

A Hunger for Holiness - Why?

REVIEW: Two weeks ago we started a series about holiness. We looked at the problem associated with holiness which is that often times, there is a gap between what we say we believe about personal holiness, and how we actually behave. If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you would confess that, “Absolutely, we need to be holy!” However, the state of the church seems to indicate that when it comes time for the rubber to meet the road, something is not right.

We looked at a few scriptures that diagnose our hearts and brought to mind some good questions for us to ask as individuals and as a church as a whole. Are we known for our obedience? Do we conceive of heaven as being a perfectly holy place? Do we seek to teach new converts to obey all the Jesus commanded?

Then we took the time to look at some of the reasons why there seems to be a lack of passion for holiness. Things like: some that claim Christianity are not true believers; we fear looking uncool to the culture around us; we might be called “judgmental”; and not the least of which, holiness is just plain hard work sometimes.

TRAN: Today we turn our attention to scripture to make sure that we have a right understanding holiness, and why we need it.

INTRO: Before we get to that issue thought, I want us to consider for a bit a seemingly simple question: why did God save you (or me, or anyone)?

I. Why did God save us?

- A. Think about that for a minute - usually we think on things like how God saved us (through Jesus death on the cross)
 1. Or we might think of when we were saved - some of us, like myself can point to an exact date, and others more like a period in your life when you knew that something in you changed
 2. We often ask and answer the question of how to be saved
 - a) And I hope that every member and regular attender of this church knows that answer
 - b) And more than knows it, trust, and believes in it with all of their heart
- B. But WHY did God save us?
 1. In studying for the sermon, the first thought that came to my mind was simple, “because God loves us”
 - a) Absolutely correct, and completely biblical!
 - b) John 3:16

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- c) We know that one, we claim that one, we rest in God's love for us - great job if that was your answer
- d) BUT, the Bible gives other reasons too
- 2. We recently finished studying the book of Ephesians
 - a) One of the themes in the book is that God saved us for the praise of His glory
 - b) Ephesians 1:5-6; 11-12
 - c) He reached down, pulled us up from the pit of sin that we all were sinking in to show His power and His glory in forgiving our sins through Christ's work on the cross
- 3. The answer I want us to consider is also found in Ephesians - Ephesians 1:3-4
 - a) We were chosen before the world was EVER created to be holy and blameless in God's sight
 - b) So in the past, God chose us for salvation
 - c) In history, God sent His Son Jesus to secure the salvation we needed from sin by offering the perfect sacrifice
 - d) In the moment we trust Christ for salvation we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit as a downpayment on the promised end of our salvation - complete holiness when we reach heaven
 - e) Now, in context this holiness Paul is speaking about really is the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed, or credited to us
 - (1) BUT the rest of the book of Ephesians bears out that this holiness is an active holiness
 - (2) Remember, the first half of Ephesians lays the theological groundwork of what God has done for us
 - (3) The second half of the book tells us what is expected of those that God gave His righteousness to
 - (a) Remember that whole "put off the old self, and put on the new self"
 - i) That is practicing holiness
 - ii) That is living out what God has done in your life
 - (b) And if people are not living up to those expectations that God has - Not that they have to live life perfectly, but that their lives are typically exemplified by that behavior
 - (c) If they are not living up to that, they are proving they never really received Christ's gift of righteousness to begin with
- C. Being holy has been God's plan in both halves of the Bible too - Old and New Testaments
 - 1. Exodus 19:4-6

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- a) This is just shortly after the Israelites escaped from Egypt by God's hand
 - b) They had just arrived at Mount Sinai and are about to receive the Ten Commandments
 - c) Notice what God says:
 - (1) They need to obey - part of holiness is following God's commands
 - (2) They will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they do
 - (3) But the beginning of the verse tells us why - God brought them out of Egypt to save them to holiness
 - (a) They were set free from slavery to be free to follow God's ways
2. Leviticus 11:44
 - a) God wanted His people to be a holy people, and the reason is because He was holy
 3. The same is true in the NT as well
 - a) 2 Timothy 1:9 "**He has saved us and called us to a holy life**—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,"
 - b) 1 Thess. 4:7 "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."
 - c) Ephesians 5:25-27
 - (1) The church is to be holy and without blemish
- D. The Bible is very clear on this, the reason you were saved was to become holy
- II. Not only is holiness the goal of our salvation, it is necessary for our salvation
- A. Before anyone reaches for the wood, fuel and matches to burn me at the stake as a heretic, let me explain some things
1. This is what I was referring to when I said last time that some Christians are so conservative that they shy away from the idea of personal holiness
 2. They so fear that we will confuse how we were saved - by grace through faith alone - with the results of genuine salvation - which are good works that God prepared in advance for us to do, that they don't like talking about works
- B. So let me be crystal clear on this before we leap in
1. How we receive salvation has nothing to do with our works
 2. It has everything to do with the works of God
 - a) In choosing us for salvation
 - b) In sending Jesus to die in our place

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- c) In imputing that righteousness of Christ to us
- d) In giving us the Holy Spirit as our deposit, and our Advocate (or One who comes along side for help)
- 3. Those are the works of God
- C. For years people have struggled with Paul versus James
 - 1. Paul, who champions salvation by grace through faith ALONE
 - a) Which by the way, is what the reformation was really fought over
 - b) The protestants
 - (1) Let me explain that - that was the group that was breaking away from the Catholic church at the time (led by Martin Luther)
 - (2) They got that name because they were PROTESTING certain theological problems they were having with the Catholic church
 - c) So the protestants objected to a works based faith
 - (1) Martin Luther championed sola fide - or faith alone
 - d) To this day, the official Catholic doctrine is that salvation comes by grace through faith AND works
 - (1) I have actually read some of the Catholic theologians from the past, and modern day
 - (2) And while some individual parish priests hedge closer “grace by faith,” the official doctrine remains with works as a part of it
 - e) So there is your quick history lesson on the Reformation and sola fide
 - 2. James on the other hand stressed works
 - a) That faith is not faith if works are not with it
 - b) In fact, James almost didn't make it in the Bible, and some reformers rejected it because of James insistence on works
 - 3. The reality is the two work in perfect harmony with one another
 - a) Paul is stressing that nothing contributes to our salvation
 - (1) It is by faith alone
 - (2) We cannot do enough good works to earn our way to heaven
 - (a) I have always questioned that idea
 - (b) How much is enough? One good work? 10? 100?
 - i) This is not the 12 labors of Hercules
 - (c) Can good works be erased by bad works? If so, how do I know what level I am on?
 - (3) Doesn't that sound exhausting?
 - (a) I have no doubt that is why many people have abandoned churches altogether
 - (b) It seems like a losing ballgame, so why play

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- b) James, on the other hand is stressing that faith needs to be put on display - it cannot just be stated and then not lived out or make a difference in our lives
 - (1) Ladies, how many of you enjoy it when your husband tells you those three magical words, "I love you."
 - (2) Now, ladies, if your husband did nothing but tell you "I love you" every single day, but did nothing else to display his love
 - (a) No help with the household chores
 - (b) No flowers for no real reason at all
 - (c) No taking you to your favorite restaurant just to spend some alone time with you
 - (d) No making you your favorite dish at home
 - (e) He does NOTHING to display love, but he is like Big Ben in announcing loud and proud every day, "I love you"
 - (f) Would that wear thin? Would that start to ring hollow after a while? Would you really believe him?
 - (3) If we say we have faith, and we do nothing that displays that faith, according to James our faith is dead - it is worthless - it's not real faith
- c) You see, to harmonize Paul and James, grace saves us through faith, works prove that our faith is real - the works don't earn us faith, they just show that it is real
- D. Now, let's return to the idea we started a couple of minutes ago - the fact that holiness is not just the goal of our salvation, but that it is necessary for our redemption
 - 1. Big thanks to John Piper who pulled all of these verses together to point out the fact that personal holiness is needed for and works in conjunction with our salvation
 - 2. I hope your fingers are good and limber, because we are going to several passages - almost an overwhelming number of passages, but I want to make sure that we understand this idea from a biblical perspective
 - 3. Matthew 7:21-23
 - a) This has been termed one of the scariest passages in all of Scripture
 - b) It shows us that we can do all kinds of good things and still miss out on heaven
 - (1) In fact, this might be the perfect blend of Paul and James
 - (2) Works don't save you
 - (3) Only those that do the will of the Father
 - (a) Which, by the way, also implies a relationship with the Father
 - (b) How can you know His will without a relationship

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4. John 5:28-29
 - a) The works determine the final destination in eternity
 - b) Obviously it begs the question: What are the things that are counted as good and bad
 - (1) The answer from Scripture as a whole is trust in Christ and seek His will
 - (2) That first part is the most important
5. Romans 2:6-10
 - a) Are we sensing a theme here about the necessity of doing good works
 - b) We were saved to be holy, and holiness leads to good works - by nature you will want to give out of the grace you have experienced
6. James 2:17, 26
 - a) This is the very ideas we were discussing regarding Paul and James
 - b) Faith, with no works is no faith at all
- E. Let's look a little more specifically at the idea of obedience
 1. Matthew 7:24-27
 - a) If we listen and follow the words of Christ, we are wise like the man that built on the rock
 - b) If we don't listen, we are like the fool building on sand
 2. Luke 8:11-15
 - a) All those others represent people that failed to listen and obey God's Word
 - b) We need to be like the seed on good soil
 - (1) We listen, take in God's Word and let it take root in our hearts
 - (2) Then we will be fruitful the way God intends
 3. John 3:36
 - a) You can't get much plainer than that
 - b) If you don't obey the Son, your will not see life
 - c) We must obey
 - (1) There was a simple little worship song several years back called "I'll Obey"
 - (2) Here are the lyrics
 - (3) "I'll obey and serve You / I'll obey because I love You / I'll obey, my life is in Your hands / For it's a way to prove my love / When the feelings go away / If it costs me everything, I'll obey"
 - (a) I have always been struck by the phrase "It's a way to prove my love when the feelings go away"
 - (b) There are times when I don't have the warm fuzzies about God
 - (c) Yet I still need to obey - and I prove my love in that obedience

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- i) Much like husbands and wives
 - ii) When you are absent from one another, you prove your love for your spouse in continuing to obey and observe your marriage vows
 - (4) God is making it very clear that obedience is expected for anyone that is His follower
- 4. Let's look at the opposite for a minute - 1 Cor. 6:9-10
 - a) Quite the list of folks that will not see God's kingdom
 - b) And remember these are all lifestyles - not mistakes
 - (1) We know this from the tense of the Greek verbs
 - (2) The verbs show an action that continues on without end
 - (3) That is why we talk of repentance
 - (a) Turning around from chasing after a lifestyle of sin
 - (b) And turning toward our Savior Jesus Christ
- 5. Galatians 5:19-21
 - a) Again, people that are locked out of God's kingdom
 - (1) This is an unpopular idea nowadays, even with the church
 - (2) But the Bible puts it plain - these lifestyles will not be tolerated
 - b) And the way this passage is translated brings this out, "those who live like this"
- F. Allow me to give you two more passages and then we will wrap things up
 - 1. The book of 1 John
 - a) Several criteria have been identified (again by John Piper) for determining if we truly belong to God
 - b) We will confess the Son - 1 Jn. 2:23; 4:15
 - c) We believe that Jesus is the Christ - 1 Jn. 5:1
 - d) We will keep God's commandments - 1 Jn 2:3-4
 - e) We must live as Jesus lived - 1 Jn 2:5-6
 - f) We practice righteousness 1 Jn 2:29
 - 2. There are several others in the book of 1 John
 - a) I encourage you to read the book of 1 John every day for the next week or two - its only 5 chapters - it will take even a slow reader about 20-30 minutes
 - b) Look for statements that the book makes about "this is how we know who is from God" or "this is how we know that a person has been born of God" and similar statements
 - c) Tests yourself against these criteria
 - (1) You will not come out perfect because as John says at the beginning of the book, "if we say we are without sin, we are a liar and the truth is not in us"

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(2) But do these things generally characterize your life?

G. The second passage - Hebrews 12:14

1. We could almost cut out the middle phrase and make it read “Make every effort to...be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”
2. The thing that sets this verse apart from others we have looked at about holiness is this: there is no doubt this refers to putting forth effort on our part to be holy
 - a) It is not the holiness we receive from Christ
 - b) It is the holiness we strive for
 - c) “Make every effort to be holy” - that is work on our part
 - d) In context this makes perfect sense because God was talking about discipline earlier in the chapter - God was training them to become righteous because they had strayed from His path
 - e) And no one is disciplined by God except family members - except real believers
3. But without holiness, we will not see God

III. Conclusion

A. We could be here for a very long time looking at other verses that all say the same thing - we need to strive for, work toward, put effort into being holy

1. I referenced John Piper earlier
2. He wrote a letter to a pastor friend of his that had taken exception to a review of a book that stressed the importance of practical holiness
3. You can find it online - the title of the letter is “A Letter to a Friend Concerning the So-Called ‘Lordship Salvation’”
 - a) Half way down the letter, which the letter is very long, Piper starts a list of scripture verses to support the letter
 - b) The list of verses is very long, and is where I drew verse from for today

B. Before I close, let me circle back around to one more thing - the fact that salvation by faith alone, and striving for holiness in no way negate one another

1. As proof I offer two classic creeds of confessions of the faith
2. The Belgic Confession (1561) says, “we do not base our salvation on [good works]” But “it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls ‘faith working through love’”
3. Perhaps more well known is the Heidelberg Catechism
 - a) It teaches that only faith in Jesus can make us right with God

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- b) But later it goes on to say, “Can those be saved who do not turn from their ungrateful and impenitent (feeling no shame or sorrow) ways? By no means. Scripture tells us that no unchaste person, no idolater...is going to inherit the kingdom of God.”
- 4. So these two ideas of faith and works, work together
- C. But the greatest thing to remember is that it is the Holy Spirit at work within us, to change us, to give us new desires to seek and to follow Him
 - 1. We need to pray to that end
 - 2. That the Holy Spirit would daily be at work on making us more holy than we were the day before