

Tonight we are in the middle of three sessions in which we are considering specific manifestations of holiness in the three basic interrelated areas of life—body, mind, and relationships. The focused, empowered pursuit of holiness must take place in each of these three areas. Tonight we look at holiness of mind.

The Pharisees of Jesus's day were obsessed with outward appearance. They did what they did to be seen but had little regard to what was underneath the surface of their skin and the surface of their actions and the surface of their prayers. Of them Jesus spoke saying, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you . . . this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." In ritualistic religion it might seem like the outside is all that matters. But before God the inside is just as important as the outside. Jesus described the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs. Outward appearance was one thing, but inwardly they were full of dead men's bones. To that point, the Pharisees came to Jesus all upset that his disciples were not washing their hands according to the custom of the rabbis. But Jesus told them eating with unwashed hands does not make you unclean. It is not what you eat that makes you evil but what is already on the inside. Pursuing holiness is a matter of controlling one's body, but it is also about controlling one's mind.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Bringing holiness to completion involves cleansing from all uncleanness both outwardly and inwardly. The Lord desires our inward beings to be as cleansed as our outward.

Why is this?

He sees what we think and what moves us to action as clearly as he sees the actions that may or may not materialize on the outside. What we think about matters as much to God as what we do. Ultimately he does not merely want our actions; he desires our love and our allegiance. And the heart is where it is at. And the mind is where the thoughts and intentions and motives of the heart happen and where they must be regulated.

1 Samuel 16:7. But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

Proverbs 16:2. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

Psalms 44:21b. For he knows the secrets of the heart.

Psalms 139:1. O Lord you have searched me and known me!

Psalms 19:14. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

1 Chronicles 28:9. And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.

Matthew 5. Adultery and murder are committed in the heart through the lust of the eyes and the hate of the heart, (5:22; 27; 1 John 3:15)

1. We must watch our Motives.

Motives are the reasons we do what we do. Jesus addressed motives in the Sermon on the Mount when he talked about giving alms, prayer, and fasting. He said we should do them without fanfare. Why is that? Your inward purpose matters to God. Do you pray truly to please God or to get the attention of other humans so they will applaud? Do you help someone who is hurting so you will be noticed or for the glory of God? If it is for man's applause, then the motive is selfish, self-centered, and for self-glory. You let your light shine so that people see your good works and glorify NOT YOU but YOUR FATHER who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). With regard to our neighbor, this means we seek not our own good but the good of our neighbor (1 Corinthians 10:24) and we do that even in what we eat or what we drink (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Envy and jealousy are heart matters that motivate us to sin against God and others by attacking or competing with others so that conflict erupts. James 3:14-16; James 4:1-5. So we must be on guard against being motivated by desires that war within.

Holiness of mind involves holiness of motive. And we find out our motives when we ask ourselves, "For what purpose/goal am I doing this? Thinking this?" Be honest about yourself and will to replace evil motives with those that please God.

2. We must control Input.

What is in our minds and hearts by nature is bad. We must protect our minds by guarding them from what comes in. Evil talk corrupts. Visual images can be destructive. We should determine not to speak of (and therefore think on) the evil that the wicked do.

How does unholiness enter our minds? Music. False teaching. Looking visually on evil. We should avoid any input that glorifies evil or provides fleshly pleasure, feeding greed or feeding the senses in a sinful way.

3. We must control our Meditations.

Psalms 1:2. Psalm 119:9-11. Philippians 4:8.

The key to controlling our meditations is not by trying not to think what is unholy but by thinking on what is holy and godly. As long as you are trying really hard not to think on something you will necessarily be thinking on that thing that you are trying really hard not to think on. When instead you are thinking on the excellent, the good, the lovely, the pure, the true, then your heart is absorbing these things and your mind is being guided by them and you are too busy to be bothered with unholy thoughts. A pitcher is always full of something. When it looks like nothing is in it, it is actually full of air. So imagine unholy thoughts to be air in a pitcher. When you fill the pitcher with water, there is no more air. Last year we did an entire series of studies on the discipline of biblical meditation. If you want to do further study on that subject we would be happy to print the handouts.

Conclusion

Jerry Bridges – “All of these attitudes — envy, jealousy, bitterness, an unforgiving spirit, and a critical and gossiping spirit defile us and keep us from being holy before God. They are just as evil as immorality, drunkenness, and debauchery. Therefore, we must work diligently at rooting out these sinful attitudes from our minds. Often we are not aware our attitudes are sinful. We cloak these defiling thoughts under the guise of justice and righteous indignation. But we need to pray daily for humility and honesty to see these sinful attitudes for what they really are, and then for grace and discipline to root them out of our minds and replace them with thoughts pleasing to God.” (The Pursuit of Holiness, 124).

All scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.