

A Hunger for Holiness - The Target

REVIEW: We are in week three of this series on “A Hunger for Holiness.” So far we have looked at the problem that we often do not take holiness that seriously. We seem to lack a passion for holiness. We looked at a few scriptures that first week to help us diagnose our hearts - Is obedience something that characterizes us, is heaven a holy place to us, and does holiness have a place in our evangelism?

Last week we looked at why we say that holiness is necessary. Holiness is the reason that we were redeemed, but it is also necessary for our redemption. We looked at a good many verses, and skipped a great many more to show both of those things are true.

INTRO: This morning we turn our attention toward trying to define the mark. How can we seek after holiness if we do not have a correct understanding of what it is, and what it is not.

I. Holiness in the Bible

- A. If you were to remove the word “holy” from the Bible, the bible would not make much sense.
- B. The word “holy” alone is mentioned more than 600 times
 1. When you add derivatives like “holiness” “sanctify” etc. the number rises to more than 700
 2. So when you remove these words we completely lose the picture that God is holy, and He is seeking to make a holy people for Himself
 3. All of Israel’s worship system was built around the idea of holiness
 - a) You have the holy people (priests)
 - b) Wearing holy clothes
 - c) In the Holy Land
 - d) At the Holy place (Temple)
- C. At its most basic, holiness means separation - it is a spatial term
 1. When something is holy, it is set apart
 2. Abraham Lincoln declared the Gettysburg battlefield “hallowed ground”
 - a) It was set apart
 - b) It was no longer to be viewed as common, but as special
- D. This is far from a perfect analogy, but in similar fashion, God is holy
 1. He is set apart from everything else in all Creation
 2. Theologians call it transcendence - God exists beyond the normal physical level
 3. God is separate and distinct
 4. And God sets us apart to live in a way that reflects His holiness - no matter how imperfectly we do so

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E. Before we jump into defining our target, let me review our theology that we went over when we worked through the series on “A Long Look at Salvation”

1. With salvation there is this dual nature to it
2. We have been justified by God through the work that Christ did on the cross
 - a) If you recall the picture I painted for you back then of a courtroom, God the Father is the judge, Jesus Christ is our lawyer, and we are on trial
 - b) Jesus defends us not with our record of good deeds, but with His shed blood
 - c) As soon as the Judge (Father) hears this, the gavel pounds down and the declaration comes, “NOT GUILTY”
 - d) That is justification
 - (1) We have been declared right, and holy in the eyes of the Judge (Father) on the basis of (the Son) Jesus Christ
 - (2) The rub comes in because as soon as we walk out of that courtroom, we still struggle with sin
3. After we are set free with the verdict, sanctification sets in
 - a) That is the process of living like what God has declared us to be - perfect in Him
 - b) It is a life long pursuit because sin still exists in the world, and can overcome us at any time
 - c) Here is where people get confused in the Bible, because the Bible also speaks of sanctification in a definitive sense
 - (1) We have been set apart because of what Jesus did
 - (2) Hebrews 10:10 “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
 - (a) This, in theologian speak is known as “definitive sanctification”
 - d) Definitive sanctification does not change the fact that we still struggle with sin, or the fact that the Bible also uses the term in the way we are talking about, usually called “progressive sanctification”
 - (1) Meaning we make progress over our lives to becoming more like Christ

II. But what exactly is holiness

A. It’s hard to hit what you are aiming at if you have not taken the time to define the target

1. Saying we are to be holy as God is holy - well that helps a little

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2. We know God has set us apart for a reason - to do good works that He prepared in advance for us to do
 3. But how does holiness actually flesh itself out in real life
 - a) We will tackle this by first looking at what it is not
 - b) Then we will zero in on what it is
- B. What holiness is not
1. Holiness is not simply rule-keeping
 - a) Here is where it gets a little tricky, because holiness is obedience to commands (rules)
 - b) Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands."
 - (1) Sounds like rule keeping to me!
 - c) People that are holy do obey commands - but rule keeping is rather a different animal
 - (1) Jesus used to rip the Pharisees up one side and down the other
 - (a) Which always cracks me up
 - (b) People look at Jesus and think He was never mean
 - (c) He was quite mean to the Pharisees - of course there was a reason why - they, of all people should have known better
 - i) They were so close to the truth, but did not recognize the truth
 - (2) The Pharisees had the outward morality thing down, but inwardly they were a mess
 - (a) So when we talk of rule keeping, think Pharisees
 - d) Too often Christians have followed the way of the Pharisees and made sanctification, holiness, a checklist
 - (1) The problem is an external checklist does not deal with idols of the heart
 - (2) And, it usually winds up being very selective
 - (a) We pick the areas that we are good at, and maybe a few that are harder for us to work on, and we wind up feeling pretty good about our spirituality
 - (b) But much like the Pharisees, we ignore the inner attitudes that the rules are supposed to point us to
 - i) Luke 11:42
 - (c) What this displays is that God has not really gotten to their hearts - and if we follow suit, the same would be true for us, God has not gotten to our hearts
 - e) So while holiness is following the commands of God, it is not checklist spirituality
 - (1) It really is obedience out of love - but we will get to that soon

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2. Holiness is not imitation
 - a) Some people make the false assumption that “If these younger generations would just follow what we used to do, they would be in great shape! Things were better back then.”
 - (1) Allow me to quote from the famous popular theologian, Billy Joel - “the good ol’ days weren’t always good, and tomorrow ain’t as bad as it seems.”
 - (2) The pursuit of holiness is not the idealized past - regardless what era you want to draw from
 - b) This is not to say that we cannot learn from previous generations or eras
 - (1) I still read from various Christian authors across the years that help me to grow
 - (2) But it does not mean that I need to imitate Jonathan Edwards who was said to preach in a monotone voice because he feared people would be persuaded by his vocal inflections rather than by the Spirit
 - c) You will hear from time to time people say, “If only things could go back to the way they used to be” in speaking of a previous era or generation
 - (1) And they might have a point on some things - like sexual standards in public
 - (2) But remember not all things should be brought back - think race relations of years gone by
 - d) Every generation has its insights into life, and its blind spots about life
 - (1) When it comes to the generational/era issue, we need to apply wisdom in learning from all generations
 - (2) One quick example here: previous generations of Christianity (various denominations) stress the otherness or apartness of God
 - (a) That He is beyond us
 - (b) And with that, comes a great deal of respect
 - (3) Current generations of Christians stress the imminence of God - or His closeness, and relational closeness
 - (4) The fact is, God is both, and we can all learn from each other on an issue like that
3. Holiness is not generic spirituality
 - a) It has been popular nowadays, and perhaps you have spoken with someone that has said this, “I’m spiritual, not religious.”

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- (1) Now some folks mean they are seeking genuine communion with God and will not settle for fake Christianity
- (2) More often than not though, they mean that they don't want to be held down by moral absolutes, and dislike organized religion
- b) The problem with this idea is that the Bible lays it out very clear
 - (1) Simply having an interest in spiritual things does not equal salvation
 - (2) In fact, most of these folks don't like to talk about the one thing this really applies to - and that's righteousness
- c) Righteousness is really the goal of Christian spirituality
 - (1) The Spirit works within us to bring about the righteous life of Christ in us
- 4. Holiness is not "finding your true self"
 - a) Nowadays we hear a lot about being true to yourself - so you have to find out who you are, and not just walk in step with the crowd
 - (1) This is what is said to bring the ultimate happiness and wholeness
 - (2) Of course, with postmodernism being the kingpin today, what this usually means is, you can dance to the beat of any drum you like, as long as it does not beat out of time with what's en vogue
 - b) The world insists on holiness
 - (1) Its just their form of holiness is found in being true to yourself
 - (2) NOT in being true to the Creator
- 5. The last thing holiness is not is the way of the world
 - a) What is meant by this is the world's system
 - (1) Worldliness will always make sin look normal and righteousness look strange
 - (2) Some cultures, the world system is closer aligned to biblical holiness
 - (3) But every culture will have some areas that are out of step with God's way of holiness
 - b) Worldliness used to be something that Christians were rightly afraid of creeping into their lives
 - (1) 1 John 2:15 "if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"
 - (2) Nowadays if you talk about dressing in a worldly way, or seeking worldly entertainment, you might get laughed at
 - (a) The world tells us other things are more important - like saving the planet, or whatever endangered species is popular right then

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- c) The point is simple - we really don't believe that friendship with the world is hostility with God (James 4:4)
 - d) The fact is, if you pursue genuine biblical holiness, you will not be popular with the world
 - (1) Some of the things you do will be well accepted
 - (2) But you will have areas that will rub the world the wrong way
- C. So what then does holiness look like
1. Holiness is the renewal of God's image in us
 - a) When man was created, we were created perfect, and whole, with the image of God
 - (1) Not a physical image
 - (2) But the moral, spiritual image of God
 - b) That image was forever marred when sin entered the world
 - (1) Romans 5 - Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, death came to all people because all sinned
 - (2) We are all messed up, and the image of God has been messed up in us
 - c) The image of God was not taken from us - we still bear His image (James 3:9)
 - (1) But the image is distorted - Genesis 6:5
 - d) The goal of our sanctification is the renewal and reformation of God's image
 - (1) Colossians 3:10 - we are being renewed in the knowledge and image of our Creator
 - (2) Combine that with Ephesians 4:24 - it means that we are growing in righteousness and holiness - that is the image renewal process
 - (3) This image renewal process does not happen all at one time
 - (a) It is a process over time
 - (b) 2 Cor. 3:18 "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (ESV)
 - (4) So being holy means becoming like God - which makes knowing the character of God, who He is, critical to our development
 - (a) Too many people only focus on the commands - do this, don't do this
 - (b) The reality is we focus on the command giver - we focus on God
 2. Holiness is a life marked by virtue instead of vice

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- a) An easy way to understand what holiness looks like in the life of believers is looking at the vice and virtue lists in the Bible
 - b) Vice Lists
 - (1) Mark 7:21-22
 - (2) Romans 1:24-31
 - (3) 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
 - (4) Galatians 5:19-21
 - c) Virtue lists
 - (1) Romans 12:9-21
 - (2) 1 Corinthians 13
 - (3) Galatians 5:22-23
 - (4) Colossians 3:12-15
 - d) There is quite a bit of overlapping that the two types of lists do in the Bible
 - e) We may not have specifics on some things from the Bible
 - (1) Like how much to give to the poor
 - (2) How long to pray
 - (3) How long to read our Bibles
 - f) In fact, what we do get is a good picture that holiness is about our character
 - (1) Some Christians stress activism - which is a great outworking of holiness
 - (2) Some Christians stress spiritual disciplines - with which we can't develop holiness
 - (3) But looking at the vice and virtue lists, character becomes very clearly a key to holiness
 - (a) We put to death sin
 - (b) We put on the character of Christ
3. Holiness is a clean conscience
- a) The fact of the matter is, because of justification that we have in Christ, we have a clean conscience
 - (1) When the devil tries to accuse us, we can stand with a clear conscience because of having been cleansed by the blood of Christ
 - b) However, we still need to pay attention to our conscience as God can and does speak to us through it
 - (1) The conscience is not perfect
 - (2) It can
 - (a) Be seared and no longer feels sorrow for sin
 - (b) Be weak - and feels bad for things that are not sin

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- (c) It can be defiled and lose its ability to tell us right from wrong
- (3) So the conscience is no substitute for the Bible
- c) Paul was one that said "I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."
- d) The thing is, conscience can be violated even if an action is not objectively sinful
 - (1) For example: If alcohol has been a problem, or you believe it to be the wrong choice for you, by drinking, not even getting drunk, you have violated your conscience
 - (2) Even lines in dating relationships, and "how far is too far" questions
 - (a) Certain areas there are black and white
 - (b) But there is some middle ground, and it could be very easy to violate your own conscience
- 4. Holiness is obedience to God's commands
 - a) Some people say that God is interested in relationship, not rules - sounds spiritual
 - (1) But it's not biblical
 - (2) Yes, God desires relationship, but the Bible is full of commands
 - (3) The rules are meant to foster relationship with God, not hinder it
 - b) God redeemed Israel first out of Egypt - then they received the law
 - (1) Redemption
 - (2) So that they might obey the law
 - c) 1 John 2:3
 - (1) You can tell me until you are blue in the face that you love God
 - (2) But if you are not seeking obedience you are lying to yourself and God
 - d) If you love your spouse, you will obey the command not to cheat on them
 - (1) The rule does not get in the way of having a good marriage
 - (2) The rule is there to protect and foster a good marriage
 - e) We will talk more about obedience to God's commands (the law) in future weeks
- 5. Last one, holiness is Christlikeness
 - a) If we are restoring the image of God in us, then it should not shock us that we would turn out looking like Christ
 - (1) Col. 1:15
 - b) It is the righteousness of Christ that covers us
 - c) It is Jesus that taught us how to live righteously in an unrighteous world

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d) Surprise surprise, we will look like Christ

(1) Meaning we will take on Christ's character

III. Conclusion

A. My hope is that you are getting a clearer picture of what holiness looks like

B. In future weeks, we will continue looking at these commands of God, and how they lay the groundwork for our holiness.