

A Hunger for Holiness - The Problem

INTRO: Good morning! Today we begin a new series. This series carries on one of the major themes from our series on the book of Ephesians. I wouldn't go quite so far as to say it is an extension, but certainly picks up one of the primary themes - the theme of holiness.

As we work our way through this series, we will be attacking this idea of holiness from several angles, but will always bring things back to the primary focus of what holiness should look like in our lives.

TRAN: To begin our series I want to start talking to you about the seemingly unrelated topic of diet and exercise.

I. Diet and exercise

- A. Now please make sure you hear me correctly, I understand watching what you eat, and making sure exercise is a part of life
 1. In fact, many of you know that I exercise in a variety of ways, and do so regularly
 2. I even enjoy it
 3. I also watch what I eat
 - a) I make sure I eat leaner cuts of meat like chicken more than red meat
 - b) Try to avoid the "grease pits" as I call them when eating out
 - c) I make sure there are no green things or cheese anywhere near my diet - so I do watch what I eat
- B. But there are some people that, you can view it one of two ways
 1. They have made these things into art forms
 2. Or they are obsessive to an extreme
 3. There are some people that are always looking for the next diet information to add to or modify what they are doing
 - a) They got their South Beach on, or their paleo, go chew on a tree thing working for them
 - b) They have their scales to weigh their food to make sure they are getting everything in perfect portions
 - c) They have their fats balanced with their proteins, balanced with their carbs, balanced with what types of foods they are getting these nutrients from
 - d) If you eat an Oreo in front of these folks, they are mortified
 4. Not to mention workout routines
 - a) They find the optimal time of day for them
 - b) Lifting weights and cardio are placed in a program with crossfit
 - (1) Regular weights aren't good enough

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- (2) It has to be more real world - Like all of us make waves with weighted ropes at work or flip giant truck tires for a living
- C. Again, let me say, don't get me wrong, I enjoy exercise and even keeping an eye on food intake so I can keep my girlish figure
- D. Here's my thing about this, I have no problem with folks that want to do these things
1. Applaud them all I say
 2. Let them seek out the organic foods, and fall into bed every night exhausted from the next level they just crushed at the gym
 3. Cool
 4. That is fine for them, but there is only so far this guy is willing to go with all of that
 5. Have at my friends, but don't chase me down with your food scale and complain that I have no sense of portion control
- E. So what does all of this have to do with holiness?
1. Good question! Is it possible that you, or I, or all of us have come to view holiness the way I view diet and exercise?
 - a) It's a fine lifestyle for other people - have at it!
 - b) Make your life harder with all the things you have to do to have the perfect diet and the right exercise routine
 - c) I am content with the parts that are working for me, and see no need to make life harder on myself than what I am now
 - d) Could this be the way we view holiness? It's great for you, but there is only so far I will go with it.
 - (1) Holiness wasn't something you were raised on, not something you learned to pray for
 - (2) Rather than a refreshment and a joy in life, holiness feels more like one more thing to worry about
 - (a) Sure, we all want to be better people
 - (b) All of us want to avoid the "big sins"
 - (c) But since God is a God of grace, as long as I am avoiding the big things, grace will just cover those other things
- F. You see, this is the problem with holiness for most of us:
1. We don't really care about it
 - a) Sure we hear lots of sermons about what we should or shouldn't do
 - (1) Which by the way, if those are void of being connected to the gospel, and what Christ has done for us, there is a problem
 - (2) That is just moralism, and moralism doesn't save our souls - only Christ's work through the gospel saves our souls

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- b) It seems, with each new generation, one of the primary goals of faith and holiness, is downplayed or dismissed as “religion” or “legalism”
- 2. Too often we make a big deal about what Jesus has saved us from, and forget what Jesus is saving us to
- II. So why do I say that we, and by we I mean the American church in general - there are always individuals that care deeply about holiness, why do I say that we don't care too much about holiness
 - A. I could turn to a variety of modern authors that would make a strong case for this premise
 - B. What I would rather do is allow the Bible to diagnose our hearts on this issue
 - C. Let's look at three places in the Bible that bring us face to face with questions for doing a heart check
 - 1. Romans 16:19
 - a) There are many times in the NT Paul sounds like a proud daddy or grandparent when he talks about how one of the churches he works with is doing
 - b) Here in Romans we have a similar idea - Romans 16:19 “Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you...”
 - (1) That is a strong statement
 - (2) Keep in mind, as I often remind you, that the NT was written to GROUPS - so it is the group whose reputation precedes them
 - (3) But could that be said of us?
 - (a) As a church family together
 - (b) And as individuals - because it stands to reason if it is true of the group, it is most likely true of the individuals in the group too
 - (4) There are many other adjectives that might sound better than “obedient”
 - (a) Relevant, hip, cool
 - (b) Creative, modern
 - (c) All of these could sound better than obedient - but that is what they are commended for
 - c) It might surprise you that the Puritans really kind of led the way in things like this
 - (1) They enjoyed God's good gifts in life, nature, and relationships
 - (2) At the same time, they pursued godliness as God's greatest gift
 - (3) They did not focus on weird mystical experience with God, or little pet issues within the pantheon of the faith
 - (4) They focused on growing in holiness

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- (a) Christians becoming visible saints
- (b) Notice the phrase, “visible saints” - we are saints by God’s declaration, the Puritans were simply seeking to live up to that
- d) Be honest: can we say that our lives as individuals, or as a church are marked by the same passionate pursuit of holiness?
- 2. Our second passage is the last two chapters of the Bible - Revelation 21 and 22
 - a) From these two chapters (and we will go through some specific verses) comes a resounding question: How holy is your heaven?
 - b) Granted, Revelation is one of those books many Christians don’t know what to do with so they usually avoid it, or worse, think that it really doesn’t belong in the Bible
 - c) Truth is it tells us what we need to know about the afterlife
 - (1) What the New Jerusalem will be like and look like
 - (2) What the requirement is to get in
 - (3) That God’s presence is the greatest thing about the city
 - (4) The fact that the gates never close - because there is no need, we have no enemies
 - d) Too many people believe that when it comes time to settle accounts and let people into heaven, God’s love demands that He becomes a marshmallow
 - (1) He is just supposed to accept everyone
 - (2) The reality is He is a holy God and His love is holy and will not stand for sin
 - e) Let’s look at a few verses
 - (1) Revelation 21:7 “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.”
 - (2) But look at the next verse - these are the ones that will not inherit heaven
 - (a) If you show disregard for Christ by giving yourself over to sin - without remorse, habitually sinning, heaven will not be your home
 - (3) One of the reasons Christians are having such a hard time standing up about homosexuality being sinful is because we really do not understand the holiness issue
 - (a) Revelation 22:14-15 - there are people that will be outside of God’s paradise
 - (b) Because we do not understand that heaven is a holy place, Christians fail to stand up and speak the truth that unrepentant

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sexual immorality (of any kind by the way), those folks will be outside of God's kingdom

- f) Heaven is a holy place
 - (1) God is a holy God
 - (2) The angels are holy - the saints, redeemed by Christ are holy
 - (3) Nothing unholy can enter heaven - Revelation 21:27
 - g) So again I ask, "how holy is your heaven?"
 - 3. Our last passage - Matthew 28:18-20
 - a) The part that most concerns us is the beginning of verse 20
 - b) "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"
 - (1) And back to obedience we go - we can't escape it
 - (2) John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and keeps them, he is the one who loves me..."
 - c) This reveals a hole in our evangelism
 - (1) Too often we are so intent on getting them to pray a prayer, rather than on becoming holy saints
 - (2) It's easy to want people to make decisions for Jesus, and forget discipleship
 - d) If we really value holiness, it needs to come out in our evangelism as well
 - (1) People are not numbers to accrue, or prayers to be prayed
 - (2) They are individuals that need to be taught to "obey all things" Jesus commanded
- III. All of this leads us to the question: "How did this disregard for holiness come about" "Why is this happening?"
- A. If God's mission is to take ungodly, unholy people, and to save them by grace through faith alone, and promises to make the faithful godly, then why does it seem like there is not much movement on the holiness front?
 - 1. Those Puritans we talked about got the name not from themselves, but from their opponents that thought they were way too focused on being... pure
 - 2. So why are we not being accused of the same today?
 - B. Well, history points us to the sad fact that Christians have equated holiness with abstaining from specific practices
 - 1. No drinking, dancing, smoking, movies, card playing etc.
 - 2. Avoid those no-nos
 - 3. Younger generations don't like this lists
 - a) Many things on the list they disagree with (and they would be right in many cases)
 - b) Other times it seems too easy to manage the list of rules

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4. With this first reason comes the fear of looking weird
 - a) If you express concern for the morality of swearing, or modesty, or sexual purity, or avoiding certain movies, we are worried that people will think we are weird
 - b) Or worse - people might call us legalistic (That's relying on laws or formulas for morality)
 - c) Or think we are narrow minded
- C. Another reason for the lack of passion for holiness: some people that claim to be Christians are not regenerated, Spirit-filled believers as the Bible counts them
 1. I say this with a small amount of fear and trepidation
 2. What I don't want is to scare people that truly trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior into thinking that they are not saved
 3. What I do want is for people to take a good look at themselves for evaluation today, and throughout this sermon series
 - a) If that passion for Christ and for being holy is not there, why?
 - b) Do you need to seek that passion out? Are you quenching the Holy Spirit's work in your heart? Or do you really not believe and have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit
 4. It should never be said of any of us that being born again by the Spirit makes no difference in our lives
 - a) That is what the world is looking for in the church
 - b) People whose lives are transformed by the gospel
 - c) And not just with a list of rules, but by the character of their lives, having been conformed to the heart of Christ
 - d) A.W. Tozer said it this way, "Plain horse sense ought to tell us that anything that makes no change in the man who professes it makes no difference to God either, and it is an easily observable fact that for countless numbers of persons the change from no-faith to faith makes no actual difference in their life."
- D. Going back to the fear, the culture of cool is partly to blame too
 1. To fit in means pushing boundaries with language, with entertainment choices, the way we dress
 2. Now holiness is much more than these things alone
 3. But too many Christians have concluded that holiness has nothing to do with my current behavior
- E. A fourth reason for our lack of passion for holiness comes from liberal Christians
 1. Unfortunately, some of these well-intentioned folks feel like labeling anything as "ungodly" is being judgmental

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- a) Which, FYI, personal pet peeve
- b) Drives me nuts when people do not understand what the genuine concept of being judgmental really is
 - (1) Being judgmental is believing someone is an idiot for what they have done
 - (2) Telling someone that their behavior was idiotic can be loving
- 2. Ephesians 5:25-27
 - a) Jesus is to make us holy by His blood
 - b) He is to present us without stain or blemish
 - c) It might make sense to understand what things are pure, and what things are impure, and seek to be pure
- F. Liberal Christians are not the only issue - very conservative Christians come into play here too
 - 1. The conservatives can sometimes be SO conservative that they confuse what God did for us, with what we should be doing
 - a) They confuse the indicatives that explain to us the glorious story of Jesus Christ and what He accomplished on our behalf
 - b) With the imperatives that tell us how we are to behave as God's chosen people
 - 2. We don't want to let those commands take away from what God did, even though the commands are there for a reason - for our betterment
 - 3. Just believing in what Jesus did for us can devolve so far that it can turn into an "easy believe-ism" where we are just saved because God is gracious, and we don't have to do any good works at all
 - a) Good work do not earn our salvation
 - b) Good works prove our salvation is real
- G. Yet another reason contributing to the problem - holiness is hard work
 - 1. We can just be plain, outright lazy
 - 2. Or we like our little sins, they are not the "biggies" and trying to kill off any and all sin in life is painful and hard
 - 3. So when we try and fail, and try and fail, often times we just give up
 - 4. Let's face it, it's easier to sign a petition or sign a check for a cause of some kind than it is to actually get involved
 - a) That would require time that I don't have
 - b) To make that time I would have to kill off some things in my life, even some I might enjoy
 - c) That means I might have to get down and dirty with others in this battle with sin in the world
 - d) That means I might be wounded in this battle with sin because it means working with people and people are messy

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- H. Finally, some Christians have just given up on holiness
 - 1. We are hopeless sinners
 - 2. We all know we will not be perfect until Jesus comes back, so why bother?
 - 3. When I try, I feel guilty
 - 4. So instead I'm just going to live life, and hold on to Jesus as my Savior and His wonderful loving forgiveness
 - 5. Some take it so far as to think that the truly spiritual celebrate their imperfection and sin because it brings more glory to God that He could save a wretch like me
 - a) That's twisted folks
 - b) That is some twisted theology

IV. Conclusion

- A. It is not my intention today to make you feel bad for pursuing other things in life
 - 1. Go be the best sports player, actor, business man or woman
 - 2. Go enjoy the outdoors, biking, fishing, hunting
 - 3. Those are all great pursuits
- B. What I do want to get across to you is that holiness is a pursuit that should be at the top of the list for every person that calls themselves a follower of Christ
- C. But is it possible, even with the positive signs of spiritual life happening in you, that you have some spots where you disregard your own holiness?
 - 1. How often do we take a verse like Ephesians 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." and seek to apply it to
 - a) Our conversations at home, work or school
 - b) Videos we watch in the internet
 - c) The TV we watch
 - 2. When the Bible says "not even a hint of immorality" how is that played out in the life of a follower of Christ?
 - a) It has to mean something
 - b) God did not put it in the book for no reason
- D. Over the next few weeks I hope and pray, for myself personally, and for each of you, and for our church that we will begin to close this gap between our love for God, and our love for the difficult task of holiness