

The Price tag of Holiness

Welcome back to Walking with Christ! Last week, God set the bar high! We heard His challenge to each of us, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” If you’re like me, you found yourself being challenged and your conscious speaking louder than ever this week! Things that never bothered me *before* got held up to this new standard of holiness. Every day brings countless opportunities and challenges to practice holiness! In fact, just this morning as I was preparing for this talk, a pastor-friend of mine called and gave me permission to share *his* challenge. He was studying for his weekly sermon, when he was joined in the living room by a friend of his daughter. She had come over for a slumber party and was the first to wake up. He tells it like this: “Since I wasn’t using the TV, she asked if she could watch a particular program that she never misses at home. Having never seen the show, but knowing her parents allowed it at their home, I told her, ‘Sure!’ Well, for the next half hour, I took notes on this show that, *Lord willing*, MY daughter will never see...and I went back and forth in my mind on the course of action I should take. As the profanity continued I couldn’t concentrate. Living a life of holiness is tough! Part of me wanted to launch into a commentary on the show’s vileness, and how **low** our world’s standards have become. Another part of me wanted to turn it off, even as I debated on how I could use it as a learning experience. ‘I’m not her parent,’ I reasoned, ‘and won’t her parents consider me ‘judgmental’ if I impose my standards on her?’”
(Pause as talk now becomes first person)

My friend was right: we’re faced with some tough decisions. But, one thing is certain: the more we become like God...and the better *disciples* we become...the more **ungodliness** will grate against our spirits! My friend continued his note-taking and, by the way, was able to have a good talk about morality with the girls. But here’s what he found is just a click away, and being watched **daily** by children and adults alike: In this **30 minute sitcom**, there were 14 comments about illicit sex, 7 regarding living together outside of marriage, 2 regarding a homosexual lifestyle, 4 regarding male genitals, and 2 cases of lying. We saw spouses disrespecting each other, numerous off-color “jokes”, a reference to incontinence and a drunk bar scene. Viewers were witness to talks on sexual fantasies using bantering humor...as well as God’s name being taken in vain twice and a blasphemous comment which we won’t even talk about. And the commercials were no better! Yes...for a disciple of Jesus Christ, and a *lover of His holiness*, our definition of “entertainment” will stand in direct contrast to that of the world!



Fellowship

1. What is your “rating system” or criteria deeming a television program or movie “acceptable”?

What would you have done in the above situation with a neighbor?

2. Describe a time this week when the Holy Spirit challenged you to a new level of holiness.



Discipleship

Patrick Morley writes that the church's integrity problem is in the misconception "that we can *add* Christ to our lives, but not *subtract* sin. It is a change in *belief* without a change in *behavior*." He goes on to say, "It is *revival* without reformation, without *repentance*."

Our tendency as humans is to try to boil down "holiness" to a long list of do's and don'ts. This can be helpful, yet also very misleading. The interpretation of "holiness" varies greatly between cultures and generations. What my grandparents saw as a standard of holiness included not playing card games; what some Indian tribes see as modesty is quite different from what is acceptable at my daughter's school; and the rules the Pharisees instituted as a safety net for holiness *itself* became a form of religion. Yet as we are diligent in study and **willing** to obey God's commands, we **will** grow in holiness! It's automatic! The Bible says that when we walk in the Spirit, we won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Turn with me to our passage for today found in II Corinthians 7:1. Read it with me. "Since we have these great promises, dear friends, let us **purify** ourselves from **everything** that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

When something is "holy", it's like this verse says: it's **cleansed** from every contaminant. When something's pure, the impure is glaring. Instead of getting discouraged with the thousands of commands, start by *removing the sin* that is dragging you down. There is no room for darkness alongside light. What is it that God wants you to remove? Let's think about it...How is He leading you to a greater level of holiness? When He brings something to your mind...what is your response? Justification or immediate obedience?

Let's turn to I Thessalonians 4, verses 1-8. It says this:

"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in

passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.”

Now, if God *called us* to live holy lives...do you realize what that means? When we pray for holiness and a quickening of our spirit...or we pray that the Holy Spirit’s voice will *shout* when we are on dangerous ground...He will do it! God wants to give us clarity, wisdom and help. He doesn’t expect *perfection* this side of heaven...but He does expect *progress!*

I have an exercise for you to do this week that I trust will be a tool God uses to pinpoint areas for change. I started mine this week and it’s amazing how it’s made me more aware. I want you to divide your life into 3 areas and have one piece of paper for each one: actions, words and thoughts. This will be like a snapshot, or x-ray, into these 3 areas of our lives.

As you live your life this week, be thinking about your “actions”. Each time that God brings an action to your mind that doesn’t line up with the standard you see in the Bible, jot it down. Don’t worry...we won’t be comparing lists next week....so be honest! I’m using a small notebook so I can easily carry it with me. The things that came to my mind as I began “x-raying” my thought life were things like: my work life. Am I giving 100% to my responsibilities at work? Maybe your boss expects you to put in a 10 hour day, but by the time you spend time on the internet or drinking coffee, you have to be honest that you give him maybe 8. Maybe you struggle with obeying the law, speeding, or lying on your taxes. Movies! Have you found yourself sitting in a theatre *of a movie you haven’t researched and known* it wasn’t living up to God’s standard of holiness? Did you find yourself arguing, “But I already spent the money on it.” Some great advice a friend gave me once was that, “The money is already spent, never to be recovered. But, what’s the real price? *What is the price tag of compromise?*”

What is the content and language like in the books you read? How about the internet sites you frequent? Do you spend undue focus or time on entertainment? Anything you can think of that doesn’t line up with God’s standard of holiness, write it down.

For the next sheet of paper, focus on the *words* that you say. My grandfather used to consistently ask me if what I had just said was “*kind, true, and necessary.*” I can still hear those 3 standards of measurement...*and* feel the conviction when I realized that even if –yes -- it *was* true...*no*, it *wasn’t “necessary!”* Are you sarcastic? Do your words hurt or heal? Do you take the Lord’s name in vain? Do you tell jokes Jesus wouldn’t tell if He were here right now? All of these are “tumors” in your x-ray, and need to be taken out.

Finally, make a snapshot of the *thoughts* you entertain. Are you jealous? Proudful? Insecure? Even insecurity can be a form of pride, since we are focusing on ourselves and what we are or are not...rather on looking at ourselves from God’s point of view! Do you

worry? We are specifically commanded by God *not* to worry, and He wants a worry-free life for all of us.

Sure, there's a price tag attached to holiness: being willing to give up areas of sin. But think back to all the things we just listed! Who in their right mind would want a tumor-infested body? The Great Physician wants to remove the disease and clean you up.

Eugene Peterson writes that it's not difficult in our world to get a person *interested* in the message of the Gospel; but it's terribly difficult to *sustain* the interest. *Millions* of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious *experience* in our world; but there is little enthusiasm for the *patient acquisition of virtue*...little inclination to sign up for a long *apprenticeship* in what earlier Christians called holiness.

I'd like to close with the thoughts of A.W. Tozer, who said, "I wonder if that sense of overwhelming, crushing holiness of God has ever come upon your heart? It was a common thing in other days, when God was the center of human worship, to kneel at an altar and shake, tremble, weep and perspire in an *agony of conviction*. We don't see it now. We've watered down the wine of our spirituality. We come into the presence of God with tainted souls. We come with our own concept of morality, having learned it from books, the newspaper and from school. We come to God dirty – our whitest white is dirty, our churches are dirty, and our thoughts are dirty – and we do nothing about it. If we came to God dirty, but trembling and shocked and awestruck in His presence, if we knelt at His feet and cried with Isaiah, 'I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips', then I could understand. But we skip into His awful presence. Each year we have more Christians, more people going to church, more church buildings, more money – and less spirituality and less holiness. We're forgetting 'holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.'"



Ministry

1. Read Philippians 1:9-11 and 2:15. What do you think are the keys to blameless living in a perverse world?
2. Read Colossians 3:1-10. Formulate an action plan for personal holiness from these verses.
3. Read Hebrews 12:14-28. What would you say to the person who dismisses sin with the comment, "Oh, well...God will forgive me!"?

How do you reconcile the two truths that God is both “a consuming fire” and “full of mercy and love”?

4. Read the following verses:

Romans 6:11-13

Ephesians 4:29, 30

Ephesians 5:8-11

Matthew 18:7-9

Philippians 2:12

What extreme measures can you see yourself needing to take to guard against unholiness?



Evangelism

5. How can you echo Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 6:1-8?

6. Read I Corinthians 5:9-13. Who is God impressing you to pray for who currently needs a glimpse of the holiness of God?



Worship

7. When we are surrounded by ungodliness, what a relief to meditate on God’s ultimate victory! Enjoy the words of hope found in Revelation 21:1-8.

8. Close with a time of prayer for those you listed in #6, a God-sized abhorrence of evil, and revelation through your assignment this week!