even if you don't have kids, do you think you would make a better parent than God? What do the Scriptures say? “If you being evil know how to love your kids...” Right?

Our youngest has a chore list. It's divided into four sections — I Take Care of Myself (this is hygiene, an area I'm still not sure children should have any control over), I Take Care of

My Room, I Help Around My Home and Other Things I Need to Do.

Now, when children begin to brush their own hair and pick out their own clothes, you are about to be embarrassed in public.

But we don't mind. Why? Because we're not cool anymore? That's part of it. But we love the attempt, however imperfect. We don't belittle how they make their bed, because we know it's still better than what dad can do. We know that in time their skillset will develop.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "How good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with. He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even this He does with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son who is coming every day to look more and more like the One whose child he is."

How unlike many of our notions about God? Some of us have the idea that God is the consummate hard to please parent. "Can't you do anything right? Look at how crooked

your blanket is hanging. Did your dad make this bed?"

5 You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways.

The gospel not only restores a right image of God. It restores a right image of ourselves in God's sight. Knowing how far we have fallen shows us how far grace has reached down. This is why Peter and the other Apostles didn't give up after they recognized the depths of their sinfulness in light of Jesus, because of how Jesus treated them. "Don't be afraid. I've got a plan for you."

APPLICATION

So, the Law leads to grace and grace leads to holiness. "Excuse me? What'd you say? How's that?"

Again, when we measure ourselves against the uncompromising standard of the Law, we glimpse our unholiness. Or if we happen to be fishing with Jesus. Then grace floods us with the free gift of salvation. This God who says, "I see how far you have fallen and I will go even further to win you back. I will pour out my grace upon you and then I will pour out more grace upon you. When I see you fail, I

will pour out my grace. When I see you turn away, I will pour out my grace. When I see you doubt, I will pour out my grace. When I see you discouraged, I will pour out my grace.”

4 Point #4 - The fourth component of holiness is moral purity.

EXPLANATION

Not only is your purpose separate, but so is your life.

Therefore, in light of the grace of God...

Romans 12:1

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers,

The Apostle Paul just spent eleven chapters explaining the gospel, explaining how God has poured out His grace in what Christ has done.

Think of it this way. If you tried to make yourself acceptable to God on the basis of your own righteous acts, you would find that they do not add up to enough. Let's say you could buy God's acceptance based upon your righteous deeds. Well, you would find that you cannot come up with enough righteous deeds to buy your way into heaven. In comparison to the Law, your deeds are like a filthy rag.

But the gospel doesn't end there. God, in His grace, sent His Son who paid the price you couldn't pay. His life is totally equal to the task. Not only did He pay your debt of sin, but then God gave you as a gift the righteousness of Christ, so that in the eyes of the Father you are as righteous as His Son. And He put His Spirit in you so that you have this desire to please God.

And how do you please God? By believing Him. And without faith it is impossible to please God. You have to believe Him first. That's the gospel. And then how do you progress? How do you grow in holiness? You continue to believe Him.

APPLICATION

John 6:28-29

28 Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

How do you grow in holiness? You continue to believe Him. Grace leads to holiness. That’s what Paul is saying here in Romans. “Because of grace, therefore...”

Romans 12:1

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,

Because of God’s grace. Do you believe He sent His Son for you? Do you believe He died for you? Do you believe He loves you? Do you believe He says to you, “Do not fear.” Do you believe He says to you, “I will make you fishers of men and women.” Do you believe He gives you good gifts? If you believe that, then I appeal to you...

to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Grace leads to holiness.

God says that you can be holy and acceptable to Him. When God says, “Be holy

for I am holy,” He says that because it’s possible. If it wasn’t possible, it would make God a liar.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (NET Bible)

23 Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is trustworthy, and he will in fact do this.

OBJECTIONS

But how many Christians have you heard utter this phrase in false humility? “There’s nothing we can do to please God. All our righteousness is filthy rags.”

Not so. If God says a dad can make a bed, then a dad can make a bed.

There seem to be two extremes on this subject of holiness.

One camp claims that we can’t do anything, so “just rest in the gospel and you’ll kind of just become different than you are.” It’s the holiness by osmosis group. “Just meditate on the gospel and you’ll be a better husband. Or

at least you won't feel guilty for being a bad one."

And the other extreme which says, "Holiness is impossible, but we have to try harder."

One group seems to be saying, "Holiness is impossible, so why try." And the other group seems to be saying, "Holiness is impossible, to try harder."

The problem with both groups is neither is biblical. The Bible doesn't sound like either one of those groups.

Isaiah 64:5

⁵ You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

God meets this person. God comes to this person. This would indicate that His presence is experienced. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Joyfully work righteousness and He will draw near to you. Remember His ways and He will draw near to you.

This isn't working to get grace. It's working to get nearness. But this is something we have to develop a hunger for.

J.C. Ryle wrote, "There is more holiness to be attained, and more of heaven to be enjoyed upon earth than most believers now experience."

Romans 12:1

¹² I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

How you live your life is worship. In other words, holiness is worship. Setting your life aside for God and thinking your thoughts based upon His revealed will, basing everything about who you are upon Him — that's holiness.

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Not only does the Bible sound like this is something God will empower us to do, but it sounds like something God commands us to do.

This is what makes these characterizations even worse, because the first camp is saying, "Holiness is impossible, so ignore God's

commands.” While the second camp is saying, “Holiness is impossible, so God has made unreasonable demands.”

Isaiah 64:5-6

5 You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?

6 We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.