

Review: In our previous two sessions, way back in December, we looked at Romans 6 and the fact that the pursuit of holiness is made possible by the overthrow of our previous ruler. Having been united with Christ, we have died to sin. Its tyranny has been removed. We are free to pursue holiness. Furthermore, we are given the incentive to pursue holiness because to do so is to pursue life. To fail to do so is to needlessly submit to one who is not your master and who only desires your death.

So, since believers in Christ are set free and since it is totally nonsensical for the ones set free from sin's dominion to submit ourselves again to it, it might seem like holiness of life is easily attained, that it is an effortless undertaking, that there is really nothing to it. Could it be that living a holy life is no more difficult than taking a ride down sledding hill in Whitnall Park. Do we just acknowledge these realities to be true and thus experience a downhill sled-ride to holiness? Absolutely Not. Though the work of Christ assures us of victory and freedom from the slavery of sin, practical lived-out holiness does not come without engaging in battle. We must fight. Tonight we are going to consider the necessity to fight. In the next session we will consider the enemies we face in the fight.

My central concern in this lesson is to prepare Christians for the battle and struggle. Holiness does not come easily. And we will experience setbacks. We must not condone or take lightly our disobedience, but neither should we be disillusioned by it. No Christian will be suddenly sinless, but no true Christian will quit fighting in the battle.

1. The Pursuit of holiness involves a fight.

1 Timothy 6:11-12 – But as for you O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called . . . ”

Paul had just been talking about some who wandered away from the faith because of their love of money and the many evils into which they were plunged. He admonishes Timothy flee from these things. He urges him to chase after holy character. There is defense and offense. Defensively, he is flee from that which is against him and would bring his death. Offensively, he is to hunt down characteristics of godliness. Flee is a strong word. It means to run like your life depends upon it. Pursue is also a strong word. Synonyms include track down, hunt after, and chase. Go after holiness like a great treasure. You cannot be lackadaisical and do this. So Paul uses the language of conflict.

He says, "Fight the good fight of the faith." You have to fight for what does not come easy. You are not standing there with your hand out waiting for something to be placed in it. You are reaching out determined to seize and possess a prize. Paul says, "Take hold of eternal life." The pursuit of holiness involves aggression.

It is like what he writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:24):

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Run after holiness like if you do not get there first, you don't get it. Fight for holiness like if you don't defeat your enemy you will lose your life. To look at the pursuit of holiness like a fight is to acknowledge that there are enemies that stand in the way. They must be defeated in order to win the prize. Fight like heaven depends upon it. Fight like you can't get to the Super Bowl if you don't win.

2. The battle for holiness rages within.

Galatians 5:17 – For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to one another, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

James 1:14 – But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Colossians 3:5 – Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.

Every Christian will face opponents in the fight for holiness. And that fight will rage within. There is an aggressor within that has pretty much coasted up until conversion. It has desires in opposition to the Spirit. It is experienced as desires that get thirsty to be satisfied. They must be confronted and resisted. The battles with indwelling sinful desires are not fun. It is not a game in which it is okay if you lose. Fighting is not easy. It is grueling and demanding. But the fact there is a fight should not be disillusioning.

J. C. Ryle – We may take comfort about our souls if we know anything of an inward fight and conflict. It is the invariable companion of genuine Christian holiness. It is not everything, I am well aware, but it is something. Do we find in our hearts a spiritual struggle? Do we feel anything of the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things we would? Are we conscious of two principles within us, contending for the mastery? Do we feel anything of war in our inward man?

Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification. . . . We are evidently no friends of Satan. Like the kings of this world, he wars not against his own subjects. The very fact that he assaults us should fill our minds with hope. (*Holiness: its nature, hindrances, difficulties, and roots*, 55)

So, fight. And do not be distressed about. Be encouraged by it. The enemy does not fight against his friends.

3. The battle for holiness involves killing.

Colossians 3:5 – Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.

Romans 8:13 – For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. Such ones will put the deeds of the body to death. They will engage in combat. They will seek out sin and destroy it. It cannot be done without hard work, determination, and perseverance. In order to be overcome, the enemy must be killed.

4. Those involved in the battle for holiness will stumble.

James 3:2 – We all stumble in many ways.

Matthew 6:12 – forgive us our debts

Galatians 6:1 – Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression . . .

Psalm 51:4 – Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight . . .

1 John 1:8 – If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Christians pursuing holiness will stumble. They will sin. We are not yet perfected. The fact that Paul exhorts his readers to put off and put on is indicative that living is a continual process of repenting and re-directing and gradual transformation.

5. When we stumble, we must get right back up and fight again.

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Matthew 6:12 – forgive us our debts

6. If we do not fight or experience some degree of progress, then we are not sanctified or justified and will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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.

Do not be shocked and disillusioned when you stumble. But beware. If you don't fight and win some, you are among the saints.

Conclusion

J. C. Ryle – So-called Christians are not true Christians if they do not fight. "There are thousands of men and women who go to churches and chapels every Sunday, and call themselves Christians. Their names are in the baptismal register. They are reckoned Christians while they live. They are married with a Christian marriage service. They mean to be buried as Christians when they die. But you never see any 'fight' about their religion! Of spiritual strife and exertion and conflict and self-denial and watching and warring they know literally nothing at all. Such Christianity may satisfy man, and those who say anything against it may be thought very hard and uncharitable, but it certainly is not the Christianity of the Bible. It is not the religion which the Lord Jesus founded, and His apostles preached. It is not the religion which produces real holiness. True Christianity must 'fight.'

The true Christian is called to be a soldier, and must behave as such from the moment of his conversion to the day of his death. He is not meant to live a life of religious ease, indolence and security. (*Holiness: its nature, hindrances, difficulties, and roots*, 51)