

INTRODUCTION

We are in a series called “The Pursuit of Holiness.”

I have borrowed that title from a book I am reading again by Jerry Bridges.

In our last two times together, we saw how holiness is a pursuit and it’s based on the Holiness of God who calls us to this kind of living.

Now today, I want us to see if we are to be holy as God is holy, then *holiness is not an option*.

In fact, in Bridges book, he lists 4 reasons why this is not an option.

I want to talk about them today.

In Hebrews 12:14, where we began our study two weeks ago, we heard the writer of Hebrews give this sobering exhortation to his hearers.

Let me remind you of what he said: “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”

I remind you this is a pursuit.

It begins at salvation and concludes in glory!

Jesus said in Luke 13:24, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

This signifies a great struggle against conflict.

But understand that Jesus was not suggesting that anyone could *merit* heaven by striving for it.

No matter how rigorously they labored, sinners could never save themselves.

Salvation is solely by grace, not by works (Eph. 2:8, 9).

But entering the narrow gate is nonetheless difficult because of its cost in terms of human pride, because of the sinner's natural love for sin, and because of the world's and Satan's opposition to the truth.¹

And because of that Jesus says to “strive to enter.”

We are to exert ourselves to the utmost to enter the kingdom by true repentance.²

¹ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997). Lk 13:24.

² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961). 747.

But once we enter by grace through faith for salvation, holiness is imputed to us.

We are now clothed in the righteousness of God (Rom.9:30) and Christ (Phil.3:9).

Scripture speaks of both a holiness which we have in Christ before God, and a holiness which we are to strive after.

These two aspects of holiness complement one another, for our salvation is a salvation to holiness: “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called *to be holy*” (1 Corinthians 1:2, emphasis added).

The word *sanctified* here means “made holy.”

That is, we are through Christ *made* holy in our standing before God, and *called* to be holy in our daily lives.

So the writer of Hebrews is telling us to take seriously the necessity of personal, practical holiness.

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives at our salvation, He comes to make us holy in practice. If there is not, then, at least a yearning in our hearts to live a holy life pleasing to God, we need to seriously question whether our faith in Christ is genuine.³

Now it is important to note before we look at these 4 areas that when we talk about personal holiness, we're talking about obedience in biblical terms.

³ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978). 33.

Both faith and obedience are inseparable.

Jesus' Great Commission to His disciples indicates just how foundational the matter of obedience is for believers.

He says in Matthew 28:19-20, ““Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

While verse 19 involves proclaiming the Gospel, seeing people saved, and having them publicly profess their faith in Christ, verse 20 builds on the new converts' salvation experience.

Disciplers, or any mature believers, will teach new Christians to obey God's commands in His Word and to submit to Him.⁴

Obedience is so foundational that if it is not present in the life of one who claims to be a Christian, that person's faith ought to be questioned.

Jesus said in John 8:31 to those Jews who had believed in Him: "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."

In John 15:10, He said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love."

John makes it even more clear in 1 John 2:3-4 when he says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His

⁴ John MacArthur, *The Pillars of Christian Character*, 21.

commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

All who profess faith in Jesus Christ must also demonstrate that faith by obeying God’s Word. Otherwise, their profession of saving faith is suspect.⁵

All of this is synonymous with holiness.

When we’re talking about practical holiness or pursuing holiness, we’re talking about obeying Jesus Christ.

The two are the same.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The Pillars of Christian Character*, 22.

The moment of salvation involves more than an isolated act of obedience.

When anyone places his trust in Christ's atoning work and receives His forgiveness of sins, he also acknowledges that the Savior is Lord and Master over his life.

That means each believer has committed himself to a life of ongoing obedience, although initially he did not fully grasp all the implications of that commitment.⁶

In Romans 6:16-18, Paul reminds us of our position in Christ and the kind of attitude we're to have:

He says, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for

⁶ John MacArthur, *The Pillars of Christian Character*, 22.

obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Notice what Paul is saying:

When someone presents himself as a slave of someone else, the primary issue is obedience--doing what the master says.

Sio “when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey.”

That is true whether someone is an unbeliever and a servant to sin, or a believer and a servant to Christ.

Paul then takes that simple illustration and applies it to that phrase in verse 17, “obedient from the heart.”

Heart obedience is what God desires of His people.

That should be an overriding attitude and desire for any Christian.

You ought to have a strong desire for obedience that you constantly manifest obedience as a fundamental, inner trait of your Christian life.

Now with all that said, we need then to understand holiness is not an option.

Since God is holy, He requires everyone to be holy.

And since holiness is His standard for all peoples, it is then required and necessary for 4 things:

Let's take them one at a time.

The first is:

HOLINESS IS REQUIRED FOR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Psalm 15:1 says, "O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?"

Another way of stating that would be, "Who may have fellowship with You?"

What's the answer?

Listen to Psalm 15:2-5: “He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the Lord; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.”

This is another way of describing one who is pursuing holiness or obeying God.

Remember we’re talking about obedience or practical holiness.

We’ve already noted that Scripture does not teach that we can attain a certain amount of holiness for salvation.

We are saved by grace, through faith (Eph.2:8).

God is our standard.

Matthew 5:48 says, ““Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

In our fellowship with God, we are to renounce all sin.

As the psalmist says regarding prayer in Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”

Not letting go of sin or certain sins causes God not to hear us when we pray.

So, in order to have intimacy with the Holy One, we must be serious about holiness.

We must grieve over sin in our lives instead of justifying it.

We must earnestly pursue holiness as a way of life.

Second:

HOLINESS IS REQUIRED FOR OUR WELL BEING

Hebrews 12:6 says, “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

This statement presupposes our need of discipline.

When we persist in disobedience, God disciplines us.

One example would be in 1 Corinthians 11.

When the Corinthians came to the Lord's table they were coming drunk--they were not coming in a worthy manner.

Because of this, 1 Corinthians 11:30 says, "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

In other words, God was disciplining those who were in sin.

Some were "weak." Others were "sick." And some even died.

In Acts 5 when Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of the proceeds for the sale of some land they hand, they were killed on the spot.

They were disciplined severely because they had told God they were going to give all to Him.

Peter asked Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last.” (vv.3-4).

Verse 10 says the same thing happened to his wife. She too “breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead.”

These two illustrations are the ultimate of discipline where the Lord takes us home.

But we need to understand that holiness is for our well-being.

It keeps us from sinning and experiencing the discipline of the Lord.

David admitted in Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.”

When God speaks to us about some sin, we need to heed and take action. To fail to deal with that sin is to risk incurring His hand of discipline.⁷

Holiness is required for fellowship and our well-being.

⁷ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978). 36.

HOLINESS IS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE

That's a no-brainer for some but others just don't get it.

If you're living in sin, do you honestly think God will use you?

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:21,
“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Holiness and usefulness are linked together.

We cannot bring our service to God in an unclean vessel.

In fact, every time we sin we grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph.4:30).

We must make every effort to walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 says, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

Ephesians 4:1 says, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

Ephesians 5:1-5 says, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no

filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

We are to be “imitators of God” and walk in holiness.

Last,

HOLINESS IS NECESSARY FOR OUR ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

True faith will always show itself by its fruit.

If we’re in Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

The only safe evidence that we are in Christ is a holy life.

John said in 1 John 3:3, “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

CONCLUSION

What’s your life like?

Are you in fellowship with God or with sin?

If we know nothing of holiness, we may flatter ourselves that we are Christians but we do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.⁸

We need to ask ourselves:

⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978). 38.

Is there evidence of practical holiness in my life?

Do I desire and strive after holiness?

Do I grieve over my lack of it and earnestly seek the help of God to be holy?

It is not those who profess to know Christ who will enter heaven, but those whose lives are holy. Even those who do “great Christian works” will not enter heaven unless they also do the will of God. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never

knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”” (Matthew 7:21–23)⁹

Let's pray.

[Lord's Supper]

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What are you doing everyday in your pursuit of holiness?

Do you have a desire to be holy?

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

How important is the Spirit's work in your life?

⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978). 38-39.

What do you do to yield to the Holy Spirit?

Do you agree with the statement, “We cannot bring our service to God in an unclean vessel”?