

A Hunger for Holiness - Progress

REVIEW: Well, we have reached the end of our series on having a hunger for holiness. In it we have covered a lot of ground. There have been challenging and convicting moments throughout our study. I will not go over all that we have looked at through our study, or we could be here until fall. If you missed some of the study, I encourage you, download the messages that you missed (if you are not a computer person ask for help, or call the office to get a copy on CD). Holiness is far too important of a topic to take lightly. Our desire for holiness, which is really a desire for Christ, should be the driving force behind all that we do.

FUTURE SERIES:

I want to do something a little odd this morning and give you a preview of the next series we will enter into.

- I. The next series will be a series of series
 - A. Because the overall topic that we will be aiming for is so important, I will need to break down the large issue into several smaller issues, each which are deserving of a close look in and of themselves
 1. So while the series we are in may not seem like it has much to do with the overall topic
 2. When we finally get to the destination topic, you should see how all the other series fit into the bigger topic
 - B. Before I reveal the topic, allow me to explain why we are heading in this direction
 1. I started with the reason that it would make things more efficient than they have been - but that reason, to be honest, is not really good enough
 2. I began to study more in depth the topic, and realized something - this really is the biblical way
 - a) Its not a convenience issue or efficiency issue
 - b) It is a biblical issue, and one of leadership
 - C. The big topic we are going to tackle is leadership in the church, and primarily the issue of elders
 1. I have been a little afraid of the topic to be honest
 2. Not because it could stir things up in the church
 - a) If there is one thing I have learned so far in this church it is that as long as things are explained as to why the change is needed, people are good with it
 - b) Moreover, when we realize that what we are doing is not the biblical way, we are open to coming into line with God's will for us as a church - even if it is different

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3. The reason I have shied away from the topic is - “Hey church, let’s talk about how to run a church for six months.” YAWN!!!
 - a) The reality is, it really is a fun topic
 - b) And because there is so much to it, there will be some great things to study and hold ourselves up against scripture to see where we meet up and where we do not
- D. So in two weeks, we will begin our first in a series of series that all will lead us toward the idea of eldership for our church
 1. Our first topic is our design
 2. How did God design a man to be
 3. How did God design a woman to be

INTRO: On to our sermon. Some of you know that before my surgery I was exercising regularly, and rather intensely to build myself up to make the recovery process easier. I took on the P90X workout program, and by the time of my surgery I was doing quite well. In fact, the same day I came out of surgery, the nurse needed to turn me over to check the incision to see if it was closed up properly or if the dressing needed changing. She called a couple of nurses assistants to come help me roll on my side. As they prepared to roll me, I reached up to that bar above my head, lifted myself up and turned myself on my side. The nurses assistants literally stood there with their mouths open. It took several weeks to get back into doing the program after surgery, but because of having worked so hard before surgery, getting back up to speed where I left off was not too bad.

However, when I first began the workout routines, that was a different story. I thought I was in pretty good shape. HA! I was wrong! Most routines I couldn’t make it through all the way. And if I did, I paid for it the next day. It took time to get up to where exercise felt good.

TRAN: I tell you this because if I had compared myself with the people that created these workouts, I would have been discouraged. Instead, I had to continually remind myself that the only one that I needed to compare myself to was myself. Yes, being at their level was the goal, but to understand progress, I had to compare myself with the last workout - was I able to do a few more reps, last a little longer, make it all the way through the workout! If I could see even a little improvement, I was moving in the right direction.

1 Timothy 4:6-16

I. Paul’s words to Timothy are a challenge to us all

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- A. For starters we are jumping into this section of Scripture at a transition point
 - 1. Paul was just instructing Timothy about people that would pervert the gospel, and God's will in a variety of ways
 - 2. Timothy was to point these things out to those in his charge
 - 3. The transition comes from the negative to the positive
 - a) The negative is point out the bad
 - b) The positive is pursue godliness and be an example of it
- B. Let's look again at verse 12ff
 - 1. Timothy was to set the example - even if he was young
 - 2. Drop down to verse 15
 - a) Be diligent in these matters
 - b) What matters - verses 12-14 - what he was to set an example in
 - c) To what end?
 - (1) End of verse 15 - So that everyone may see your progress
 - (2) Now there are up sides and down sides to this idea of seeing progress
- C. The ups and downs of progress
 - 1. The down side is: what if someone comes along and sees that rather than making progress, you are less mature than you were 3 or 4 years ago?
 - a) What if you regress rather than progress?
 - b) Obviously, we are to be displaying progress
 - 2. But here is the up side: The very idea that we are to show progress demands that we will not always get it all right
 - a) I seriously doubt Paul would have foisted on young Timothy, "set the example" and do it perfectly!
 - b) No, progress means that you will not get it all correct - otherwise you don't need to show progress, because you are perfect
 - c) But just like my exercise, my progress is not measured against everyone else, my progress is measured against who I was last week, last month, and last year
 - d) So practically this means,
 - (1) A man could serve as an elder in the church, and not have to be perfect
 - (2) It means I have room to grow and mature in godliness, in my understanding of Scripture, in my teaching
 - (a) But, progress is one thing that should be seen in life
 - (b) I hate the phrase, "That's just the way they are"
 - i) It implies the person is incapable of progress

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- ii) And when the progress being talked about is holiness, or character development, implying that they are incapable of change doesn't cut it - it is an insult to the Holy Spirit
- D. This brings up an important axiom in regards to holiness - It is more important where you are going than where you are
 - 1. In other words, "Direction matters more than position."
 - 2. So if you are feeling bad because you are not as holy as you would like to be
 - a) Take heart!
 - b) God is pleased with your direction and progress - even if it is slow
 - c) To flip that coin over, if you are not as holy as you used to be, God is not impressed with yesterday's victories when you are now standing on the sideline, not seeking to make progress at all
- E. Now, measuring your spiritual progress is not that easy
 - 1. If you are taking your spiritual temperature every day, you will see little change
 - 2. If you look over months and years, you can get a better handle on progress
 - 3. So don't get all bunched up in knots worried that today was holier than yesterday
 - a) Look at yourself over the last several months, or even years
 - b) In fact, if you are quicker today than yesterday to recognize, own, and confess your sin, than you are making progress
 - 4. This, by the way, applies to judging others as well
 - a) Don't criticize others spiritual progress
 - b) You have no idea how far they have come
- F. The final thing to point out from this passage is this - you don't control the spiritual thermometer
 - 1. "so that everyone may see your progress"
 - 2. We have a natural, sinful tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think
 - a) You want to know how you are progressing - ask a close friend
 - (1) We as Christians in general, and as a church are generally not that good at this
 - (2) And neither am I - it is one area we need continual growth in
 - b) One of the other benefits of asking a friend
 - (1) We can get bogged down in our sin of the moment, or a struggle that is really hard for us
 - (2) Our friend can see the long term look

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- (3) It is a normal thing to see more of our ungodliness the closer we get to God
 - (4) Being more aware of your sin is a work of God's Spirit in you
 3. So, don't be afraid to ask someone that knows you well, can you see my progress
- II. To progress in holiness means that repentance becomes a way of life
- A. We all understand the idea of two steps forward, one step back and because of this, repentance needs to become second nature to us
 1. So holiness is actually marked more by repentance than by perfection
 - a) We hear "holy" and think perfect
 - b) We should think - repentance
 2. Biblically the word translated "perfect" (teleios) means qualified, mature or fulfilled
 - a) So we are to be perfect
 - b) But the Bible never paints the picture that we would be sinless
 - B. Turn to Romans 7:14-20
 1. Paul is talking about himself and the fact that he too struggles with sin
 - a) Paul, the man who basically helped found Christianity
 - b) He desires to do right, but does the wrong thing
 2. This should help us realize that we are normal
 - a) We desire to follow Christ
 - b) But we fail at it sometimes
 - C. Even if you are strong and your desire for holiness wins the day in most situations, people in this boat often battle spiritual pride
 1. They can become arrogant
 2. Judgmental toward others that they feel are not as far along the path
 - a) I have know some of these folks
 3. What might be worse is that pride then becomes their driving point - their motivation
 - a) It is no longer Jesus Christ
 - b) It is the sense of being better than others - not that they would ever say that
 - D. This is why Jesus, in what we call "The Lord's Prayer" made it clear that asking forgiveness and taking stock of our lives before God should be a way of life for His followers
 - E. Now repentance may seem like a weak way to end this series on holiness, but that is only because we have a weak understanding of repentance
 1. If your understanding of repentance is "sin like crazy, say a few 'I'm sorries, and then go back to life" then your understanding of repentance is weak

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2. Genuine repentance is hard work
 - a) Hate your sin
 - b) Understand how you have hurt and disobeyed God
 - c) Ask for His forgiveness
 - d) And then make a U-turn in life and don't go that way anymore
3. Do you see how genuine repentance is takes real work - it is not some sort of escape hatch
 - a) It takes effort
 - b) It takes change in real life
 - c) It is not weak
 - d) In fact, it takes a very strong person, and it is a model of true holiness
 - (1) It means that you are seeing sin the way God's sees sin
 - (2) It means God is revealing more of your sin to you - things you maybe thought were normal, and now you understand that it is displeasing to God

III. The grief that leads to repentance

- A. We have talked about this before, but I want to do a review because it is so helpful for us
- B. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11
 1. This passage talks about grief, or sorrow
 2. All people are capable of this emotion
 - a) Even non-Christians are quick to say that they are not perfect
 - b) They may not believe they deserve God's wrath, but they know they have made mistakes
 - c) So while they feel sorrow it is more like regret for things
 - (1) "I really messed up, and boy I feel bad about that."
 - (2) Worldly sorrow is regret for missed opportunities, painful present situations, or personal embarrassment
 - d) It does not lead them to genuine repentance - it has no spiritual dimension to it
 3. According to verse 10, "worldly sorrow brings death"
 - a) Worldly sorrow never accounts for our offenses to God
 - b) Because of that, we never deal with our vertical problem with God
 - (1) When we don't deal with our sin problem with God, it leads to death
 - (2) Worldly sorrow deals with the symptoms, not the true disease
 - c) Have you ever heard someone say, "I can't forgive myself"
 - (1) That really is more a sense of worldly sorrow
 - (2) It may mean that you are not trusting in God's promises and Christ's work on the cross for you

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- (3) Or that you are just focusing on your loss of self for what you did
- 4. Godly sorrow is different
 - a) Godly grief owns its own sin
 - (1) It does not blame the schools, the teacher, parents, the government, the church, etc.
 - (2) It says, "Lord have mercy on me for I am a sinner."
 - b) But notice in verse 11, "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you..."
 - (1) Godly sorrow leads them to take the next step
 - (2) In the Corinthians case, they had been implicated in an attack on Paul and they wanted to clear their names, and make things right
 - (3) Their godly sorrow brought repentance where needed - a turning around from what was done
- C. There is an eternal difference between regret and repentance
 - 1. Regret feels bad about past sins
 - 2. Repentance walks away from those sins
 - 3. Regret looks at our circumstances
 - 4. Repentance looks to God
- D. Sadly too many people, including Christians, are content with regret
 - 1. We are happy to spend some time feeling bad
 - 2. We know this will help us "be a better person" (therapeutic moralistic deism at its finest)
 - 3. We cry, we say how sorry we are, but we don't really change
 - a) Maybe we don't treat THAT person the same way, but we still treat others that way
 - 4. We don't want to deal with God
 - a) God uses godly sorrow to change us and make us eager to do good works
 - b) To help us run from the same sinful problem as we dealt with before
 - 5. To err is human, to make progress divine
- IV. Our need for personal holiness
 - A. I have quoted him before, Robert Murray McCheyne, a pastor in Scotland in the 1800's said "the greatest need of my people is my own holiness."
 - 1. Perhaps a bit overstated, but still true - for me as a pastor
 - 2. But also for you - as a father, mother, child, sibling, friend, co-worker and on and on the list goes
 - 3. A lost and dying world NEEDS to see holiness
 - a) They need you to be with God
 - b) More than they need you to be "with it"

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4. The world does not need you to part the Red Sea to see the reality of God
 - a) No miracles are needed for the world to know the truth of the gospel
 - b) What IS NEEDED is each and EVERY person that claims the name of Christ to be holy
 - (1) Holiness is measured in the small everyday acts that you do
 - (2) Rather than in one great and mighty act
 - (3) It is the sum of millions of little things
 - (a) Saying no to things that would sink our integrity
 - (b) Saying no to compromise
 - (c) Seeking out the little indiscretions in us and killing them off
 - (d) It is in the display of genuine godly character
 - i) The compassion
 - ii) The kindness
 - iii) Patience
 - iv) Love
 - v) Joy - We were saved from the fires of hell folks - we have more reason than anyone to be joyful
- B. Our nation, and even our world is obsessed with beauty
 1. According to statistics about 25% of men and 21% of women take longer than 30 minutes to get ready in the morning
 2. We spend \$55 billion a year on cosmetics
 3. Given all the advertisements, we can understand why we are obsessed with beauty
 4. Moreover, this obsession with beauty affects our Christian lives as well
 - a) We too often put on the perfect Christian mask
 - b) We need to look good or people will look down on us
 - c) We need to have a perfect family or someone might think we are bad parents
 - d) We need to look like we have it all together and figured out
 - (1) And by the way, there is more than one lie in that last statement
 - (2) One big lie that we tell ourselves, especially if we are new to church or the faith, everyone else here already knows more and is in better shape spiritually than I am
 - (3) BIG FAT LIE
 5. Here is the point
 - a) God is not looking for the best looking Christians
 - b) What is most attractive is holiness - its seeking to conform to the image of Christ

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- c) So the best looking Christian is the Christian growing by God's Spirit into the likeness of Christ - through ongoing repentance
- C. God wants each of us to be holy
 - 1. If you are a follower of Christ and have confessed your sins and accepted Jesus as your Savior, you have already been declared holy
 - 2. Now, through that faith in Jesus, Jesus walks with you to help you live out this holiness
 - 3. And this is not an option
 - a) God's bride (the church and all those that make up the church) will be blameless
 - b) Just remember, that this is a journey with Christ through life
 - (1) There are no shortcuts to holiness
 - (2) It takes effort, it takes focus
 - (3) When we do, God will make us into some beautiful Christians that bring glory to His name

CONCLUSION: Prayer Time of examination and repentance. "If My people who are called by My name..."