

The Command Regarding Holiness of Heart

Lord's Day 44

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1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. 10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. 13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. 17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of

your sojourning here in fear: 18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

Beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ, the commandments that God gives to us are the rule of thankfulness. God has redeemed you and me from our vain conversation. He didn't redeem us with corruptible things such as silver and gold, he redeemed us with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. God according to his abundant mercy, based on that redemption price, has begotten us again unto a lively hope. God has given to us an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, an inheritance that fadeth not away, that is reserved in heaven for us. And beloved, God is keeping us by his mighty power so that we will receive the final salvation of our souls.

All of those blessings call for thankfulness. All of those expressions of God's great love towards us call you and me to love our God in return. That's why the Heidelberg Catechism puts the law in the third section because the law is a rule of thankfulness. God does not merely give us the law to show our sins and our sinfulness, but in his love to us, he gives to us the means, he shows to us the way in which we may express our love to him. That's why the 10 Commandments begin the way they do, expressing God's love towards us. "I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage," as if to say, "I am the Lord thy God who loved thee much and here's the way to express thy love to me."

Beloved, how do you love the holy God and how do I love the holy God who is absolutely separate from sin, the God who is devoted to himself and to his own glory? By being holy ourselves. God's law commands us to be holy in the way that we worship him alone, set him apart. Be holy in the way we worship him not worshiping him according to our own desires. Be holy in the way that we use his name. Be holy in the way that we spend the Lord's day. Be holy in the way that we treat those in authority over us. Be holy in the way that we seek the good of our neighbor and the way that we love our spouses and the way that we treat the goods that God has entrusted to us and our neighbors. Be holy in the way we talk about others.

That holiness, beloved, is not, must not be mere outward show, that holiness must begin with an inclination and devotion in our hearts, an inclination and devotion towards God and a hatred of everything that is against God. When the tenth commandment, beloved, forbids covetousness, it calls us to holiness of heart, and to treat that tenth commandment, then, under the theme the command regarding holiness of heart, let's note the perfection of holiness to which we are called; secondly, the beginning of holiness that God gives to us; and lastly, the lifelong battle for holiness for which we strive.

The command regarding holiness of heart. Beloved, the principle behind the tenth commandment is that God himself is perfectly holy in all his ways. What does it mean that God is holy? Well, in the first place that means that God is absolutely free from any defilement of sin. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. To behold evil, he cannot. He knows about evil but he cannot look upon it with any favor whatsoever. God hates all sin with the perfection of his being.

He is separate from sin but in the second place, God's holiness means that he is exalted above the creature, infinitely separate from the creature. God is not merely the greatest creature, he is separate. Even the seraphim, those holy creatures, those holy angels in heaven, cry out to God, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts." Beloved, what a wonder that this holy God, this transcendent God, nevertheless would condescend to love creatures of the dust, mere creatures of the dust.

God is exalted above all the creatures and then, thirdly, that God is holy means that he is consecrated to himself. He is devoted to himself. Within the Trinity, the Father devotes himself to the Son, and the Son devotes himself to the Father. In the Trinity, the God, the Triune God that we serve is devoted to his own glory with all of his being.

God is a holy God and God reveals that holiness, beloved, especially in Jesus Christ. Jesus in his life was absolutely free from all spot or blemish. Jesus had no wickedness at all in himself. He has also shown that he was glorious. He showed himself to be glorious in his works and in his words. What Jesus did while he was on the earth evoked awe from the creature: he healed the sick with a word; he gave sight to the blind; caused the lame to walk; even the wind and the waves obeyed his voice. Jesus showed that he was far above the creature.

He was glorious. He was holy and Jesus showed himself holy in the way that he devoted himself to the Father. How devoted was Jesus to the glory of his Father? So devoted that he gave himself in sacrifice. We find an expression of that devotion, John 17 in the High Priestly Prayer, just before Jesus went to the cross, John 17:1, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." That was Jesus' great desire, to glorify his Father. That's why he went to the cross willing to drink the cup of God's wrath in order to pursue the glory of his Father. That's why Jesus is called the holy one of God. Even the demons recognize that about Jesus. Not the least inclination or thought contrary to any of God's

commandments ever rose in Jesus' heart. He hated sin with his whole heart. He delighted in all righteousness. He is the perfection of holiness.

Now the question, beloved, is why did Jesus devote himself with such zeal to his heavenly Father that he would die for you and me? Why did Jesus love us and die for us as his bride? I'll let Scripture answer that question with Ephesians 5:27. Why did he love his bride? "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Jesus wanted to take to himself a holy bride, to gather to himself a holy people.

Why did God choose us in Jesus Christ? Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

What was the redemption that God promised to Abraham? Luke 1:74, "That he," that God, that is, "That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."

In short, the question is: why did God save us? Why did God call us out of darkness? Why did he call us into fellowship with himself? 1 Peter 1:15, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."

God saves us so that we would be holy. What does that holiness look like? What is the perfection of holiness to which God calls us? Well, in the first place, beloved, that we are holy means we are freed from the dominion and defilement of sin. Now, we don't have that perfectly in this life. The perfection of that holiness will come when Jesus Christ returns for us and when he takes us into glory, but God does free us from the ruling power of sin. He puts a separation between saints and the world and that's what the antithesis is about. Holiness means that God separates us from sin so that we hate sin and flee from it. Do you hate sin, beloved? Do you hate those besetting sins that rise up again in your life day after day? Do you separate yourself from sin? I ask myself the same questions. God says, "Be ye holy for I am holy."

Then in the second place that we are holy means that we are consecrated to God, and in that consecration, we love God and seek him in every aspect of our lives. In consecration to our holy God, we delight in righteousness. We delight to walk not just in some of the commandments but to walk in all of the commandments. Do you and I, beloved, delight in righteousness? Do we meditate upon God's law as a means of expressing our love to our faithful covenant God? Jesus died to make us holy. He died for us so that we would hate sin and so that we would love righteousness.

What does holiness look like? Another way we could express the answer to that question is that holiness is the opposite of covetousness. While holiness is our inclination towards God, covetousness is an inclination away from God. While holiness sees that God is worthy of all praise, when holiness is present in us, we desire to glorify God.

Covetousness desires the creature more than God, the Creator. Covetousness gives glory to the creature of which God alone is worthy.

That's why God forbids coveting. That covetousness stands in contrast to holiness is clear from the passage that we read in 1 Peter. 1 Peter 1:14 reads this way, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." There is a calling that we avoid those former lusts. Those former lusts literally are the covetings, the illicit desires of our hearts. We must not fashion ourselves according to the covetous desires of the past that belong to us by nature, rather there is what we must flee, the covetous desires of the past and rather God would have us to be holy.

Verse 15, "But," and that's the strong contrast that the inspired apostle makes, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." Beloved, the commandment that forbids coveting is the commandment that calls us to strive to be perfectly holy as God is holy. Be perfectly holy in your worship. Be perfectly holy in your work. Be perfectly holy in your recreation. Be perfectly holy in your deeds and in your words and in your thoughts.

The commandment, beloved, calls us to strive for the perfection of holiness but when we examine ourselves according to God's perfect standard, it becomes more and more evident to us, beloved, that we have only a small beginning of this obedience. There have always been those throughout history who have a shallow view of God's holiness and then they imagine that they themselves are able to keep God's law perfectly. The Pharisee of the past imagined that he was able to keep God's law perfectly. That's why he could look down upon sinners that he saw around him and imagine that he himself was a pure one. And some in the church today imagine the same thing, that they have pretty much arrived at the perfection of holiness that God requires.

The reason they think that in part is because they look only at the outward. They see the outward part of obedience and even that outward part of obedience they take in a shallow way, and so that the Pharisaic person will think to themselves, "I have not killed anyone. I have not literally committed adultery," and so on. But beloved, God requires far more than just outward holiness. Jesus makes it clear that the commandments apply to our hearts. One who speaks a hateful word is guilty of murder. Matthew 5:21, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." That means, beloved, if I demean my wife or my children by my words, I am guilty of murder. Now certainly, murder, literal murder is far more serious, it will receive a greater punishment, but hateful words are still sins against my neighbor and still sins against the infinite majesty of God, and still sins that require the torments, the eternal torments of hell.

When the tenth commandment addresses the desires of our hearts, then, beloved, you and I must confess we have only a small beginning of new obedience. That's why the apostle,

the inspired Apostle Peter, commands us to be holy. The Holy Spirit wouldn't have to give that command if we already had arrived at holiness. God would not have to tell us to avoid fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance if that was not a problem for us. But it is. We still fashion ourselves according to the former lusts, those lusts that are ours by nature.

We are not holy the way God commands us to be holy and that's why the apostle confesses in Romans 7, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." I am carnal says the regenerated child of God, says the inspired Apostle Paul about himself. I am carnal. I am fleshly, that is, I still have the old man of sin and that old man cannot do anything except for sin. That's all he could do and that's why the apostle says later, "I know that in me, that is," he clarifies himself, "that is in my flesh," there is that same word related to the word carnal, "in the carnal portion of my being I know that in me, in that carnal portion, dwelleth no good thing."

When we compare ourselves to the perfect standard of God's holiness reflected in his law, we must confess we have only a small beginning, and at the same time, beloved, we make a serious mistake if we think we cannot grow in holiness. It's a serious mistake. If we cannot grow in holiness, why would the inspired Apostle Peter repeat God's command to us, "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation"? Understand, beloved, that's not telling us to be what we already are, as if we were already perfectly holy, that would be like saying, "Be a Canadian citizen," to someone who was a Canadian, telling them to be what they already are. That's not what the inspired apostle is doing here. On the other hand, if you said, "Start acting like a good citizen," that would be different. "Start acting like more of a good citizen," that would be different. Now you're telling them to be something that they have not yet attained.

So the inspired apostle is telling you, people of God, the inspired apostle is telling me to strive, strive to be holy as he which hath called you is holy. That's the idea of 1 Peter 1:15. As God is perfectly holy, so you must strive to be perfectly holy. That's why, beloved, the Catechism speaks about even the holiest men because there are some who are holier than others. You can't have one who is holiest if there are not some who are holier. But I say that, beloved, not so that we can puff ourselves up with pride and say to ourselves, "I must be holier than others." That's not why I say that. The Apostle Peter does not tell us, "Be holy," so you can pat yourself on the back. That's not why he tells us to be holy. I say that, beloved, that some are holier than others so that we are convinced that our own spiritual growth by the grace of God, that our own spiritual growth in holiness is possible.

If I think that growth in holiness is impossible, then I give myself an excuse. I don't have to pursue holiness because I will never grow in holiness. I can ignore God's command to be holy because it's pointless. We must not give ourselves an excuse to ignore God's command to be holy as God is holy. Yes, we have only a small beginning of holiness but, beloved, God commands us to advance in holiness. Don't be fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts when you were ignorant of God's will. Be holy.

God commands us, beloved, to strive for holiness, engage in a daily battle for holiness. Hebrews 12:14, follow these things. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness." That word "follow" is often translated "persecute," that is follow diligently. "Follow after with great energy peace with all men and follow after with great energy holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

Now that growth in holiness, beloved, involves two things at least, two different aspects that I want to bring out, and in the first place that involves growing downward. When we grow in holiness, we will grow in a proper estimation of ourselves as sinners, we will grow downward, that is, the more holy we become, the more we will see our sins and our sinfulness. That's because growth in holiness involves a greater hatred of sin and when I hate sin more, I will hate it in myself more, and the more we see that sin, the more we will hate it in ourselves, the more we will be humbled as we compare ourselves to the standard of God's law. Beloved, do you hate the sins that you see in yourself? So much so that we are willing to do something about them? So much so that we repent of them and flee from them?

Growing downward will cause us, beloved, to pray. It will cause us to pray more and more for forgiveness and for the righteousness of Christ to be granted to us, the perfect righteousness. We will pray that God will lift off the debt of our sin and send that debt away and we pray that he will give us that perfect righteousness, the righteousness of justification.

On the other hand, beloved, when we grow in holiness, we will also grow upward. Some make the mistake of thinking we will only grow downward but the truth is we will also grow upwardly. The more we grow in holiness, the more we will grow in our delight in righteousness. When we delight in righteousness, we will pursue righteousness; we will make it our daily business to become more and more conformable to the image of God. That's what the Catechism teaches. This is not just your minister, this is the Reformed Confession. Likewise that we constantly endeavor and pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God. We will make it our business. That's the idea of constantly endeavoring. We will endeavor to do that and we will pray. Not separately. Not endeavoring in our own strength and then praying for God's strength on the other hand. Those are not separate things. We will constantly endeavor and pray. Augustine said that too and the Reformers and others have said that. Pray and work.

Beloved, that's why we need the strict preaching of the law because God uses that strict preaching to encourage us onward in the battle for holiness. In the first place that means, beloved, for myself as a minister, I must not be afraid to step on toes to bring God's law to bear, to show our sins and our sinfulness, to show us the way that God calls us to live in holiness. A minister must not be afraid of that though it may make some people upset. God calls me as your pastor to preach the law strictly. He wants us together to pursue the cause of holiness. That's scripture. That's why God saved us.

But in the second place, beloved, that we engage in a battle for holiness, that means that you and I must receive that word, receive the strict preaching of the commandments. We learn through the preaching to detest all sin with our whole heart always, learn to delight in all righteousness.

We need, beloved, the strict preaching of God's law because that also sends us to Christ again. It sends us to Christ for the remission of sins and for his righteousness. It sends us to Christ for justification but it also sends us to him for sanctification because not only do we constantly endeavor, we also pray to God for his Spirit, the Spirit of Christ to work in us.

We need the strict preaching of God's law. Learn more and more, beloved, also to look forward because we always will only have a small beginning. Learn to look forward to the day when we will have the perfection of that holiness. Look forward to the day when the battle is done and God takes us into glory, until we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come. Then we will serve our God in holiness and righteousness forever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy great goodness towards us. We thank thee that thou hast called us out of darkness and into thy marvelous light. Grant to us as thy people that we would pursue holiness, that we would be holy as thou art holy, separate from sin, devoted to thyself in glory, and that we may be separate from sin and devoted to thy glory. Forgive us where we have fallen short and lead us by that Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.