

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Learn how to be holy, like God is holy

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Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God’s word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God’s word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God’s instructions.

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“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

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“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 1:

An Introduction To Holiness

1 Peter 1:13-16 says, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

But, what exactly does it mean to be holy? Man often has his own ideas about what holiness is – and how it ought to be applied to his life. However, we are forced by passages like 1 Peter 1:13-16 to think about the holiness of God – and to use God’s holiness as our own standard for holiness. In addition, man often desires to withhold a portion of his own life for himself, without allowing God’s command to be holy to take effect in that portion of his life. Yet again, the passage in 1 Peter 1:13-16 forces us to challenge that way of thinking – and apply God’s standard of holiness to every area of our lives!

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the term “holy,” to consider why holiness is so important, to realize that God does

expect for His people to be holy, and to accept that holiness requires effort on our parts. This is an introduction to holiness. This lesson is attempting to establish a foundation for our future studies concerning holiness. And, please note that some of what we will discuss in this lesson will be discussed in greater detail in future studies.

Now, before we begin looking at this lesson, I want to offer a few words about what this 8-lesson study on holiness requires of you. First, this study requires an open Bible. The Bible is the inspired word of God that guides us into all of the ways that are pleasing to God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” As such, we must appeal to it as the standard/criteria for living life on this earth!

Second, this study requires an open and willing mind. To learn about holiness is not all that God requires. Instead, God requires that we apply the things that His word teaches about holiness – and be willing to make the necessary changes to our lives, no matter how far-reaching or “radical” they may seem to be!

What Is Holiness?

The original words that are translated to indicate holiness all have the same basic meaning. The main idea of being holy is to be set apart. In a spiritual sense, then, it is used to denote that which has been set apart (separated from) the common, unclean, profane, and sinful – and dedicated to God! Consider, now, some examples from both the Old and New Testaments to see that this is true.

Holiness in the Old Testament

First, consider seven passages from the Old Testament that represent a sample of God’s teaching about holiness. Many of these passages specifically discuss the responsibility of the Israelites to be God’s special and separate people. Still, through these

examples, you can gain a greater understanding of what it means to be “holy.”

(1) Exodus 3:5. “Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’”

As Moses turned aside to look at a bush that was burning, but, not being consumed by the fire, God called to Moses. He instructed Moses to take his shoes off – because the place he was standing was “holy ground.” This ground was “holy” because it was separated from/different than all of the common ground. This ground was holy in that it was in the presence of the Almighty God!

(2) Exodus 20:8-11. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

The Sabbath (seventh) day was to be kept holy under the Old Covenant. This day was set apart from all of the other days of the week. The Israelites were to recognize this day as being separate – and follow God’s special instructions concerning their work on the Sabbath.

(3) Leviticus 20:26. “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”

The Lord is separate from everything that is evil. Therefore, He calls for His people to be holy (separate from everything that is evil, profane, common, etc.). Under the Old Covenant, God had separated His people (the Israelites) from all of the people of the world to be His own special people and be a holy nation.

(4) Leviticus 21:5-9. “They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the

offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God. Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy. The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.”

The priests of Israel (from the tribe of Levi) performed the tabernacle (and later, the temple) service for God, including offering sacrifices to God. Those who were involved in the priesthood were expected to be “holy to their God.” That is, they were to be separated from the unclean, impure, and sinful in order that they might perform their service to God in a way that was acceptable to Him. These laws reflect the things God had instructed of them in fulfilling this special role among God’s people.

(5) Deuteronomy 14:21. “You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the Lord your God. ‘You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.’”

As God’s holy people, the Israelites were given certain restrictions concerning their conduct, diet, etc. in order to be acceptable to God. Notice how these laws were relevant to the holy people of God and not to the nations of the world. This was because God’s people were called to a higher standard to be separated from the things God declared common and unclean and be devoted entirely to Him!

(6) Deuteronomy 7:1-6. “When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their

son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”

When God would bring the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan, they were to destroy the people of the land along with all of their idolatrous images and altars! This was all to be done because God had called the nation of Israel to be His own special people and be separated from the wicked ways of the world to Himself. God realized that if they would not take these provisions, the people of the world would influence the Israelites to turn away from serving Him!

(7) Deuteronomy 26:16-19. “This day the Lord your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken.”

The covenant Israel entered with the Lord was this: They would be God’s people and He would bless them. And, He would be their God and they would keep His commandments. Therefore, the people of Israel were separated from all of the people of the world to serve the Lord according to the Lord’s instructions and abstain from the sinful ways of the world!

Holiness in the New Testament

Now, let’s focus on five passages in the New Testament containing the idea of holiness. Though these passages speak of different things/people as being “holy,” they help us gain a greater understanding of the word itself.

(1) Romans 16:16. “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”

This passage (along with 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:26) talks about the greeting between those who are Christians. This greeting is something that ought to be special and set apart from all the other ways people greet each other. There is truly something special/unique about the way Christians should greet one another. It reflects the unique and special relationship that is shared between one another in the Lord.

(2) 2 Timothy 1:9. “[Who] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

The way that God calls people to Himself is separate from all of the other calls an individual might receive in this world. God calls people to Himself through the gospel’s message (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Therefore, this call is special and unique in that it is the only calling that will result in the salvation of souls (Romans 1:16)!

(3) 1 Peter 3:5. “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”

Women who trusted in God were known as “holy women.” They were known as such because they were separate from all of the common women who would not trust in God! These who trusted in God and were separated from the worldly women, then, submitted to their husbands – according to the instructions of the Lord (1 Peter 3:1-6).

(4) 1 Peter 2:9-10. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the

praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

As we have seen, the Israelites were God’s special people in the Old Testament and were separated from the world. Today, God’s “holy nation” of people who are separated from the world is the church (composed of individual Christians)! These have been called by God’s holy calling to be separated from the ways of darkness, come into His marvelous light, and obtain mercy from Him!

(5) 1 Peter 1:15-16. “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

God is separated from all that is evil. In the same way, God expects His people to be separated from all that is evil in every area of their lives! We will be revisiting this passage frequently throughout this study. This passage instructs that you must be holy according to God’s standard of holiness in order to please Him.

Why Is Holiness So Important?

Why is it even important to consider this subject? Now that we have learned a little about how the word “holy” is used in the Scriptures, I want us to consider some reasons we need to be concerned about our own holiness. In fact, as we will observe, holiness is a major theme of the Scriptures – beginning with the holiness of God Himself! We will talk more about these points in the next couple of lessons. Still, let’s briefly observe these important points concerning why holiness is so important.

Because of God’s own nature

Remember the basis of God’s plea for His people to be holy is His nature of being holy: “Be holy, for I am holy.” This was true concerning God’s people in the Old Testament (the Israelites). Leviticus 11:44-45 demonstrates this point, “For I

am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” And, the same is also true concerning God’s people under the New Covenant (Christians), as we saw in 1 Peter 1:15-16.

God’s nature is such that He is entirely pure and separated from everything that is evil. 1 John 1:5 says, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” There is no amount of evil in God! And, since this is true, He expects His people to be separated from the ways of evil.

Because of sin

Sin is the transgression/violation of God’s laws. It is acting against or contrary to God’s laws. 1 John 3:4 says, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” God’s ways are always perfect and righteous. Therefore, those who violate God’s perfect and righteous commandments are guilty of unrighteousness! 1 John 5:17 plainly states that all unrighteousness is sin.

Then, because sin is contrary to the holy nature of God, sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” After stating that God is light (without any mixture of darkness), 1 John 1:6 goes on to make it clear that there can be no fellowship with God while we live in sin.

Because of what God has done

The Scriptures teach that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). With the exception of those who do not have the mental ability to sin (i.e. infants, young children, etc.) and Jesus Christ, all who have ever lived on this earth have sinned. Since the wages of sin is spiritual death (separation from God, Romans 6:23) and results in

eternal spiritual death in Hell fire (Revelation 21:8), man's separation from his holy God is a serious problem!

Thanks be to God that He has provided a way through Jesus Christ to be forgiven of our sin and be reconciled to Him! Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Because God calls His people to be holy

God has sacrificed His only begotten Son in order to redeem mankind from his sin. This was the greatest sacrifice that could ever be made – and it was one entirely stemming from God's love and compassion for mankind! He did *not* make this great sacrifice so that mankind could continue living in the same sinful ways he had been living!

Therefore, God requires that those who come to Him for the forgiveness of their sins come out from the world to be separate and dedicate their lives to following Him! This is what we have already considered from 1 Peter 1:13-16 and 1 Peter 2:9-10. Now, consider 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 to further demonstrate this point.

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.' Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse

ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Because we will reap what we have sown

The Bible warns us that it *does* matter whether we choose to live our lives for ourselves or for Him! Galatians 6:7-8 tells us that we will reap what we have sown, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." We will all be judged by Jesus Christ when our earthly lives are over (2 Corinthians 5:10). The standard by which we will all be judged is the word of God – whether we have lived according to the instructions of God while we lived on this earth or not (see John 12:48; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:11-15). God's word is the standard that describes the holiness of God and instructs us concerning our own holiness.

Those who choose to live their lives in rebellion against the holy ways of God will be sentenced to eternal punishment in Hell fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 21:8). But, those who choose to live their lives in submission to the holy ways of God will be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 21:1-22:5).

How you choose to live matters!

How you choose to live matters! First, it matters to God. God is a holy God who calls you to live a life of holiness if you want to be in fellowship with Him and receive the blessings He provides. He has even sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross so that you could be saved from your sins and be made holy in His sight.

Second, how you choose to live matters to you! If you choose to live in sin, you will be eternally punished in Hell! However, you will be eternally rewarded if you will give your life entirely to God! Jesus taught that there is nothing and nobody worth losing your soul for (Matthew 16:26)! Therefore, it pays to be holy!

Holiness matters! All of the points we have considered are directly related to the importance of living a holy life. I hope I have adequately

demonstrated that point. So, whether or not you choose to live a life of holiness matters!

The People Of God

God expects His people to be holy. This was the case under the Old Testament – and it continues to be the case under the new. Therefore, let’s search the Scriptures to see how they refer to God’s people under the New Covenant, particularly as it relates to holiness.

Christians are “the people of God”

1 Peter 2:9-10 (as quoted earlier) said that Christians (the church) are God’s own special people – just like the nation of Israel was God’s own special people under the Old Covenant. The term “church” (as frequently used in the Bible) simply refers to the collection of God’s people. All Christians are part of Christ’s church – and are the people of God!

They are God’s people because they have been purchased with His own blood and have entered into a covenant relationship with Him! Acts 20:28 is one passage that indicates the church of God has been purchased by His own blood (through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross). It says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (as we’ve already considered) describes the covenant that God has made with His people. Notice that this covenant is one in which God will be their Father (which results in a great inheritance, see Romans 8:16-17) and His people have agreed to be separated from the sinful ways of the world in order to follow Him!

Some figures used for God’s people

Now, consider some ways in which His people are described in the Scriptures (as applicable to our study about holiness).

(1) A holy nation. 1 Peter 2:9 identifies Christians as God’s “holy nation.” Just as the

Israelites were called by God to be separate from the wicked and sin-filled world, Christians (His people today) are called to be separate from the wicked ways of the world.

(2) Saints. All Christians are identified as “saints” in the Bible (see Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2). The Greek word translated as “saint” simply refers to a most holy thing (see Thayer’s Greek definitions).

This is because all Christians are sanctified! To be sanctified is to be set apart (and is related to the idea of holiness). Specifically, the Scriptures frequently refer to sanctification in the sense of being set apart from sin – and the consequences of sin.

Those who are obedient to God’s plan of salvation are sanctified by God. Remember, he/she was previously enslaved to sin – and could not escape his/her sin alone! It is through the working of God that those who obey God are sanctified! Ephesians 5:25-27 demonstrates how Christ loved the church so much that He gave Himself to die for her – in order to set her apart (sanctify her) from sin, presenting her to himself as a “glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” As an example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 demonstrates how those in Corinth (who had been guilty of the sins listed in 6:9-10 prior to becoming Christians) were set apart from and justified of their past sins through Jesus Christ!

In the same way, all who are obedient to God’s plan of salvation today are set apart from and justified of their sins – in order that they would live holy lives that are entirely dedicated to the Lord! Therefore, Christians are “saints” (God’s holy people).

(3) The temple of God. The church of God is called His temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” Also consider 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 2:19-22. This is used in the collective sense of all His people (His church). Then, individual Christians are also called temples of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Christ's church is identified in this way because God dwells in His people and they are expected to be entirely separated to Him. God dwells in Christians through His word – as God's word works in the lives of Christians! So, just as God's tabernacle and temple (used in Old Testament worship) were recognized as holy places, God's people are also to be holy. The tabernacle and temple were recognized as being separate from all other places on earth – because God would dwell in them. Therefore, everything about and around the tabernacle and temple was to be holy! In the same way, since God dwells in the Christian (through His word), everything about the Christian's life is expected to be set apart from that which is common, impure, and wicked!

(4) A royal priesthood. 1 Peter 2:9-10 not only describes God's people as a holy nation, but also as a royal priesthood. In the Old Testament, God's priests were expected to be set apart and dedicated to God's service (as we observed in Leviticus 21:5-9). You can read about the various aspects of the priesthood to see how they were called to be separate because of their important role of ministering to God on behalf of the people.

Today, all Christians are priests! We offer to God the spiritual sacrifice of our lives (Romans 12:1-2) and offer our worship to Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Therefore, God expects every Christian to be separated entirely to Him so that their spiritual sacrifices and worship will be acceptable to Him!

Holiness Requires Effort

Finally, after considering these truths that God expects His people to be holy, you must recognize that holiness requires effort! Holiness doesn't just happen. Consider how the Scriptures demonstrate the effort that is attached with holiness.

The flesh pulls us to be unholy

The way of the flesh is contrary to the way of God (the Spirit). Galatians 5:16-26 demonstrates this to be true. Verse 16 instructs us to live according to

God's instructions (walk "in the Spirit") so that we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. "For," he explains in verse 17, "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." Paul then identifies some wicked things that will be produced in the lives of those who live according to the ways of the flesh (i.e. fornication, adultery, idolatry, sorcery, jealousies, murder, drunkenness, and such things). In contrast to these, are some good things that will result in the lives of those who live according to God's holy ways (i.e. love, joy, peace, self-control, etc.). Paul concludes that "those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (verse 24).

After Peter identified God's people as a "royal priesthood" and a "holy nation" in 1 Peter 2:9-10, he begs those who are Christians to view themselves as "sojourners and pilgrims" during their earthly lives. He does so because those who view themselves in this way will not be focused on living according to the unholy desires that are often used by the devil to lure people away from serving God. He exhorts those who are Christians to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (see 1 Peter 2:11-12).

In Romans 8:5-8, Paul taught that the mind that is set on living according to the ways of the flesh cannot please God. He said that this mind is hostile toward God and will not submit to God's holy ways. Instead of focusing on temporary earthly things, Paul encouraged Christians to focus on the eternal (spiritual) things of God. These are the only things that will help us to experience life and peace.

Clearly, the Scriptures demonstrate that the fleshly things of this life are trying to pull us away from being holy and serving God. Sadly, most people succumb to the pull of these fleshly desires that result in being unholy. The way of the flesh is the way that is common, sinful, wicked, etc. In fact, listen to John's assessment of the things that are "in the world," in 1 John 2:15-17. It is not the way that is separate and pure! "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the

world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Many Bible examples demonstrate that the majority of those on the earth will pursue the ways of the flesh instead of living to please God. (1) All but eight individuals were wicked in the days of Noah (Genesis 6:5-8). (2) Not even ten were found to be righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah to prevent God from destroying those two wicked cities (Genesis 18-19). (3) Even the nation of Israel (God’s people under the Old Covenant) consistently turned away from following after God, so as to pursue their own fleshly desires and follow the idols of the nations around them.

Jesus also said that most people would choose to live in a way that does not please God, taking the easy path through this life: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Because of the great pull of the flesh to live in a way that is unholy, being holy requires great effort! It doesn’t just happen by chance! It takes determination and self-discipline!

Must cleanse self from all filthiness, perfecting holiness

2 Corinthians 7:1 says, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

We must make an effort to be entirely holy! This passage (2 Corinthians 7:1) instructs that we cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit. This is our responsibility! We must make a determined effort to rid ourselves of the filth of sin, both inside and outside! This passage tells us that we must be pressing toward perfect holiness!

Holiness, therefore, is an ongoing responsibility. Holiness is not a one-time decision (i.e. when we become Christians). Instead, holiness requires great diligence throughout the course of a lifetime! Therefore, Jesus told the Christians in

Smyrna, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). We must take time to be holy, evaluating our lives in order to see whether we are living in the way that is pleasing to God or not – and determine to make the necessary changes to our lives in order to perfect holiness!

Then, this is to be done as you recognize the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord involves two elements: (1) Reverential respect for God concerning who He is and what He has done. (2) Terror of God concerning His vengeance upon those who disobey Him. Both of these elements have a tremendous impact on our decisions to be holy!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That to be holy is to be separated from the common, evil, unclean, profane, etc. and to be completely dedicated to God. (2) That the choice to be holy or not to be holy has eternal implications for our souls. (3) That God calls those who are His own special people (Christians) to live holy lives. And, (4) that holiness requires diligence and effort.

How dedicated are you to being holy? Do you recognize your need to be holy? Holiness is only found through Jesus Christ – in coming to Him for the forgiveness of your sins through obedience to the gospel! Come to Christ today! Have you heard His word, believed in Him, repented of your sins, confessed Christ, and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, you are still in your sins! If you have come to Christ, are you living your life in the way that is pleasing to God, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord? If not, you need to make the necessary corrections to your life today! 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”!

Study Questions

What are your impressions from reading 1 Peter 1:13-16?

What does this study on holiness require of you?

1. What Is Holiness?

Define holiness.

Briefly discuss the following OT examples of holiness:

1. Exodus 3:5 –
2. Exodus 20:8-11 –
3. Leviticus 20:26 –
4. Leviticus 21:5-9 –
5. Deuteronomy 14:21 –
6. Deuteronomy 7:1-11 –
7. Deuteronomy 26:16-19 –

Briefly discuss the following NT examples of holiness:

1. Romans 16:16 –
2. 2 Timothy 1:9 –

3. 1 Peter 3:5 –

4. 1 Peter 2:9-10 –

5. 1 Peter 1:15-16 –

2. Why Is Holiness So Important?

What does God's own nature have to do with holiness?

What does sin have to do with holiness?

What does the sacrifice of Jesus have to do with holiness?

What does God's call have to do with holiness?

What does the Day of Judgment have to do with holiness?

Does holiness matter? Explain.

3. The People Of God

Who are the "people of God"?

Discuss the following figures that are used regarding God's people – and how they are connected with holiness:

1. A holy nation –

2. Saints –

3. The temple of God –

4. A royal priesthood –

4. Holiness Requires Effort

How does the flesh pull you away from being holy?

What does 2 Corinthians 7:1 teach you concerning your individual effort to be holy?

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 2: God, Our Standard For Holiness

1 Peter 1:13-16 says, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

But, what exactly does it mean to be holy? Man often has his own ideas about what holiness is – and how it ought to be applied to his life. However, we are forced by passages like 1 Peter 1:13-16 to think about the holiness of God – and to use God’s holiness as our own standard for holiness. In addition, man often desires to withhold a portion of his own life for himself, without allowing God’s command to be holy to take effect in that portion of his life. Yet again, the passage in 1 Peter 1:13-16 forces us to challenge that way of thinking – and

apply God’s standard of holiness to every area of our lives!

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the term “holy,” to consider why holiness is so important, to realize that God does expect for His people to be holy, and to accept that holiness requires effort on our parts. This is an introduction to holiness. This lesson is attempting to establish a foundation for our future studies concerning holiness. And, please note that some of what we will discuss in this lesson will be discussed in greater detail in future studies.

Now, before we begin looking at this lesson, I want to offer a few words about what this 8-lesson study on holiness requires of you. First, this study requires an open Bible. The Bible is the inspired word of God that guides us into all of the ways that are pleasing to God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” As such, we must appeal to it as the standard/criteria for living life on this earth!

Second, this study requires an open and willing mind. To learn about holiness is not all that God requires. Instead, God requires that we apply the things that His word teaches about holiness – and be willing to make the necessary changes to our lives, no matter how far-reaching or “radical” they may seem to be!

What Is Holiness?

The original words that are translated to indicate holiness all have the same basic meaning. The main idea of being holy is to be set apart. In a spiritual sense, then, it is used to denote that which has been set apart (separated from) the common, unclean, profane, and sinful – and dedicated to God! Consider, now, some examples from both the Old and New Testaments to see that this is true.

Holiness in the Old Testament

First, consider seven passages from the Old Testament that represent a sample of God's teaching about holiness. Many of these passages specifically discuss the responsibility of the Israelites to be God's special and separate people. Still, through these examples, you can gain a greater understanding of what it means to be "holy."

(1) Exodus 3:5. "Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.'"

As Moses turned aside to look at a bush that was burning, but, not being consumed by the fire, God called to Moses. He instructed Moses to take his shoes off – because the place he was standing was "holy ground." This ground was "holy" because it was separated from/different than all of the common ground. This ground was holy in that it was in the presence of the Almighty God!

(2) Exodus 20:8-11. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

The Sabbath (seventh) day was to be kept holy under the Old Covenant. This day was set apart from all of the other days of the week. The Israelites were to recognize this day as being separate – and follow God's special instructions concerning their work on the Sabbath.

(3) Leviticus 20:26. "And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine."

The Lord is separate from everything that is evil. Therefore, He calls for His people to be holy (separate from everything that is evil, profane, common, etc.). Under the Old Covenant, God had separated His people (the Israelites) from all of the

people of the world to be His own special people and be a holy nation.

(4) Leviticus 21:5-9. "They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God. Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy. The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire."

The priests of Israel (from the tribe of Levi) performed the tabernacle (and later, the temple) service for God, including offering sacrifices to God. Those who were involved in the priesthood were expected to be "holy to their God." That is, they were to be separated from the unclean, impure, and sinful in order that they might perform their service to God in a way that was acceptable to Him. These laws reflect the things God had instructed of them in fulfilling this special role among God's people.

(5) Deuteronomy 14:21. "You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the Lord your God. 'You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.'"

As God's holy people, the Israelites were given certain restrictions concerning their conduct, diet, etc. in order to be acceptable to God. Notice how these laws were relevant to the holy people of God and not to the nations of the world. This was because God's people were called to a higher standard to be separated from the things God declared common and unclean and be devoted entirely to Him!

(6) Deuteronomy 7:1-6. "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and

the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”

When God would bring the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan, they were to destroy the people of the land along with all of their idolatrous images and altars! This was all to be done because God had called the nation of Israel to be His own special people and be separated from the wicked ways of the world to Himself. God realized that if they would not take these provisions, the people of the world would influence the Israelites to turn away from serving Him!

(7) Deuteronomy 26:16-19. “This day the Lord your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken.”

The covenant Israel entered with the Lord was this: They would be God’s people and He would bless them. And, He would be their God and they would keep His commandments. Therefore, the people of Israel were separated from all of the people

of the world to serve the Lord according to the Lord’s instructions and abstain from the sinful ways of the world!

Holiness in the New Testament

Now, let’s focus on five passages in the New Testament containing the idea of holiness. Though these passages speak of different things/people as being “holy,” they help us gain a greater understanding of the word itself.

(1) Romans 16:16. “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”

This passage (along with 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:26) talks about the greeting between those who are Christians. This greeting is something that ought to be special and set apart from all the other ways people greet each other. There is truly something special/unique about the way Christians should greet one another. It reflects the unique and special relationship that is shared between one another in the Lord.

(2) 2 Timothy 1:9. “[Who] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

The way that God calls people to Himself is separate from all of the other calls an individual might receive in this world. God calls people to Himself through the gospel’s message (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Therefore, this call is special and unique in that it is the only calling that will result in the salvation of souls (Romans 1:16)!

(3) 1 Peter 3:5. “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”

Women who trusted in God were known as “holy women.” They were known as such because they were separate from all of the common women who would not trust in God! These who trusted in God and were separated from the worldly women, then, submitted to their husbands – according to the instructions of the Lord (1 Peter 3:1-6).

(4) 1 Peter 2:9-10. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

As we have seen, the Israelites were God’s special people in the Old Testament and were separated from the world. Today, God’s “holy nation” of people who are separated from the world is the church (composed of individual Christians)! These have been called by God’s holy calling to be separated from the ways of darkness, come into His marvelous light, and obtain mercy from Him!

(5) 1 Peter 1:15-16. “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

God is separated from all that is evil. In the same way, God expects His people to be separated from all that is evil in every area of their lives! We will be revisiting this passage frequently throughout this study. This passage instructs that you must be holy according to God’s standard of holiness in order to please Him.

Why Is Holiness So Important?

Why is it even important to consider this subject? Now that we have learned a little about how the word “holy” is used in the Scriptures, I want us to consider some reasons we need to be concerned about our own holiness. In fact, as we will observe, holiness is a major theme of the Scriptures – beginning with the holiness of God Himself! We will talk more about these points in the next couple of lessons. Still, let’s briefly observe these important points concerning why holiness is so important.

Because of God’s own nature

Remember the basis of God’s plea for His people to be holy is His nature of being holy: “Be

holy, for I am holy.” This was true concerning God’s people in the Old Testament (the Israelites). Leviticus 11:44-45 demonstrates this point, “For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” And, the same is also true concerning God’s people under the New Covenant (Christians), as we saw in 1 Peter 1:15-16.

God’s nature is such that He is entirely pure and separated from everything that is evil. 1 John 1:5 says, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” There is no amount of evil in God! And, since this is true, He expects His people to be separated from the ways of evil.

Because of sin

Sin is the transgression/violation of God’s laws. It is acting against or contrary to God’s laws. 1 John 3:4 says, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” God’s ways are always perfect and righteous. Therefore, those who violate God’s perfect and righteous commandments are guilty of unrighteousness! 1 John 5:17 plainly states that all unrighteousness is sin.

Then, because sin is contrary to the holy nature of God, sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” After stating that God is light (without any mixture of darkness), 1 John 1:6 goes on to make it clear that there can be no fellowship with God while we live in sin.

Because of what God has done

The Scriptures teach that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). With the exception of those who do not have the mental ability to sin (i.e. infants, young children, etc.) and

Jesus Christ, all who have ever lived on this earth have sinned. Since the wages of sin is spiritual death (separation from God, Romans 6:23) and results in eternal spiritual death in Hell fire (Revelation 21:8), man's separation from his holy God is a serious problem!

Thanks be to God that He has provided a way through Jesus Christ to be forgiven of our sin and be reconciled to Him! Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Because God calls His people to be holy

God has sacrificed His only begotten Son in order to redeem mankind from his sin. This was the greatest sacrifice that could ever be made – and it was one entirely stemming from God's love and compassion for mankind! He did *not* make this great sacrifice so that mankind could continue living in the same sinful ways he had been living!

Therefore, God requires that those who come to Him for the forgiveness of their sins come out from the world to be separate and dedicate their lives to following Him! This is what we have already considered from 1 Peter 1:13-16 and 1 Peter 2:9-10. Now, consider 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 to further demonstrate this point.

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and

daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.' Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Because we will reap what we have sown

The Bible warns us that it *does* matter whether we choose to live our lives for ourselves or for Him! Galatians 6:7-8 tells us that we will reap what we have sown, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." We will all be judged by Jesus Christ when our earthly lives are over (2 Corinthians 5:10). The standard by which we will all be judged is the word of God – whether we have lived according to the instructions of God while we lived on this earth or not (see John 12:48; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:11-15). God's word is the standard that describes the holiness of God and instructs us concerning our own holiness.

Those who choose to live their lives in rebellion against the holy ways of God will be sentenced to eternal punishment in Hell fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 21:8). But, those who choose to live their lives in submission to the holy ways of God will be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 21:1-22:5).

How you choose to live matters!

How you choose to live matters! First, it matters to God. God is a holy God who calls you to live a life of holiness if you want to be in fellowship with Him and receive the blessings He provides. He has even sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross so that you could be saved from your sins and be made holy in His sight.

Second, how you choose to live matters to you! If you choose to live in sin, you will be eternally punished in Hell! However, you will be eternally rewarded if you will give your life entirely to God! Jesus taught that there is nothing and nobody worth losing your soul for (Matthew 16:26)! Therefore, it pays to be holy!

Holiness matters! All of the points we have considered are directly related to the importance of living a holy life. I hope I have adequately demonstrated that point. So, whether or not you choose to live a life of holiness matters!

The People Of God

God expects His people to be holy. This was the case under the Old Testament – and it continues to be the case under the new. Therefore, let’s search the Scriptures to see how they refer to God’s people under the New Covenant, particularly as it relates to holiness.

Christians are “the people of God”

1 Peter 2:9-10 (as quoted earlier) said that Christians (the church) are God’s own special people – just like the nation of Israel was God’s own special people under the Old Covenant. The term “church” (as frequently used in the Bible) simply refers to the collection of God’s people. All Christians are part of Christ’s church – and are the people of God!

They are God’s people because they have been purchased with His own blood and have entered into a covenant relationship with Him! Acts 20:28 is one passage that indicates the church of God has been purchased by His own blood (through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross). It says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (as we’ve already considered) describes the covenant that God has made with His people. Notice that this covenant is one in which God will be their Father (which results in a great inheritance, see Romans 8:16-17) and His people have agreed to be separated from the sinful ways of the world in order to follow Him!

Some figures used for God’s people

Now, consider some ways in which His people are described in the Scriptures (as applicable to our study about holiness).

(1) A holy nation. 1 Peter 2:9 identifies Christians as God’s “holy nation.” Just as the Israelites were called by God to be separate from the wicked and sin-filled world, Christians (His people today) are called to be separate from the wicked ways of the world.

(2) Saints. All Christians are identified as “saints” in the Bible (see Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2). The Greek word translated as “saint” simply refers to a most holy thing (see Thayer’s Greek definitions).

This is because all Christians are sanctified! To be sanctified is to be set apart (and is related to the idea of holiness). Specifically, the Scriptures frequently refer to sanctification in the sense of being set apart from sin – and the consequences of sin.

Those who are obedient to God’s plan of salvation are sanctified by God. Remember, he/she was previously enslaved to sin – and could not escape his/her sin alone! It is through the working of God that those who obey God are sanctified! Ephesians 5:25-27 demonstrates how Christ loved the church so much that He gave Himself to die for her – in order to set her apart (sanctify her) from sin, presenting her to himself as a “glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” As an example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 demonstrates how those in Corinth (who had been guilty of the sins listed in 6:9-10 prior to becoming Christians) were set apart from and justified of their past sins through Jesus Christ!

In the same way, all who are obedient to God’s plan of salvation today are set apart from and justified of their sins – in order that they would live holy lives that are entirely dedicated to the Lord! Therefore, Christians are “saints” (God’s holy people).

(3) The temple of God. The church of God is called His temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the

temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” Also consider 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 2:19-22. This is used in the collective sense of all His people (His church). Then, individual Christians are also called temples of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Christ’s church is identified in this way because God dwells in His people and they are expected to be entirely separated to Him. God dwells in Christians through His word – as God’s word works in the lives of Christians! So, just as God’s tabernacle and temple (used in Old Testament worship) were recognized as holy places, God’s people are also to be holy. The tabernacle and temple were recognized as being separate from all other places on earth – because God would dwell in them. Therefore, everything about and around the tabernacle and temple was to be holy! In the same way, since God dwells in the Christian (through His word), everything about the Christian’s life is expected to be set apart from that which is common, impure, and wicked!

(4) A royal priesthood. 1 Peter 2:9-10 not only describes God’s people as a holy nation, but also as a royal priesthood. In the Old Testament, God’s priests were expected to be set apart and dedicated to God’s service (as we observed in Leviticus 21:5-9). You can read about the various aspects of the priesthood to see how they were called to be separate because of their important role of ministering to God on behalf of the people.

Today, all Christians are priests! We offer to God the spiritual sacrifice of our lives (Romans 12:1-2) and offer our worship to Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Therefore, God expects every Christian to be separated entirely to Him so that their spiritual sacrifices and worship will be acceptable to Him!

Holiness Requires Effort

Finally, after considering these truths that God expects His people to be holy, you must recognize that holiness requires effort! Holiness

doesn’t just happen. Consider how the Scriptures demonstrate the effort that is attached with holiness.

The flesh pulls us to be unholy

The way of the flesh is contrary to the way of God (the Spirit). Galatians 5:16-26 demonstrates this to be true. Verse 16 instructs us to live according to God’s instructions (walk “in the Spirit”) so that we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. “For,” he explains in verse 17, “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” Paul then identifies some wicked things that will be produced in the lives of those who live according to the ways of the flesh (i.e. fornication, adultery, idolatry, sorcery, jealousies, murder, drunkenness, and such things). In contrast to these, are some good things that will result in the lives of those who live according to God’s holy ways (i.e. love, joy, peace, self-control, etc.). Paul concludes that “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (verse 24).

After Peter identified God’s people as a “royal priesthood” and a “holy nation” in 1 Peter 2:9-10, he begs those who are Christians to view themselves as “sojourners and pilgrims” during their earthly lives. He does so because those who view themselves in this way will not be focused on living according to the unholy desires that are often used by the devil to lure people away from serving God. He exhorts those who are Christians to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (see 1 Peter 2:11-12).

In Romans 8:5-8, Paul taught that the mind that is set on living according to the ways of the flesh cannot please God. He said that this mind is hostile toward God and will not submit to God’s holy ways. Instead of focusing on temporary earthly things, Paul encouraged Christians to focus on the eternal (spiritual) things of God. These are the only things that will help us to experience life and peace.

Clearly, the Scriptures demonstrate that the fleshly things of this life are trying to pull us away from being holy and serving God. Sadly, most people succumb to the pull of these fleshly desires that result in being unholy. The way of the flesh is the way that

is common, sinful, wicked, etc. In fact, listen to John's assessment of the things that are "in the world," in 1 John 2:15-17. It is not the way that is separate and pure! "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

Many Bible examples demonstrate that the majority of those on the earth will pursue the ways of the flesh instead of living to please God. (1) All but eight individuals were wicked in the days of Noah (Genesis 6:5-8). (2) Not even ten were found to be righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah to prevent God from destroying those two wicked cities (Genesis 18-19). (3) Even the nation of Israel (God's people under the Old Covenant) consistently turned away from following after God, so as to pursue their own fleshly desires and follow the idols of the nations around them.

Jesus also said that most people would choose to live in a way that does not please God, taking the easy path through this life: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Because of the great pull of the flesh to live in a way that is unholy, being holy requires great effort! It doesn't just happen by chance! It takes determination and self-discipline!

Must cleanse self from all filthiness, perfecting holiness

2 Corinthians 7:1 says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

We must make an effort to be entirely holy! This passage (2 Corinthians 7:1) instructs that we cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit. This is our responsibility! We must make a determined effort to rid ourselves of the filth of sin,

both inside and outside! This passage tells us that we must be pressing toward perfect holiness!

Holiness, therefore, is an ongoing responsibility. Holiness is not a one-time decision (i.e. when we become Christians). Instead, holiness requires great diligence throughout the course of a lifetime! Therefore, Jesus told the Christians in Smyrna, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). We must take time to be holy, evaluating our lives in order to see whether we are living in the way that is pleasing to God or not – and determine to make the necessary changes to our lives in order to perfect holiness!

Then, this is to be done as you recognize the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord involves two elements: (1) Reverential respect for God concerning who He is and what He has done. (2) Terror of God concerning His vengeance upon those who disobey Him. Both of these elements have a tremendous impact on our decisions to be holy!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That to be holy is to be separated from the common, evil, unclean, profane, etc. and to be completely dedicated to God. (2) That the choice to be holy or not to be holy has eternal implications for our souls. (3) That God calls those who are His own special people (Christians) to live holy lives. And, (4) that holiness requires diligence and effort.

How dedicated are you to being holy? Do you recognize your need to be holy? Holiness is only found through Jesus Christ – in coming to Him for the forgiveness of your sins through obedience to the gospel! Come to Christ today! Have you heard His word, believed in Him, repented of your sins, confessed Christ, and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, you are still in your sins! If you have come to Christ, are you living your life in the way that is pleasing to God, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord? If not, you need to make the necessary corrections to your life today! 2

Corinthians 6:2 says, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”!

1.

2.

Study Questions

3.

What does it mean to be holy?

4.

What standard must be used to determine what is wicked and what is good?

What is the guidebook for living in a way that is acceptable to God – and how does it teach you to be holy?

1. God Is Holy

List and briefly describe the teachings of some passages in which God’s holiness is proclaimed.

List and briefly describe some passages in which God’s holiness is illustrated.

2. What God’s Holiness Requires

Discuss each one of the following ramifications of God’s holiness:

1. All that is in His presence must be holy –

2. A perfect standard to guide individuals in ways of holiness

3. Vengeance to be taken against His enemies

4. A perfect sacrifice made to make others holy –

3. God’s Perfect Standard Of Holiness

List some common false standards of holiness – and briefly explain why they are false.

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 3:

The Grace Of God And Our Holiness

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

To be holy is to be separate or set apart. In the spiritual sense, it refers to our responsibility to be separate from the ways of the world (the ways that are common, profane, and sinful) in order to be entirely devoted to God! The standard that must be used to determine our holiness is God (who is perfectly holy), and the message that He has revealed to mankind.

But, how can we be holy after we have sinned? The Bible teaches, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). How could we ever be restored to a place of friendship

with the perfectly holy God after we have sinned? And, if we could ever be restored to a place of friendship with God, what would this mean for our lives?

The purpose of this lesson is to consider that God created us as holy beings, to learn about and appreciate God’s eternal plan of redemption, and to evaluate what God’s grace should mean for our own holiness!

We Were Created Holy

Before we can learn about how God’s grace makes it possible for us to be made holy *again*, we have to first come to an understanding that our being unholy was not God’s fault. God created us entirely holy. However, each one has chosen to rebel against the holy ways of God (thereby committing sin). And, this sin carries eternal consequences.

We were born sinless

When we were born into this world, were we born pure or sinful? There is a large segment of the religious world today that will claim that we were already sinners whenever we entered the world. They claim that we have inherited our sin – that it has been passed down from the time of Adam and Eve! Therefore, there was never a time in which we were ever innocent and holy!

However, the Bible (despite the claims made to the contrary) never teaches the doctrine of original (inherited) sin (also known as total hereditary depravity)! Now, this is *not* to say that those who advocate this doctrine do not use certain Scriptures to attempt to prove that it is true. Yet, the passages that are used do not actually teach what they are said to teach! Instead, as you consider the entirety of the Divine revelation and rightly divide the Scriptures, you discover that God has given each individual free will and has not arranged a system in which we enter the world as sinners – condemned before we start!

Consider some passages that disprove the doctrine of inherited sin (though these are only a few of the passages we could consider).

(1) Ezekiel 18:20: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

This passage is a direct contradiction to the things that are taught by the advocates of inherited sin. Each individual is spiritually responsible for his/her own sin – and not for the sins of his/her forefathers! Yet, the inherited sin position claims that sin has been passed down throughout the generations from Adam to the present time.

(2) Matthew 18:1-4: “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

When the question was asked, “Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?,” Jesus responded by indicating that it is little children – and those who would be converted to be like little children. Think about what Jesus has just said (as He teaches a lesson about humility) – and the implications of this teaching to the subject of inherited sin! If children were born in sin, why would He instruct others to be converted and become like little sinners? The truth is that Jesus instructed them to be converted and be holy like little children (who are completely holy)!

(3) Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

This text (Romans 5:12-21) is a passage used by “original sin” advocates to teach their false doctrine. However, notice that whatever this passage teaches is prefaced by verse 12! This verse clearly teaches us that death (spiritual death) spread to all men *because all sinned!* Death did not spread because they had inherited their sin. Instead, death spread as a result of their decision to commit sin!

So, these passages help us to understand that we were born entirely holy in the sight of God! We entered the world in a state of being entirely separated from all that is evil, wicked, and sinful – and entirely in the favor of God! He has given each one personal responsibility and accountability. Therefore, we are each responsible for our own actions and not for the decisions made by others!

All have sinned

Still, the Bible teaches us that all have sinned. Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That is, everyone who has reached an age of personal accountability (an age at which we can decide between right and wrong for ourselves), has made the decision to sin (with the exception of Jesus Christ, Hebrews 4:15). Since sin is contrary to the way of God (1 John 3:4), it is the way of darkness and takes us out of fellowship with our holy God (1 John 1:5-7).

But, how does sin work? James 1:14-15 helps us to understand. It says, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” Sin results whenever we are drawn away and enticed by our own fleshly desires. Then, when we act to fulfill those fleshly desires in ways that are contrary to the instructions of the Lord, we sin. So, as the result of choosing to fulfill our own personal desires rather than fulfilling the instructions of God, we no longer live holy lives (separated from sin and devoted to God)! Therefore, we are separated from this holy God (Isaiah 59:1-2)!

The consequences of sin

James 1:15 and Romans 6:23 teach us that the wages of sin is death. James 1:15 said that sin “when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This refers to spiritual death (separation from God). While we live (if we are living in our sins), we are separated from fellowship and friendship with God (spiritual death). For instance, 1 Timothy 5:6 says, “But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.”

Then, if we die while we are in our sins, we will experience the “second death.” Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” The “second death” refers to the eternal separation from God that those who die in their sins will experience. Recall (from lesson 2) the language of the following passages that indicate this eternal separation from God.

Matthew 7:21-23 speaks regarding individuals who professed Jesus as Lord. Yet, they had not been doing the will of the Father. Notice what they will be told (according to verse 23): “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” In Matthew 25:41, you should notice the same sort of language – as Jesus will tell those who will have been judged to be unfaithful to Him, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 discusses the Day “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

All of these passages point to an eternal separation from God. This place of eternal separation from God is a place the Bible calls Hell! This place is described as being: (1) A lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8), (2) a place of everlasting fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), (3) a place of everlasting (never-ending) punishment (Matthew 25:46), and (4) a place in which their worm does not die and the fire is never quenched (Mark 9:42-48).

Then, not only do you need to understand the place of punishment God has prepared for those who live for sin, but you also need to understand that you forfeit the opportunity to spend eternity in Heaven with Him (a place that is magnificently described in Revelation 21:1-22:5)!

Sin is a problem we cannot solve by ourselves!

We have each decided to live in a way that is contrary to God’s ways and His nature! Therefore, we have each lived in a way that is deserving of eternal spiritual death in Hell fire. Since eternal spiritual death is what we all deserve for sinning, there is nothing that we can do (of ourselves) to be reconciled to God and be made holy in His sight again! Remember Romans 6:23 say, “For the wages of sin is death...”

The only way we could be saved from the consequences of our sins is if God would provide a way by which we could be made holy in His sight once more. Thanks be to God that He has provided us this great opportunity through Jesus Christ! Romans 6:23 continues, “...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God’s Grace To Save Us From Sin

Oh, how miserable a condition we would be in without God! We would be hopelessly lost in our sins and destined to spend eternity in the everlasting torments of Hell. However, the Bible does *not* just tell us about the consequences of our sins. The Bible also tells us about the love, grace, and mercy of God that works to save us from our sins and give us eternal salvation in Heaven!

God’s eternal plan of redemption

Thanks be to God that He had a plan that would provide the remedy for sin. God, according to His manifold wisdom had a plan of redemption in His mind from eternity (before He ever created the world) that would be accomplished through His Son, Jesus Christ! Ephesians 3:8-11 speaks of this eternal plan of God. Specifically, notice verse 11: “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” 1 Peter 1:20-21 also references this eternal plan of God. It says, “He indeed was foreordained before the foundation

of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” God knew the only things that could appease His wrath and bring about the forgiveness of sins was the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God (who was tempted in all of the same ways we are tempted, yet, did not commit sin – Hebrews 4:15)!

God’s plan provided all spiritual blessings to be made available in Jesus Christ. You can read Ephesians 1:3-14 and realize that these spiritual blessings include the forgiveness of sins, the adoption as children of God, and an eternal inheritance in Heaven. You should also notice that those who would be “in Christ” were expected to be holy and without blame before God! Verse 4 says, “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

God, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, would make it possible for those who were once alienated from God to be reconciled to Him and made to be holy in His sight once more. Consider Colossians 1:19-23: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

Now, it is important to recognize that God’s plan of redemption involves two parts: God’s part and man’s part. God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves (in providing us an opportunity to be forgiven of our sins and be restored to a place of friendship with Him). But, He has given us things that we must do in order to be saved (things which demonstrate our dependence upon Him).

God’s part in salvation

God sent His only begotten Son to be the ransom sacrifice. God loved mankind so much that He did not want mankind to experience the eternal consequences of his sin! 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” So, He sent His only begotten Son to the earth to provide the sacrifice that was necessary to ransom mankind from his sin (John 3:16)! Jesus Christ willingly left Heaven to come to earth, He lived a sinless life, He endured great sufferings at the hands of evil men, He was crucified on the cross (having nails driven into His hands and His feet), He was buried, He rose from the dead, and He has ascended into Heaven!

Consider how Romans 5:6-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 describe God’s work to reconcile mankind to Himself through Jesus Christ, thereby appeasing His own wrath. Romans 5:6-11 says, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Similarly, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 demonstrates that it is only through Jesus that mankind could be reconciled to God. It says, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

Our past sins, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, can now be entirely removed from God’s

mind (Hebrews 8:12; Acts 3:19)! Our sins, which had separated us from our holy God (1 John 1:5-6), can be covered with Jesus' blood and we can be restored to a place of fellowship with God! Consequently, we are given the opportunity (through Jesus) to spend eternity in Heaven when life on this earth is over!

So, we can be saved by the grace of God! Notice how Ephesians 2:1-3 describes the fact that we were once spiritually dead, when we lived in our trespasses and sins. It says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

We were living in a way that made us children of wrath (subject to the wrath of the Almighty God). We were living according to our own desires rather than the desires of God! However, this text informs us that God has made it possible for us to be spiritually alive – even though we had once been dead in our trespasses and sins!

Then, verses 4-10 go on to describe how God's great love has been shown to us through Jesus Christ in providing His mercy and grace. It says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

This passage speaks of both the grace and the mercy of God. God's grace is shown in that He gives us what we do *not* deserve (i.e. eternal life in Heaven). God's mercy is shown in that He does *not*

give us what we *do* deserve (i.e. eternal punishment in Hell). Furthermore, this text indicates that there are no works that we can do to merit (earn, deserve) our salvation; but, that our salvation is the gift of God. Remember, we earned eternal punishment in Hell. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can experience eternal life in Heaven (Romans 6:23).

Our part in salvation

While it is true that we cannot do anything to earn our salvation, God *does* require that we be obedient to His instructions in order to be saved. Therefore, let's focus now on our God-given responsibilities in salvation. Remember, those who do not *obey* God are the ones who will be eternally separated from Him (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who *obey* Him (Hebrews 5:9). Furthermore, James says that we are justified by works – and *not* by faith only (James 2:14-26). Clearly, God says that we must *obey* His commandments in order to be saved. Yet, doing these things does *not* earn our salvation. Instead, it is simply obedience to Him (fulfilling the requirements He has placed on salvation). So, what does God require of us in order to be saved?

God has given very clear instructions throughout the Bible as to what we must do in order to become Christians, be forgiven of our sins, and be saved eternally. He has said that we must: **(1) Hear God's word.** If you are going to be obedient to the gospel of Christ, you must first hear the gospel's message. Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." You must hear about what God has done through Jesus Christ so that you can be saved and hear what He requires you to do in order to be saved.

(2) Believe. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Although mentally believing certain facts about God and Christ are not enough to be saved (by themselves), God does require this mental assent. For instance, Jesus said, "Therefore I said to

you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

(3) Repent of your sins. You must put your old ways of sin to death (as taught in Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3). Repentance is central to this. In repentance, you determine to turn away from the sinful things you have previously been living for in order to live your life entirely for God. Acts 17:30 says that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent.”

(4) Confess Jesus Christ. God requires that you confess Jesus Christ with your mouth. Romans 10:9-10 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” An example of this confession is found in Acts 8:37, when the Ethiopian (prior to being baptized) confessed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

(5) Be baptized. To be baptized is to be immersed in water (see Acts 8:38-39 and Romans 6:3-4). This immersion in water is plainly said to be necessary for the salvation from sins. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Also, Acts 2:38 records the command, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins....”

(6) Remain faithful. At this point (after obeying these commandments), you become a child of God and are forgiven of your sins (being made pure and holy in the sight of God once again). Then, you have the responsibility of being faithful to God throughout your life. In Revelation 2:10, Jesus instructed those who had become Christians previously, “...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Continued faithfulness involves many things, including the responsibility to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Continued faithfulness is necessary because it is possible to fall from the grace of God once you have been saved by it. Galatians 5:4 says, “You have become estranged from Christ, you

who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” The Galatians had previously become Christians. Yet, Paul said that they had fallen from God’s grace. Remember, sin separates us from our holy God (Isaiah 59:1-2). This is just as true after we become Christians as it is before we become Christians (remember 1 John 1:5-7)!

What God’s Grace Should Mean To Us

Now that we have been observing the grace of God, what should this grace that God has shown to us mean? How should it translate in the way we live our lives? Here are some points to remember. (1) We chose to pursue our own selfish desires rather than maintain holiness in the sight of God when we sinned. (2) The result of our sin meant separation from our holy God – and put us on the path that leads to eternal punishment in Hell (the second death). (3) God provided the perfect sacrifice (in Jesus Christ) to ransom us from our sins, providing us the opportunity to live eternally with Him in Heaven instead of being sentenced to eternal destruction in Hell. (4) Now, we have the responsibility of obeying His instructions in order that we might gain access to and enjoy the blessings provided by His grace! Surely, such love that has been shown toward us ought to provoke the desire within us to live in a way that is entirely pleasing in His sight (according to His standard of holiness)! Let’s consider what the Bible teaches concerning this.

Ephesians 4:1

Please realize that the book of Ephesians can be divided into two main sections. The first section (chapters 1-3) discusses the eternal plan of God to redeem mankind from His sin, demonstrating that we can be saved by the grace of God and have access to all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. The second section (chapters 4-6) discusses the responsibilities that those who are in Christ have to living in a way that pleases the God who has saved them by His rich grace.

So, as Paul begins this second section (regarding proper Christian living), he does so by instructing the Ephesian Christians, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1). Given the high calling with which those who are Christians have been called, each Christian has the responsibility to conduct himself/herself in a particular way. The call with which we have been called is the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). This is the great message of salvation through Jesus Christ we have been discussing!

Therefore, how could those who have obeyed the call of the gospel to become recipients of all the spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ continue to live their lives in sin? Of course, this instruction indicates that there is a particular way in which Christians are expected to conduct their lives now that they do enjoy the blessings that are in Christ. In fact, Paul goes on to explain many of the ways in which the Christian is expected to conduct his/her life from chapter 4 through chapter 6 of Ephesians. Also notice a similar instruction in 1 Thessalonians 2:12: “that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

This passage says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” This passage demonstrates the magnitude of Christ’s love for us. It brings to mind all of the suffering Christ willingly endured so that we could be saved from our sins. But, this is not just a passage that talks about the love of Christ. Instead, this is a passage that describes how the love of Christ ought to cause us to live our lives!

The love of Christ ought to control us! That is, whenever we realize the true magnificence of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for our sins (and not His own), it ought to provoke a strong response in us. That response must be a determination to live our lives entirely for the one who has given His life for us! If you choose to live your life in any other way than this, you either do not recognize the

magnificence of Christ’s love or do not appreciate His sacrifice.

Galatians 2:20 expresses the type of commitment we must make to Christ as we consider His sacrifice. It says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Our lives become His – to be used in His service to His honor and glory, however He chooses to use them! This will manifest itself in a life that is given to full submission to the instructions of God (in His written word, the Bible).

Romans 6:1-23

Please take some time to read this entire chapter. For now, realize that there are two questions asked and answered in this chapter. The first question is: “May we continue to sin so that God’s grace may abound?” (6:1). That is, since God has shown His grace to those who are in Christ Jesus, is it not permissible for Christians to continue to live for sin – so that God’s grace can be shown in even greater abundance? The answer that is given in verse 2 is: “Certainly not!” Paul goes on to make the point that those who are Christians have died to sin. So, how can they continue to live for sin? Those who are Christians must not allow sin to reign in their bodies. Instead, they must use their bodies to accomplish God’s righteousness.

The second question is asked in verse 15: “May we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” That is, since God has made a way to be forgiven of sins under this new covenant, can’t we just live however we want to live – and expect God’s grace to cover our sin? This question is given the same answer as the last one: “Certainly not!” (6:15). Paul goes on to make the point that we are the slaves of the one we obey – either of sin or of righteousness. Sin leads to spiritual death. But, righteousness produces the fruit of holiness and results in everlasting life!

Both of these questions demonstrate misapplications of God’s grace that we must also be careful to avoid. God’s marvelous grace is not something that gives us the ability or permission to

commit even more unrighteousness. Rather, it gives us the opportunity to be freed from the sin we have previously committed and dedicate our lives entirely to serving God!

Colossians 3:1-4:1

Again, please take some time to read this entire text. Part of walking worthy of the gospel's call is to walk in newness of life (i.e. to be transformed). This point is made by Paul in Ephesians 4:17-24. And, this is the same basic point is being made in Colossians 3. Those who are Christians are expected to have a new focus and new allegiance! Our focus is expected to be on the spiritual things of God rather than on the old ways of living (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 3:3). Therefore, the Christian is seeking "those things which are above" (Colossians 3:1).

This transformation involves putting to death the old man of sin. This is the old manner of living that was contrary to the holy ways of God. The strong language of putting this old man to death indicates that this is a complete change – not a temporary or partial one! When the Christian recognizes that these ways of sinning separates himself/herself from his/her holy God, he/she should desire to entirely remove them from his/her life! Read Colossians 3:5-11 to see some specific things that are identified as being part of the old man.

Then, the transformation is not complete without the putting on of the new man. This new man has been given new spiritual life by God and is expected to be patterned after God in true righteousness and holiness (see Ephesians 4:23-24). According to Ephesians 4:23-24, renewal of the mind is involved in this transformation. That is, we have the responsibility to change the way in which we view sin and holiness in order to make our thinking compatible with God's instructions. Read Colossians 3:12-4:1 to see some specific things that are identified as being part of the new man (including a change in how we view our roles in relationships). Note that both the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man involves dedication and effort – and does not happen accidentally.

Titus 2:11-14

This passage says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

The grace of God that brings salvation (which we have been studying throughout this lesson) teaches us some things. First, God's grace teaches us to deny ourselves of things that are contrary to His way of holiness (i.e. ungodliness and worldly lusts). Second, God's grace teaches us that we should determine to live in a way that is acceptable to God (i.e. soberly, righteously, godly, and looking for the return of Jesus Christ).

Jesus died to make us His own special people who were zealous for good works! Jesus did not die for us so that we could half-heartedly live for Him, doing His will *sometimes* and our own will *the rest* of the time! Instead, Jesus gave His life for us that He would have a group of people for Himself who were completely dedicated to serving Him. He wants us to be zealous (on fire) for good works! Therefore, His people should not view the commandments of God as being burdensome (1 John 5:2-3). We must not begrudge the idea of doing what God instructs us to do. Instead, we must be on fire to do the will of God!

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1

This is a final passage to consider in this lesson (as we attempt to put the grace of God into perspective). I encourage you to look at this passage. We have been separated from the sinful ways of our past – and the sinful ways of the world. We are different in God's sight – and are expected to live differently!

We must not continue to live for the same wicked ways of the world. God's people are not to join themselves with the ways of those who live for Satan and themselves! Verse 17 instructs, "Come

out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” And, if we will do this, God promises that He will be our Father and we His sons and daughters!

Peter simply put it this way, “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That God created us as holy beings; but, we each chose to violate His laws and live for ourselves – which results in serious spiritual consequences. (2) That God has given us the opportunity to be saved from our sins (something that we could not accomplish on our own). (3) That God’s grace must have a wide-reaching impact on the way we live our lives, leading us to live a life of holiness!

Have you accessed the grace of God? He has provided His grace for everyone; but, God requires that you be obedient to Him in order to enjoy the blessings He has prepared in Christ Jesus (by hearing His word, believing in Jesus as the Son of God, repenting of your sins, confessing Jesus Christ, and being baptized for the forgiveness of your sins)! If you have obeyed God and accessed these spiritual blessings, have you allowed God’s love to control your actions in every way? Or, do you still live to fulfill your own desires? Are you walking worthy of the gospel’s call? If not, make your life right with Him today! “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

What does it mean to be holy?

How can we be holy after we have sinned?

1. We Were Created Holy

We you born pure or sinful? What does this mean regarding your holiness?

Who, then, have sinned? How does sin work?

What are the spiritual consequences of sin?

Can you solve the serious problem of sin by yourself?

2. God’s Grace To Save Us From Sin

Has God provided a remedy for sin? Describe the nature of God’s plan of redemption.

What did God do in order to provide the opportunity of salvation.

What does God require you to do in order to be saved?

3. What God's Grace Should Mean To Us

Review what we've established.

Discuss how the following passages discuss the impact God's grace should have on our lives and on our holiness:

1. Ephesians 4:1 –

2. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 –

3. Romans 6:1-23 –

4. Colossians 3:1-4:1 –

5. Titus 2:11-14 –

6. 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1 –

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 4:

Perfecting Holiness In The Fear Of The Lord

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

To be holy is to be separate or set apart. In the spiritual sense, it refers to our responsibility to be separate from the ways of the world (the ways that are common, profane, and sinful) in order to be entirely devoted to God! The standard that must be used to determine our holiness is God (who is perfectly holy), and the message that He has revealed to mankind. Furthermore, it is only by the grace of God that we can be made holy after we have sinned – and that grace which has been shown toward us ought to provoke us to giving our lives entirely to the service of the Lord!

But, if we have been made holy through the grace of God, what does our responsibility to be holy look like through the remainder of our lives? Are we (as some say) “once saved, always saved?” Or, do we have a continual responsibility to be holy? Then, how “radical” do we need to be when we seek to be holy? That is, can we be holy most of the time – and live for ourselves the remainder of the time? Or, is our responsibility to be entirely committed to holiness?

The purpose of this study is to consider what it means to perfect holiness (according to the command in 2 Corinthians 7:1), to recognize the impact that the fear of the Lord will have on our perfecting holiness, and to learn how we can accomplish this great task.

What It Means To Perfect Holiness

As we consider the responsibilities God has given to us concerning holiness, we observe that it is an ongoing responsibility. And, we observe that it is a responsibility that touches every aspect of our lives. Think back to 1 Peter 1:13-16. Peter’s instruction was for us to be holy in “all” of our conduct – and to be holy as God is holy. In fact, God gives us the responsibility to be “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Though we have briefly considered this passage in previous lessons, let’s consider it in greater detail now. And, let’s consider this passage in a few different sections.

Verses 14 and 15: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”

The Christian cannot rightly be “yoked together” with unbelievers. A “yoke” was used to harness the power of two animals that would be

pulling in the same direction, to accomplish a single goal. But, Christians are living for a different and higher purpose (according to the call of God through the gospel) than those who are living in sin. Therefore, it is not proper for God's holy people to decide to accomplish the same kinds of sinful things as those who are unbelievers. This is further emphasized by the questions that follow. They all have the implied answer of "none." What fellowship does righteousness have with lawlessness? None! What communion does light have with darkness? None! What accord does Christ have with Belial? None! What part has a believer with an unbeliever? None! God's people are expected to live in a way that is separate from the sinful pursuits of the world around them!

Verse 16: "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.'"

Can the temple of God be properly used to worship idols? Certainly this would be abominable in God's sight. God's temple (as observed in the Old Testament Scriptures) was a place to worship the true God and where He would be glorified. Today, God's people are temples of God. Recall that we have also seen this referenced in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 demonstrates that the Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (who dwells in the Christian through the word of God living in him/her). Therefore, we must glorify God in our bodies and spirits – which belong to God (having been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ). Just as God dwelt in the Old Testament temple, God dwells in His people today (again, He does this through His word). Christians, then, have this wonderful relationship of having God as their God – and being the people of God. But, the implication of the text is that, as temples of God, we cannot glorify anything that is sinful in our lives.

Verses 17-18: "Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.'"

As God's temple and His people, we must get away from everything that is evil. Ask yourself: How much wickedness does God permit His people to keep in their lives? How many spiritually defiled elements can remain in the temple of God? None! He does not permit us to overlook any – just because we might find those things to be pleasurable for our lives! There is a God-given responsibility in this text followed by a promised blessing. If we will come out and be separate (holy) from everything that is wicked/unclean (as God has instructed), then God will receive us. He will be our Father. We will be His children. But, what if we choose not to comply with these conditions? By implication, He will not accept us, He will not be our Father, and we will not be His children. At that point, we would be children of the devil. 1 John 3:10 says, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest [made known]: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."

Verse 1 (chapter 7): "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

The opportunity to be the children of God is a tremendous one! Romans 8:16-17 speaks concerning this opportunity and says that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Thus, as God's faithful children, we have reservations made in Heaven for all of eternity (see Ephesians 1:11-12 and 1 Peter 1:3-9)! Since we have these tremendous opportunities (based on the promises of the God who cannot lie, Titus 1:2), we must be clean – of the flesh and spirit. Remember, both are God's and are to be used to glorify Him (according to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Everything about us must be clean – according to God's standard of "clean." And, though mankind might settle for a lifestyle he considers to be "clean" that leaves a little bit of wickedness in his life, God's standard of clean is getting rid of "all filthiness." It is a commitment to a continual pursuit of holiness in recognition of the fear of God! Now, let's build on this foundation and continue to think about the responsibility to be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

“Perfect”

The word “perfect” intimidates us. We recognize that we are not perfect. We know our weaknesses and our past failings (and we know them well). We also know that only Jesus has reached the age of spiritual maturity and remained sinless (Hebrews 4:15). Otherwise, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). So, any time the Scriptures refer to perfection, we are often quick to explain that we are not and will never be “perfect.”

However, the Scriptures *do* talk about our being “perfect.” The word “perfect” means bringing something to completeness, something that is not lacking to be complete. Notice some references to our being “perfect” or “complete.”

Matthew 5:48: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The context of this passage shows Jesus teaching that we must love and do good to our enemies – and how this is a way we can imitate our holy God. After all, God makes “His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Therefore, by doing good and loving those who hate and do evil to us, we can be “perfect, just as” our Heavenly Father is “perfect” (at least in this particular area). But, notice that Jesus did not say such a degree of perfection is out of our reach. We must simply be self-disciplined enough to imitate God’s righteousness in this area.

Ephesians 4:13: “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

The context of this passage deals with the fact God has authorized certain functions in the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers). These were given for the purposes of equipping saints for service and edifying Christ’s church (His body). Verse 13 tells the outcome of their work. The passage then continues to demonstrate that God’s children would no longer be tossed about by all of the different doctrines of men and that they would continue to make progress to become stronger and stronger in the faith and edify

the body of Jesus Christ. But, you should notice that there was an expectation that the body of Christ could come to be a “perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Was Paul speaking of an impossibility?

Colossians 4:12: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Here is a greeting from a laborer in the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Christians in Colossae. This individual is said to have been “fervently” laboring for the Colossians. And, the purpose of his labors was so that they “may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Now, was this man wasting his time and efforts on something that was outside of the realm of possibility? Absolutely not!

2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Here is the what the Scriptures (that reveal God’s will to mankind) are beneficial for. Doctrine. Reproof. Correction. Instruction in righteousness. All of these things work, then, in such a way that the one who belongs to God and has dedicated his/her life to serving God “may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Therefore, whenever the Scriptures are put to work in an individual’s life, he/she “may be complete” (not *somewhat* complete). This is the same concept as being “perfect.” And, to expound even further, we are told that the Scriptures equip us to accomplish “every” good work. Not *most* good works. Can the Scriptures *really* accomplish this? Or, is God a liar?

James 1:4: “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Here is the result of being faithful to God through times of trials. James says that we could “count it all joy” when we fall into trials because we know there will be a positive and beneficial outcome. First, there will be an increase in our patience (perseverance). Then, James says that we “may be

perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” These phrases (perfect, complete, and lacking nothing) are all different ways of expressing the same basic ideas. Why would he promise this as an outcome of being faithful through trials if it was not possible?

Revelation 3:2: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.”

This is part of Jesus’ rebuke to the church in Sardis. This church was identified as being a “dead” church. Though it had a name as if it was alive, it was spiritually dead (separated from God). As Jesus (who knew their works) considered this congregation, He said that He had not found their works “perfect” before God – and told them that they needed to change. Now, was Jesus being unfair to them, expecting something from them that they were not capable of accomplishing? Absolutely not!

So, as we consider these passages, we have to be careful to rightly divide the word of truth on the subject of perfection – and not just dismiss the subject as being “unattainable” and not worth our efforts! In fact, sometimes the statement, “I am not perfect” can actually be used in an attempt to justify continuing to live in sin. Yet, we have just seen that the Bible does talk about Christians being perfect/complete. So, we need to think about what is involved in this perfection.

We can be perfect in Christ Jesus

As we consider these passages (along with 2 Corinthians 7:1), we must understand that this perfection is *not* brought about through our own meritorious works. That said, do recognize that Jesus demonstrated that it is possible to live a life of full submission to God without sinning (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus consistently and perfectly lived in a way that was pleasing to God because He exercised self-discipline and was determined to practice only that which was right. Let us never forget that point!

Yet, after we have sinned, we can never make ourselves perfect! As we’ve talked about in prior lessons, we had sinned (separating ourselves from our holy God) and deserved to be punished eternally in Hell. In Romans 7:7-25, Paul describes the internal conflict that rages between the flesh and the Spirit

(the ways of God) – and details the hopeless condition we find ourselves in whenever we attempt to find justification through the law only! Of course, the problem is that we cannot overcome our past imperfections through perfectly keeping the law of God (even if we never sinned again)! This is why we cannot earn our own salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9)!

Instead, we are only made perfect in Christ! As Paul continues his discourse from Romans 7 (dealing with the hopeless condition of attempting to find justification through law only), consider what he writes in Romans 8:3-4: “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

God made it possible for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us! This was accomplished through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, who did not sin during His life on earth! So, Hebrews 10:14 says (concerning the sacrifice of Jesus Christ), “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”

Colossians 1:27-28 says, “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” This perfection is only available through what Jesus Christ has accomplished in fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law in those of us who live for Him! Remember, Romans 8:3-4 said that the righteous requirement was fulfilled through Jesus in those who do not live according to the ways of the flesh, but according to the ways of God.

However, though Christ died for the entire world, not everyone will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14). So, there is personal responsibility involved in being made perfect. There is personal responsibility God has given us to become Christians, thereby being forgiven of our sins. We are commanded to hear God’s word (Romans 10:17), believe (John

8:24), repent of our sins (Acts 17:30-31), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be immersed in water (Acts 2:38). Then, we have the responsibility to live faithful Christian lives that are entirely patterned after God's commandments and instructions (Revelation 2:10)! We will be particularly focused on how we can perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord throughout our Christian lives as we go through the remainder of this study.

Cleanse self from all filthiness

Now that we have considered some basics about perfection (and, I hope that we are less intimidated by the thought of perfection), let's come back to 2 Corinthians 7:1 to see what is involved in perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Notice that Paul connects the cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit with "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." As Paul has demonstrated in the verses prior to 7:1 (in 6:14-18), the Christian is to fully give himself/herself to live in the service of God – and not walk in the ways of sin! As we realize this responsibility, we must concern ourselves with being cleansed from all filthiness – inside and out! We must desire for everything that is contrary to the ways of God to be purged from our lives – and go about carrying out that responsibility!

Notice how far we are expected to take this responsibility. 2 Corinthians 7:1: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." Simply put, there is nothing wicked, evil, worldly, or sinful that is permitted to remain in our lives – as Christians!

So, we must press toward perfect holiness! This is an ongoing and lifelong process. That is, we

never arrive at perfect holiness and can say, "I am holy and have no need to continue working to be holy." Consider what 1 John 1:8-2:2 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

Remember the context of this passage (1:5-7) outlined the fact that God is entirely separated from the ways of darkness – and the ways of darkness are entirely separated from Him! However, we deceive ourselves and make God out to be a liar if we believe that we have lived sinless lives (i.e. that we have been perfect by ourselves)! Instead of claiming perfection on our own, those who are Christians have the responsibility and opportunity to repent of the sins we have committed, confess them to God, and ask for His forgiveness in order receive that forgiveness through Jesus Christ (see also Acts 8:22)!

So, "perfecting holiness" is an ongoing process that looks like this (in a very simplified form): (1) We are made perfectly holy when we obey the gospel of Christ and become Christians. (2) Each time we sin (even after becoming Christians), we separate ourselves from our holy God. (3) In order to be restored to a right relationship with God, we must repent of our sin, confess our sin to God, and ask Him for forgiveness. (4) Then, we are made perfectly holy in His sight again.

Our responsibility, therefore, is to press toward perfect holiness throughout the course of our lives, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness! Remember, God has given us two things that makes this endeavor possible. First, He has given us the sacrifice of His Son, who is able to make us perfect. Second, He has given us His written word to guide us perfectly into His ways of holiness.

The Fear Of The Lord

There is still another element involved in perfecting holiness. 2 Corinthians 7:1 speaks about perfecting holiness “in the fear of God.” Therefore, we need to spend some time considering how the fear of God impacts our holiness.

What is the fear of the Lord?

The Scriptures place great emphasis on the fear of the Lord. It is, indeed, given a very prominent place in living a life that is pleasing to God. In fact, the life that is pleasing to God has the fear of the Lord at its core. Consider some basic facts about the fear of the Lord.

(1) It is a choice. Proverbs 1:28-29 says, “Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord.” So, each one of us will make a personal decision to either fear the Lord – or not to fear the Lord!

(2) It is clean and endures forever. Psalm 19:9 says, “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” There is nothing about the fear of the Lord that is impure (or that leads us into paths of unrighteousness) – and it will never cease to exist!

(3) It is worth much. Proverbs 15:16 says, “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, Than great treasure with trouble.” The fear of the Lord is worth much more than even the greatest of earthly treasures – because of what each one brings about! Earthly treasures only bring about temporary benefits and pleasures. However, the fear of the Lord will help you live a life that is pleasing to God and spend eternity in Heaven!

(4) It hates evil. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.” The fear of the Lord produces the desire to do what is right – and recognizes the dangers involved in evil (and stays away from it)! The fear of the Lord will

help us not to embrace anything that is contrary to God’s holiness!

Elements involved in the fear of the Lord

There are two elements involved in the fear of the Lord. These two cannot be separated from one another – as they both represent the proper response to the reality of God’s nature! They are: Reverential respect and terror.

(1) Reverential respect. Understanding God’s true nature ought to lead us to standing in awe of God (i.e. His nature of being holy, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, etc.)! Thinking also about the work of God in creating the universe ought to make us stand in awe of Him! The psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

Also, thinking about the Biblical record of God’s past actions ought to make us stand in awe of Him – as you think about how He caused the entire world to be flooded with water, how He caused the Red Sea to be parted, how He caused the sun to stand still, how Jesus walked on the water, how God has raised the dead, etc.! Indeed, we must stand in awe of our great, and powerful, and holy God!

(2) Terror. As we recognize all these characteristics about God, there also must be personal application made. We must consider what God’s characteristics mean for us and how we choose to live our lives! Remember what we have already established in this series of lessons. Particularly, remember that God’s holiness means that He must exercise His vengeance against those who die in their sin.

The Bible tells us that God is a severe God who will punish those who are disobedient to Him (Romans 11:22; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Therefore, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31)! If our lives are not conducted in a way that pleases our holy God, we will experience His All-Powerful wrath! And, we will not be able to resist His wrath (as we will be sentenced to eternal punishment in Hell fire).

The impact of the fear of the Lord

Consider Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 in order to begin considering the impact of the fear of the Lord on our lives. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”

Fearing God is part of the whole duty of mankind! Our purpose in life is *not* to seek our own desires or to seek after worldly wealth and pleasures. Instead, the entire purpose of our lives is to glorify God (see Isaiah 43:7). Involved in glorifying God is fearing God and keeping His commandments! If we are not doing these two things, we are wasting our lives!

So, the fear of the Lord has wide-reaching effects in how we choose to live our lives! If we fear the Lord, we will live our lives according to the standard of holiness He has set for us and keep His commandments! Remember, as Ecclesiastes 12:14 teaches, our lives will be judged by this great, awesome, and powerful God – even the things which we thought were done in “secret”!

Philippians 2:12 says, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Notice that this passage begins with the word “therefore.” This word connects the points that Paul has already made with what he said in verse 12. Specifically (from verses 5-11), you should notice that God has highly exalted Christ and that everyone will bow before and confess Jesus Christ. This refers to the things that will take place as we stand before Christ on the Day of Judgment and give an account of our lives (compare with Romans 14:10-12)! So, consider the significance of this great truth – and what it means to your life! Since we will stand before and be judged by our holy God, we must recognize the need to conduct our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him *now* – because we will reap what we have sown (Galatians 6:7-8)!

Philippians 2:12, then, teaches that we must work out our salvations with fear and trembling. So,

there is work to be done in order to please God. That is, if we are given eternal salvation, it will not be by chance! It will be by the grace of God – and will be dependent upon our diligence to live in a way that is fully pleasing to God! This involves diligence to remove sinful things from our lives – and to pattern our lives after the holiness of God.

Notice that the working out of our salvations must be done with fear and trembling. Again, it is connected with the nature of God that we have been discussing! So, we must be perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord – as the fear of the Lord will cause us to bring our lives into submission to the law of God!

How To Perfect Holiness

We have seen what it means to perfect holiness (i.e. that we are continually pressing toward perfect holiness in our lives) – and have seen the impact the fear of the Lord has in this. In our next three lessons, we will be getting specific in order to apply these things to our lives and consider how we can perfect holiness in all aspects of our lives (in our thoughts, in our words, and in our conduct). But, before closing this lesson, I want us to learn from the model given in 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22. I believe this “model” will help us to accomplish this great task of perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. And, we will be using this “model” in the next three lessons.

The passage says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” I believe that the things instructed here provide a model for holiness! This model is to (1) Test, (2) Cling, and (3) Abstain. Let’s overview each point now before we apply them in specific areas in the coming lessons.

Test

The passage instructs that we test all things. To test something is to examine and scrutinize it, so as to see its true nature. In this case, we must scrutinize everything we are taught, everything we believe, everything we think about, everything we

hear, everything we do, everything we say, etc. We must scrutinize all of these things in order to determine whether they are good or whether they are evil.

As we put these things to the test, we must not be guilty of overlooking or ignoring anything! Sometimes it is that there are things in our lives that we enjoy, find to be worthwhile, do not consider to be dangerous, or even consider to be a “necessary evil” that we are not willing to put to the same degree of scrutiny as we might do with other things. Yet, to do this is to fail to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord! Nothing must escape this test!

Our standard for evaluating everything (as we discussed in lesson 2) is *not* the doctrines or opinions of man, the way of the majority, our own individual consciences, or any other subjective standard. Instead, the standard by which we must evaluate all things is the infallible word of God which endures forever and fully equips us to live in a way that pleases God (1 Peter 1:25; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)! After all, His word is the standard by which Christ will judge us on the Last Day (John 12:48; Revelation 20:11-15)! Therefore, it is our responsibility to find out what is acceptable to the Lord in all areas of our lives (Ephesians 5:8-11; Romans 12:1-2).

This is a lifelong endeavor. You must never think that you know the word of God perfectly – and do not need to continue to search the Scriptures or stop evaluating everything! Instead, make it your lifelong determination to learn God’s word more accurately, growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Peter 3:18).

But, once you have made an evaluation, what should you do with it? Certainly, we need to act properly regarding the evaluations that we make. There are some common problems we must avoid regarding the evaluations we make (even when we’ve made accurate evaluations).

(1) Deceive ourselves. There are many ways we can deceive ourselves. One way is that we can think we are not guilty of sin – when we really are. Perhaps it is that we clearly see the sin others are involved in, but we fail to see our own sin (i.e. Matthew 7:3-5). Or, perhaps it is that we may know

the right things, but simply fail to make the correct applications of them to our lives (see James 1:26).

(2) Be hearers only. Just as dangerous (and, another form of self-deception) is to know the right things, but never put them into action in our lives (see James 1:22-25). It may be that we know that we ought to be involved in something good – or that we should not be involved in something evil. But, perhaps we still fail to take the proper action regarding the truth we have accepted! In this case, we are hearers only – and not doers of the word of God!

Instead of these, we must be willing to apply the results of our evaluations – regardless of the costs! We must not be unwilling or afraid even to make changes that are perceived to be “radical” (if the Scriptures lead us to those types of conclusions)! In fact, we must be *willing* to make “radical” changes (as we recognize that our souls are at stake)! Jesus said that it does not profit us if we gain everything the world has to offer – and lose our own souls (Matthew 16:26)!

Consider, for instance, the radical nature of Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 5:27-30: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

I believe that many are too quick to dismiss what Jesus says in this passage about plucking out our eyes and cutting off our hands as being *figurative* and “too extreme.” Now, I do *not* believe that doing these things should be our first choice (and, doing so would often not even solve the true problem, because the problem comes from the heart). However, given the serious nature of sin and the reality of Hell, I believe that we should be willing to go to these *radical* steps – ***if this is the only thing that will keep us from spending eternity in Hell!***

Cling

When you evaluate something and find that it is good (in harmony with the instructions of God), you must hold securely to it! This is to keep it and make it part of who you are, what you believe, and what you do! But, again, remember that which is “good” is not determined by our own opinions or by other subjective standards. Instead, it is determined by what God’s inspired word considers to be good!

We must hold fast/cling to these “good” things because they are to be part of the “new man.” According to Ephesians 4:22-24, this new man has been created according to God in true righteousness and holiness – and is partially described in Colossians 3:12-17.

Abstain

When you evaluate something and find that it is evil (not in harmony with the instructions of God), you must keep yourself away from it! This is to completely rid your life of every kind of evil! But, again, remember that which is “evil” is not determined by our own opinions or by any other subjective standard. Instead, it is determined by what God’s inspired word considers to be evil!

We must put off/abstain from these “evil” things because they are part of the “old man” of sin. According to Ephesians 4:22, this old man “grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” – and is partially described by Colossians 3:5-9. Also notice that we are to “put to death” the sinful ways of the old man (Colossians 3:5). That is, we are not to permit any of these old ways of sin to remain alive in us! Romans 13:11-14 tells us that we have wasted enough of our lives in the works of darkness – and we must not make any provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That God instructs us to press toward perfect holiness (which is only possible through Jesus Christ). (2) That the fear of the Lord will lead us to conduct our

lives in the way that pleases God. (3) That we must test all things, clinging to what is good, and keeping ourselves from what is evil.

Have you been pressing toward perfect holiness? God has given you the opportunity to be holy through the sacrifice of His Son. Have you taken advantage of that opportunity by being obedient to Him? Have you obeyed God in order to become a child of His (by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing Christ, and being baptized)? If so, are you living a life of faithful obedience to God in all areas? Are you perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord? If not, make your life right with Him today! “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

What does it mean to be holy?

What is your responsibility to be holy throughout your life?

1. What It Means To Perfect Holiness

How do the scriptures talk about our being “perfect”? How can we be “perfect”?

What does 2 Corinthians 7:1 say is involved in perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord? Describe the ongoing process involved in perfecting holiness.

2. The Fear Of The Lord

Briefly discuss what each of the following passages teach about the fear of the Lord:

1. Proverbs 1:28-29 –

2. Psalm 19:9 –

3. Proverbs 15:16 –

4. Proverbs 8:13 –

What two elements are involved in the fear of the Lord? Briefly discuss each one.

What impact does the fear of the Lord have on perfecting holiness?

3. How To Perfect Holiness

What model is given in 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 that will help you perfect holiness?

What does it mean to “test all things”? What standard must be used?

What does it mean to cling to what is good?

What does it mean to abstain from every form of evil?

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 5:

Holy In Thought

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

To be holy is to be separate or set apart. In the spiritual sense, it refers to our responsibility to be separate from the ways of the world (the ways that are common, profane, and sinful) in order to be entirely devoted to God! The standard that must be used to determine our holiness is God (who is perfectly holy), and the message that He has revealed to mankind. Furthermore, it is only by the grace of God that we can be made holy after we have sinned – and that grace which has been shown toward us ought to provoke us to giving our lives entirely to the service of the Lord! Our continued responsibility, then, is to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1).

But, what does perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord really look like? In our last study, I suggested that 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 should be

used as a model for perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. This passage says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” We saw that this model involves three steps: Test, Cling, and Abstain.

To test means that we must examine everything in order to see its true nature (whether it is pleasing to God or not pleasing to Him). Then, we must cling (hold fast) to everything that is found to be in harmony with the will of God (that is, we must make it part of who we are and what we do). And, we must abstain (get away) from everything that is not found to be in harmony with the will of God (that is, we must give it no place in who we are and what we do).

This model has wide-reaching implications for our lives – in our thoughts, in our words, and in our conduct. Over these next few lessons, we want to spend our time evaluating each one of these three areas in order to see how we can be holy! This lesson will focus on our thoughts.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how we can be holy in our thoughts by putting all things to the test, clinging to what is in harmony with God’s will, and abstaining from that which is contrary to God’s will.

Test

We must test/evaluate our thoughts. As we will see, what is in our hearts (minds) are vitally important to how we live our lives (whether we do the things that are pleasing to God or not). As we evaluate our thoughts, recognize that we must be willing to evaluate every area of our thoughts in order to see whether they are pleasing to God or not. We must not intentionally overlook *any* area. And, also remember that the standard for evaluating our thoughts must be God’s word. Only this will help us to perfectly understand which thoughts are pleasing to God and which thoughts are not pleasing to God.

The importance of our thoughts

As we begin evaluating our thoughts, we must understand their importance. We must recognize that our thoughts have wide-reaching implications for how we will choose to live our lives and will impact our holiness in all other areas. Now, as we prepare to consider a few significant points concerning the importance of our thoughts, understand that the term “heart” is frequently used in the Bible to identify the functions of the mind. Watch for this term as we go through the following points and consider: Is the author talking about the functions of our physical hearts (that pumps blood throughout our bodies) or is he talking about the functions of our minds (that thinks, experiences emotions, and influences our actions)?

(1) The word of God reveals whether our thoughts and intents are proper. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

The Bible presents a clear standard for the way in which we must be thinking! Notice that the word “heart” is used in this passage as performing functions of the mind (i.e. as it mentions the thoughts and intents of the heart). The Bible, therefore, is able to clearly reveal whether someone’s thoughts and motives are in harmony with God’s will or not! We will be evaluating some of its teachings concerning what kinds of thoughts are pleasing to God and what kinds are displeasing to Him as we progress through this lesson.

This is significant, in large part, because of what is said in verse 13. We are all accountable to Jesus Christ for how we have lived our lives! And, this passage tells us, there is nothing hidden from His sight (not even the thoughts and intents of our hearts). Consider that God “saw” all of the wickedness of mankind preceding the flood in Noah’s time, including the fact that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5)! Also, when the Pharisees were

appearing to worship God, God knew that their hearts were actually far away from Him (Matthew 15:7-9)! These are just a couple examples of many that demonstrate God’s ability to know the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

So, our thoughts are important because the word of God reveals whether they are acceptable to God or not acceptable to God. And, they are important because we will give an account even for our thoughts and intents!

(2) Our “hearts” are responsible for our actions. Notice the following passages that demonstrate this point. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.” Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, But his heart is not with you.” Matthew 15:18-19 says, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

Again, notice that the Bible “heart” does not refer to the physical blood pump of the body in these passages. Instead, it refers to functions of the mind (including our thoughts and intents). Notice how each of the three passages I’ve just quoted connects our hearts with the things that we do (all of the “issues of life”).

Just a glance through the Bible will demonstrate this to be so. For instance, Cain killed his brother Abel because of the envy that was in his heart. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery because of their jealousy. The Israelites determined not to go into the land of promise initially because they believed the discouraging report ten of the spies brought back to them. Naaman initially did not dip in the Jordan River so as to be cleansed of his leprosy because he had thought he would be healed another way. David’s adultery with Bathsheba stemmed from his lust for her. Ananias and Sapphira lied to God because of their determination to deceive and keep back part of their profit for themselves. Jesus Christ was crucified because of the envy of the Jews.

But, the heart is not just capable of producing sinful actions. It is also responsible for our righteous

actions. Consider a few examples of this from the Scriptures as well. Joseph did not commit adultery with Potiphar's wife because he had determined not to sin against God. King Josiah tried to restore many things in Judah to be pleasing to God because his heart was tender and he humbled himself before the Lord. Paul's faithful life of preaching and service for the Lord stemmed from his dedication to give himself as a living sacrifice to God. Jesus Christ did not sin because He had determined to accomplish the Father's purpose.

Notice Matthew 15:18-19 again (quoted earlier) – and notice the sin that is identified as being produced from our hearts. Evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. All of these unholy activities stem from unholy hearts. Therefore, it is importance to keep our hearts “with all diligence” – because all of the “issues of life” truly do stem from it.

(3) Given the importance of our thoughts, God expects us to be sober-minded. 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 1:13 says, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

To be sober-minded is to be in control of your mental processes. 1 Peter 1:13 also identifies the importance of having your mind prepared for the proper action. This is seen in the instruction to “gird up the loins of your mind.” In Bible times, girding up the loins referred to the practice of preparing one's clothing for action by gathering the loose ends of the robe into the belt/girdle, allowing one to work or run more efficiently. The comparison with the mind, then, is to have your mind prepared to act appropriately in response to the various situations encountered throughout your life.

Christians are to remain entirely sober-minded at all times. They are always be ready to react properly to whatever comes his/her way! Given this responsibility of the Christian to be sober-minded, the Christian must abstain from those things which would hinder his/her ability to maintain a sober mind. Alcohol (even in moderation), drugs, getting

caught up in emotions (rather than dealing with them appropriately), allowing yourself to become depressed, becoming focused on the things of the flesh, etc. are all things that will hinder us from having minds that are prepared to take the appropriate actions. In each of those examples (and I'm sure other things that could be added to the list), our minds are clouded so as to make it difficult to give the proper response to the situations we encounter.

Quite simply, since God created us and recognizes the importance of our thoughts, He does not want our thinking to be negatively affected by inappropriate influences (i.e. like alcohol). Instead, our Creator wants our minds to always be fully prepared to make the appropriate decisions!

(4) So, we must “keep” our minds with all diligence, for “out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). You have likely heard the phrase, “garbage in, garbage out.” This is true concerning our minds! If they take in garbage (things that are not pleasing to God), our minds will be more likely to be thinking about things that do not please God. And, when this happens, we will be more likely to be involved in those things that do not please God.

You have also likely heard the phrase, “you are what you eat.” This, too, is true concerning our minds! Our minds produce actions that are the product of what we feed them! So, if we are willingly subjecting our minds to ungodliness, we should not be surprised whenever our lives reflect the same ungodliness (just as an individual who eats a lot of fatty foods should not be surprised when he/she is overweight and has many other health problems).

There are two ways that we can “keep” our minds. First, we can keep our minds by guarding the “entrance gates” to our minds. Consider this. How do our minds gain information? It is by our five senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight).

So, realizing the things we have already discussed in this lesson concerning the impact of our thoughts on our actions, we must be extremely careful as to what we *willfully* allow into our minds. This applies to what we watch on television, what kind of music we listen to, what internet sites we visit, what kinds of places we go, the books we read,

the friends we keep company with, the type of educations we choose to pursue, etc. In all of these things, we must be evaluating (testing) whether they are going to help us be holy in thought or whether they are going to be introducing things into our minds that are going to influence us into a way that is not pleasing to God! As we will discuss later, let's use Philippians 4:8 as a "filter" for our thoughts. Anything that fails to meet the standard of Philippians 4:8 must be rejected!

Second, we can keep our minds by discarding ungodly information. There are some times inappropriate things (i.e. things that are not according to God's ways) gain access to our minds. Sometimes this is because of our failure to keep them out of our minds. And, sometimes this is because we had no control over the situation. But, even when the latter occurs, we do control what we do with the things that gain access into our minds! So, in order to "keep" our minds, we must eliminate those things that are not according to God's standard (so that they do not influence our lives in ungodly ways).

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 demonstrates how we must bring every thought into the captivity of Jesus Christ: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."

Our minds must be renewed

We are either carnally or spiritually minded. Romans 8:5-8 says, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Being carnally minded leads to the sinful works of the flesh. This is because a carnal mind is

focused on fulfilling fleshly desires. Galatians 5:19-21 is a list that describes the sorts of activities that the carnally minded individual will be involved in (i.e. fornication, lewdness, idolatry, jealousies, drunkenness, etc.). Certainly, then, the carnal mind is not pleasing to God because it is contrary to His ways and will not submit to His laws.

But, being spiritually minded leads to the fruit of the Spirit. This is because a spiritual mind is focused on fulfilling the instructions of God, living in a way that pleases Him rather than a way that pleases self. Galatians 5:22-23 is a list of characteristics that will be present in the life of the one who is spiritually minded (i.e. love, joy, peace, self-control, etc.). Particularly, the one who is spiritually minded will deny himself of his own fleshly desires in order to please God.

Therefore, a major part of our transformation from the old man of sin to the new man who is created according to God in true righteousness and holiness involves the renewal of our minds. In fact, this renewal of our minds is essential to this transformation. Take a few moments to read Romans 12:1-2 and Colossians 3:1-4. I'll quote Ephesians 4:22-24 here: "that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

The "old man" was involved in the sinful works of the flesh – and did not live life in a way that was pleasing to God. Colossians 3:5-9 identifies some of the things that were part of the "old man." At this time, our minds were focused on the things of the earth – and not entirely focused on the things "above."

The "new man," however, is created according to God – in true righteousness and holiness. Consequently, it produces things that are quite different than the things produced by the "old man" (see Colossians 3:12-17). At this time, our minds are focused on the things that are "above" (i.e. on spiritual/heavenly things) and not on the things that are on the earth.

But, what lies between the two is the renewing of our minds! You simply cannot be transformed from the old man (and all of its ways of sin) to the new man (and its holy ways which are patterned according to God's holiness) without a transformation of the mind!

This transformation involves the determination to put away all of the things which are contrary to God's will – and a determination to do those things that are pleasing in His sight. To do this, there must be an understanding of the dangers of those things which are carnal – and a valuing of those things which are spiritual! So, this transformation is very much from the inside out, since the change in actions will follow the change in mind.

Cling

There are a number of thoughts specifically mentioned in the Scriptures that are approved of God. We need to hold to these things – because they will lead us to conducting our lives in the holy way that pleases God! These things can, generally, be included in our responsibility to be spiritually minded (mindful of the things of God rather than the things of men). Now, we will certainly not talk about every single thought that is appropriate and helpful (that will take an ongoing study of the Scriptures and constant evaluation of our thoughts). However, we will identify some specific things which are identified in the Scriptures as being approved of God. Consider some of these with me.

The ways of God

Psalm 77:12 says, "I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds." Psalm 1:2 says, "But his delight [the blessed man's delight, see verse 1] is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night." There is nothing better for us to meditate on than the ways of our holy and perfect God! We must allow our minds to dwell on His nature and His holiness. And, we must allow our minds to be consumed by the instructions given in His law.

Things that are true

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things."

We must not spend time focused on those things that are false or only speculative. Instead, we must meditate on things that are true (as only those things will have any valuable impact on our lives and our salvations). Among all the things that are true, God's word (as we've already noticed) must be a central part of our thoughts.

Things that are noble

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. This references things that are honorable (things that can be held in esteem). Of course, this cannot be a reference to things that are held in esteem by ungodly men/women. Instead, these are things that are held in esteem by godly men/women and by God. We must not spend our time thinking about disgraceful things (things which are looked down upon by godly men/women and by God).

Things that are just

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. To be just refers to being righteous – and observing the laws of God. So, we must not be thinking about things that are contrary to law (either God's laws or man's laws). Instead, we must be focused only on things that are lawful and right in the sight of God!

Things that are pure

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. To be pure is to be clean, separated from evil. In Matthew 5:8, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God." So, we must not be spending time thinking about things that are sinful,

wicked, filthy, etc. Instead, we must be focused on things that are pure in the sight of God!

Things that are lovely

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. This refers to things that provoke love in us. We should not be focused on things that cause us to be resentful, unkind, faultfinding, etc. Instead, we should be focused on the things that stimulate us to love (both God and our fellow man).

Things that are of good report

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. These are things that are commendable. We must not focus our minds on things that do not have a good report/good name among others (i.e. those who are godly). For instance, sometimes we may be embarrassed to tell others what we are thinking about because they are not commendable (i.e. things that do not have a good name)! Instead, we need to be setting our minds on things we can be proud of and things that have no shade of evil in them (and are recognized as being commendable by godly men/women).

Things that are virtuous

This is one of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. These are things that are full of moral excellence. We must not think on things that are deprived of such moral excellence (i.e. things of the world, lustful things, etc.). Instead, we must focus on things that help us increase our spiritual strength/character.

Things that are praiseworthy

This is the last of the things listed in Philippians 4:8 that describes what we must meditate upon. While it is true that there are many who focus their minds on things that are praised by the world, this is not the focus of this passage! Instead, we must focus our minds on things that would be praised by those who set their hearts on serving the Lord. Only those things that would be praised by the Scriptures are going to help us live in ways that are pleasing to God.

Humility

Philippians 2:5 tells us that we must have the “mind of Christ” – as was manifested in Christ’s humility. The passage (Philippians 2:5-11) describes how Christ humbled Himself even to the point of death on the cross (even though He possessed the nature of being God)! This mindset of humility must be present within us also – that we do not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3, 16). We must simply maintain a modest assessment of who we are – and not fall into the mindset of believing we are better than others or that we are better than we really are!

Contentment

1 Timothy 6:6-10 says, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Hebrews 13:5 says, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

To be content is to be satisfied with the things we have already been blessed with – and is opposed to the mindset of always needing to have more! In fact, the mindsets of dissatisfaction, covetousness, and greediness is repeatedly condemned in the Scriptures. Colossians 3:5 even identifies covetousness as idolatry. Greediness simply causes us to pursue worldly things at the expense of serving God! A mind of contentment will keep our lives focused on God, both in being thankful for what He has already blessed us with and in not feeling the need to focus on accumulating worldly things.

Abstain

There are a number of thoughts specifically mentioned in the Scriptures that are not approved of God. We need to keep away from these things – because they will lead us to conducting our lives in ways that do not please God! These things can, generally, be included in our responsibility not to be carnally minded (mindful of the things of men rather than the things of God). Now, we will certainly not talk about every single thought that is inappropriate and not helpful. That will take an ongoing study of the Scriptures and constant evaluation of our thoughts. However, we will identify some specific things that are identified in the Scriptures as not being approved of God.

Lustful thoughts

Jesus condemned lustful intent and thoughts in Matthew 5:27-30: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

He said that that the intent to look at a woman with lust for her is just as sinful as the act of adultery itself (this would also be true for looking at a man with lustful intent). So, as one application of this, viewing pornographic material is sinful. However, understand that pornography is anything that arouses (including looking at those immodestly dressed, viewing/listening to literature, music, movies, internet sites, etc. that are designed to arouse). Instead of this kind of mind that is focused on lust, Job’s commitment in Job 31:1 describes the appropriate mindset of a Christian. He said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?”

Envy/jealousy

Both envy and jealousy are sinful mindsets that are condemned in Galatians 5:19-21 as being works of the flesh. Both of these mindsets have an improper desire for what another has. However, envy not only desires what another has, but it also seeks to deprive that individual of what he/she has. So, these mindsets are contrary to the ways of contentment. They result in seeking more from life on this earth than just what God provides. Therefore, rather than being focused on the things of God, such an individual is focused on worldly things.

Worthless thoughts

The Psalmist said, “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way” (Psalm 119:37). But, why would it matter if his eyes would be focused on worthless things? Remember, this is one of the senses through which things gain access into our minds. So, looking at worthless things would provoke worthless thoughts that could (potentially) produce worthless and sinful actions! Something that is worthless would simply be something that does not produce a result that is pleasing to God. Therefore, we need to keep ourselves from thoughts that do not help us to serve God.

Selfish ambitions

Selfish ambition is condemned in the following passages. 2 Corinthians 12:20 says, “For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults.” Philippians 2:3 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” It is also identified as being a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Our minds simply must not be focused on pursuing our own fleshly desires (i.e. selfish pursuit of wealth, pleasures, fame, status, etc.). Instead, they must be focused on pleasing God and putting others before ourselves.

False doctrines

The Scriptures contain many warnings about those who are false teachers leading others into error and away from the way of truth (i.e. Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31). Particularly notice 2 Peter 2:1-3: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”

Realizing the dangers of false teachers and false doctrine, the Scriptures instruct us to mark those who teach false doctrine and avoid them (not giving them any kind of approval), see Romans 16:17-18 and 2 John 1:9-11. Therefore, we must be careful what teachers we listen to (or even read material from). We do not want to be misled by any! Remember, false doctrine is often subtle – and can negatively influence our thinking over an extended period of time. This is applicable to TV/radio/internet preachers, books, internet sites, a preacher in a church, etc.

Vain philosophies

Colossians 2:8 warns against philosophies that are contrary to the ways of the Lord: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” There are many philosophies that are spread by our culture, educational systems, entertainment industry, etc. that are often contrary to the teaching of Scripture. These philosophies often concern the meaning of happiness, attempt to redefine morality, pervert the God-given structure of the home, etc. We must be diligent in rejecting these vain philosophies rather than allowing our minds to dwell on them! They are truly vain (worthless/useless in terms of accomplishing anything that is good). If we allow our minds to dwell on them, we might just come to accept them and act

upon them. Rather than doing this, we should be focused on training our minds according to the instructions of God’s word, allowing it to shape our opinions in every area of life!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That we must put all of our thoughts to the test, recognizing the importance of keeping our minds focused on what pleases God and helps us live in a way He approves. (2) That the Scriptures identify many thoughts that are according to the will of God we must be diligent to cling to. And, (3) that the Scriptures identify many thoughts that are contrary to the will of God we must be diligent to abstain from.

Have you been pressing toward perfect holiness? We must always remember the influential nature of our thoughts on our actions – and that we will give an account of our thoughts on the Day of Judgment. So, we must use Philippians 4:8 as a “filter” to determine what is and is not permitted into our minds. Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 commands that we bring every thought into captivity and into the obedience of Christ!

Are you perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord by being holy in thought (testing every thought, clinging to the good, and abstaining from every form of evil)? If not, make your life right with Him today! Set your heart fully upon serving God and doing the things He instructs you to do. Do not delay! “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

What does it mean to be holy?

What is your responsibility to be holy throughout your life?

1. Test

What is the importance of your thoughts?

What is the importance of renewing your mind? How do you renew your mind?

2. Cling

What kind of thoughts must you cling to?

Explain the following types of thoughts you must cling to:

1. The ways of God –
2. Things that are true –
3. Things that are noble –
4. Things that are just –
5. Things that are pure –
6. Things that are lovely –
7. Things that are of good report –
8. Things that are virtuous –

9. Things that are praiseworthy –

10. Humility –

11. Contentment –

3. Abstain

What kind of thoughts must you abstain from?

Explain the following types of thoughts you must abstain from:

1. Lustful thoughts –
2. Envy/jealousy –
3. Worthless thoughts –
4. Selfish ambitions –
5. False doctrines –
6. Vain philosophies –

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 6:

Holy In Word

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

To be holy is to be separate or set apart. In the spiritual sense, it refers to our responsibility to be separate from the ways of the world (the ways that are common, profane, and sinful) in order to be entirely devoted to God! The standard that must be used to determine our holiness is God (who is perfectly holy), and the message that He has revealed to mankind. Furthermore, it is only by the grace of God that we can be made holy after we have sinned – and that grace which has been shown toward us ought to provoke us to giving our lives entirely to the service of the Lord! Our continued responsibility, then, is to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1).

But, what does perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord really look like? Previously, I suggested that 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 should be used as a

model for perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. This passage says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” We saw that this model involves three steps: Test, Cling, and Abstain.

To test means that we must examine everything in order to see its true nature (whether it is pleasing to God or not pleasing to Him). Then, we must cling (hold fast) to everything that is found to be in harmony with the will of God (that is, we must make it part of who we are and what we do). And, we must abstain (get away) from everything that is not found to be in harmony with the will of God (that is, we must give it no place in who we are and what we do).

This model has wide-reaching implications for our lives – in our thoughts, in our words, and in our conduct. During this section of lessons, we are spending our time evaluating each one of these three areas in order to see how we can be holy! This lesson will focus on our words.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how we can be holy in our words by putting all things to the test, clinging to what is in harmony with God’s will, and abstaining from that which is contrary to God’s will.

Test

We must test/evaluate our words. The words that we speak are important to God – as He tells us that they are powerful to accomplish a great deal. They can either be used to accomplish things that are pleasing to God or they can be used to accomplish purposes that do not please God. Therefore, as we evaluate our words, recognize that we must be willing to evaluate every area of our words in order to see whether they are pleasing to God or not. We must not intentionally overlook *any* area. And, also remember that the standard for evaluating our words must be God’s word. Only this will help us to perfectly understand which words are pleasing to God and which words are not pleasing to God.

The importance of our words

As we begin evaluating our words, we must understand their importance. Our words, as we will see, reveal what is in our hearts. And, they will impact whether we are truly living holy lives or not. I believe that a few simple points will help us to understand the importance of our words.

(1) The Bible presents a clear standard for the way in which we must be speaking. In this lesson, we will be considering some specific elements of our speech the Bible instructs us to cling to. For now, we must recognize that God will judge us – even for the words that we use during our lives!

2 Corinthians 5:10 is a general passage that indicates we will be held accountable to God for everything that we have done during the course of our lifetimes. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” This will include the words that we have said.

Specifically, Matthew 12:36 indicates that we will give an account on the Day of Judgment for “every idle word” we speak. The word “idle” refers to something that is lazy, unemployed, or useless. So, an idle *word* would be a word that is useless, thoughtless, and something that accomplishes no good. Seriously consider the warning, then, that is contained within this passage. You will be held accountable to God for every word you speak that accomplishes no good!

Of course, as with everything in life, the Bible is the standard by which we will be judged – as it is the standard for holiness (Revelation 20:11-15)! Our words are not made “right” because we *feel* that they are right, or because we have been *told* by someone else that they are right, etc. Instead, our words are only “right” in God’s sight if they are according to His standard of holiness and righteousness!

(2) The Bible teaches that our words reveal our thoughts. Consider Matthew 12:33-37: “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil,

speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Remember that the word “heart” is often used in the Bible as performing functions of the mind. Recognize, then, the important principle that is identified in this passage: Good fruit comes from good (healthy) trees and bad fruit comes from bad (unhealthy) trees.

The same thing is true of our lives regarding our hearts and our words. Remember what we discussed in our previous lesson regarding our thoughts (from Proverbs 4:23; Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:18-19). We saw that everything we are stems from the heart. Now, this principle is specifically applied to our words. If we are always speaking words that are holy and pleasing to God, it is because our hearts are holy and pleasing to God. If, however, we find ourselves engaged in filthy speech, gossip, lying, and other sins of the tongue, it is because our hearts are *not* holy and pleasing to God. So, as is true in every area of our lives, if we want to be pleasing and holy in the sight of God, our hearts must first be holy and pleasing to God!

Consider, then, the importance of exercising care regarding the kind of speech we hear! Remember, our sense of hearing is one of the ways in which things gain access into our minds. It is one of the “entrance gates” I spoke of in the previous lesson. So, we need to be careful what kind of language we *willingly* subject ourselves to from entertainment sources (i.e. television, radio, music, etc.). We need to choose our friends wisely (1 Corinthians 15:33) – and not *willingly* spend time around those who are using sinful language (unless we are actively trying to change them). We also need to *do our best* to remove ourselves from situations and environments in which sinful language is being used (i.e. by asking the sinful language to stop, leaving the room, etc.).

Remember the principle: Garbage in, garbage out! While this is not always true in our lives (because we can choose *not* to be involved in the sinful things around us), it is generally true! The more that we are *willing* to put ourselves around sin, the more we will tend to become desensitized to sin – often resulting in imitating the same kinds of sinful speech/behavior.

(3) The Bible teaches that our words are powerful. Consider what is taught in James 3:1-12: “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”

This passage demonstrates the power of the tongue (particularly its destructive power), even though it is a small member of the human body. This point is made by comparing the tongue to (1) horses that are controlled by small bits put inside their mouths, (2) large ships that are driven by a small rudder, and (3) great forest fires that begin as only small fires. So, even though the tongue is a very small member of our physical bodies, they have the potential to cause much destruction if they are not properly controlled!

In addition to its destructive power, the Bible also teaches the great power for good that the tongue has! Proverbs 15:23 says, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver.” Proverbs 12:25 says, “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad.” Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Furthermore, this passage (James 3) demonstrates the difficulty involved in controlling our tongues. I believe the phrase “no man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8) means that we cannot tame it to the point that we do not need to exercise constant watchfulness over it! It is possible to make wild and fierce animals tame (though they still require the proper care). However, the tongue can never be left to its own devices! We must exercise constant watch care over it! We must be diligent to exercise the proper self-discipline over the tongue – because we must not be hypocritical and allow our tongues to speak words of praise to God and then use them against our fellow man!

So, we must be diligent and recognize the destructive power possessed by the words that we use – as well as the power for good that is possessed by our words! The Christian, of course, must be dedicated to using his/her words for good – and for nothing that is sinful! Therefore, the Christian must learn to be “slow to speak,” choosing his/her words very carefully and sparingly. James 1:19 says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” Proverbs 10:19 says, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.” Proverbs 17:27 says, “He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.”

Our words must be transformed

The transformation that is required of Christians involves the renewing of our minds. We considered this as part of our previous study. Go back and review Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-24, and Colossians 3:1-4.

Then, as you consider some of the passages that describe the Christian's transformation, you should notice that words are involved in this! Ephesians 4:25-32 demonstrates that there are some sins of the tongue that must be put away and replaced with things that are right in God's sight. Ephesians 5:3-4 identifies some ways of speaking that are part of the old man that must not even be named among the saints (as they are not fitting for God's holy people/saints). Colossians 3:8-9 also identifies some ways of speaking that are part of the old man that must not be part of the transformed life of a Christian.

The Christian, then, must be devoted to restraining his/her tongue from speaking evil. 1 Peter 3:10 says, "For 'He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.'" Psalm 39:1 describes the type of dedication we need to have: "I said, 'I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me.'" In order to accomplish this challenging task, let us petition the help of our Heavenly Father, like the Psalmist did in Psalm 19:14 and Psalm 141:3-4.

Cling

There are a number of things that are specifically mentioned in the Scriptures that are approved of God related to our speech. We need to hold to these things – because they will help us please God! Now, we will certainly not talk about every single element of speech that is appropriate and right in the sight of God (that will take an ongoing study of the Scriptures and constant evaluation of our words). However, we will identify some specific things that are identified in the Scriptures as being approved of God.

Worship

What better use of our tongues is there than to use them to worship our Creator? Hebrews 13:15 says, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips,

giving thanks to His name." We should be engaged in praising God with our mouths frequently! Involved in this should also be the giving of thanks to God. Ephesians 5:4 says, "neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."

How often do you offer the fruit of your lips to God? This could be done by praying to Him. This could be done by singing praises to His glorious name. This could be done by preaching His saving message to others around us. Regardless of how we accomplish it (as long as it is in accordance with the way of truth), we must be diligent in offering praises to God!

Sound speech that cannot be condemned

Titus 2:6-8 describes the commitment that young, male Christians ought to have to personal purity as members of a local body of Christ: "Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you." While this instruction regarding speech is specifically applicable to young Christian men, it is in full harmony with the general standard the Scriptures present concerning the way every Christian ought to be speaking. In fact, let's use this as a standard to evaluate our speech by in every area!

The instruction is that they use "sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you." The overall life of the Christian who is committed to holiness will result (like Jesus) in one's opponents having no reasonable objection against him! Certainly, an important element of this is the way in which one speaks. For, if an individual was guilty of sins of the tongue, then his/her opponents could have a reasonable complaint against him/her.

Now, let's focus on the specific instruction regarding our speech. It is to be "sound speech that cannot be condemned." (1) It is speech that is sound (entirely healthy and pure, with no mixture of error in it). (2) It is speech that can have nothing evil truly

said against it – because there is no mixture of error in it. So, our speech must not be “pushing the boundaries” between what we believe is acceptable and unacceptable speech. Instead, our speech focuses on that which we know to be entirely pure and holy! As you speak, you should ask yourself if your speech is “sound speech that cannot be condemned.”

Speech seasoned with salt

Colossians 4:6 describes the way in which Christians ought to speak – with a particular focus toward those who are not Christians (though this would certainly apply to our discourse with Christians also). “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

You should consider this statement in its context to glean a specific point (as it is made in the context of teaching those who are “outside” of Jesus Christ). Christians must consider their speech – even when they are talking around those who are not Christians, because their speech has an influence on them. Even in our speech, Christians have the responsibility to be the “light of the world” and the city that is set on a high hill that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:13-16). We should be providing a contrast between speaking like the world speaks and speaking like God wants us to speak!

In a general sense, we need to apply this instruction to every area of our speech. Our speech must be with grace. That is, our speech must be fitting with the God-given standard for His people (those who have received His grace). Our speech must not sound the same as those who have never accessed the grace of God! Our speech must also be as if it was “seasoned with salt.” Our speech, therefore, must not be bitter or harmful to others. Instead, it must be “palatable” and helpful to those who hear (note that this can still be true even if our words are not what others *want* to hear).

Full of the word of God

Just as we must use our tongues to praise God, we must use our tongues to spread His saving message to others! After all, it is through the “foolishness of the message preached” that God has

chosen to have His saving message spread to others (1 Corinthians 1:21; also see Romans 10:13-18). So, His people today must realize that it is their responsibility to use their words to help others come to learn and obey God’s saving message!

Therefore, we must be devoted to this work of spreading God’s message to those we come into contact with! Jeremiah 20:9 describes the attitude of the prophet Jeremiah, who (even though he tried) could not keep himself from speaking the message of God: “Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.” Similarly, the apostle Paul said that he was ready to preach the gospel of Christ, because he realized that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Romans 1:15-17)!

Words of edification to the hearers

As we’ve already discussed, our words are powerful in accomplishing good. We can even use our words to build others up spiritually! Perhaps we know that someone is going through a difficult time. Our words have the power to turn away depression and make their hearts glad (Proverbs 12:25)! This is why the Proverbs teach the value of a word that is “fitly spoken” (Proverbs 15:23; Proverbs 25:11)!

We must always be concerned about speaking words that build others up spiritually. And, we must never be involved in speaking words that bring about the spiritual ruin of those who hear. For instance, 2 Timothy 2:14 identifies the fact that it is possible to speak in a way that ruins the hearers: “Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.” In fact, Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

Now, please understand that simply because someone may not *like* what is said does not mean that it is sinful speech. Edification simply has to do with building others up spiritually. So, even if you rebuke someone for his/her sin (which the Bible commands), it is still speaking words of edification –

because it is for his/her spiritual benefit! Christians simply **must** be concerned with the spiritual well-being of others and be prepared to serve those who are in need (even through our encouraging words)!

Words of truth

Christians have the responsibility of putting off the sinful ways of deceit and lying, and putting on the ways of speaking truth with all men! Ephesians 4:25 indicates that this is so (as well as many other passages). It says, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor....’”

Christians must have no part in slander (lying about other people) or in deceiving others (see Romans 1:29)! It is simply *not* OK for a Christian to tell a lie or to mislead others for *any* reason! Instead, the Christian is expected to tell complete truth *always*! Remember, there is no such thing as a “pure/harmless lie” (a.k.a. “white lie”).

Let your “yes” be “yes”

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus forbade making oaths. He said, “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

Jesus described that these types of oaths would be made, swearing by someone greater than themselves. However, Jesus also demonstrated the foolishness involved in this by pointing out that they are not in full control – regardless of what they swear by.

Instead, Jesus said that we are to simply allow our “yes” to mean “yes” – and our “no” to mean “no.” So, we must simply allow our words to mean what they say! Notice that Jesus said, “whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

Abstain

In contrast with these uses of our words that are approved of God, there are a number of things that are specifically mentioned in the Scriptures that are not approved of God, as related to our speech. We need to keep away from these things – because they will not help us please God! Now, we will certainly not talk about every single element of speech that is inappropriate and sinful in the sight of God (that will take an ongoing study of the Scriptures and constant evaluation of our words). However, we will identify some specific things that are identified in the Scriptures as not being approved of God.

Filthy and corrupt words

Ephesians 4:29 identifies “corrupt” words as part of the speech that was found in the old man of sin – and not in the new man who has been transformed to walk according to the instructions of God. Paul instructed, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth....” The word “corrupt” refers to something that is rotten, corrupted, bad, worthless, and not fit for use. Certainly, much of the way that the world speaks would fit into this general category. Such as: Using God’s name in vain, profanity, gossip, euphemisms, etc. This is simply not the way of the Christian’s speech!

Ephesians 5:4 also identifies filthiness and foolish talking as part of the old man of sin. Ephesians 5:3-4 says, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” First, the term “filthiness” refers to shamefulness and obscenity. This shameful or obscene conduct could be in thought, in word, or in deed – as they are all not pleasing to God. As the term “filthiness” implies, it is contrary to the way of purity (in thought, in deed, and in word). However, this term (in this context) appears to have specific application to the use of our words. So, our words must be in keeping with God’s standard for holiness and not in ways of shamefulness and obscenity. Second, foolish talking would refer to words that are both foolish and sinful,

reflecting the foolishness of our hearts. These things (according to Ephesians 5:3-4) must not even be named among the saints – as they are not fitting for the way God expects Christians to conduct themselves!

Though these terms are quite general in nature, they would certainly have application to the specific areas we are now going to begin considering. So, even though I may not reference these passages at those times, please keep them in your mind and make these applications. Remember, these things are not fitting for those who are God's holy people.

Profanity

The word “profanity” identifies speech that is offensive. Now, it is important to recognize that the Bible does not condemn all speech simply because it is offensive to others. For instance, when Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees of His day, His disciples recognized that they were offended by what Jesus had said (Matthew 15:12). However, the distinction lies in the fact that Jesus was accomplishing God's will by teaching them the way of truth and was not at all going against God's standard for holiness. Yet, there are a number of words/phrases we can use that do go against God's standard for holiness because they demonstrate to others a willingness to use offensive language as part of one's vocabulary.

You probably know the terms that are generally recognized as being “profanity.” I do not need to spell them out for you in this lesson. If, by chance, you are not sure what these terms are, a quick internet search will get you started to learn some terms you need to avoid! If we decide to go ahead and use these terms that are considered to be offensive to others, we will have greater difficulty showing Christ to them! Therefore, we do need to seriously consider how those who hear us speak consider the terms that we use. However, even if those we are talking with do not recognize certain terms as being vulgar language, we will still be setting a bad example for them (demonstrating to them that we are willing to use terms that are offensive to others). This is not the way of holiness. Remember, the term “holy” implies being separated

from all that which is evil and dedicated to that which is good!

Using God's name in vain

Under the Old Testament, the Israelites (who were supposed to be God's holy people) were specifically instructed not to take God's holy name in vain. Exodus 20:7 says, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” Leviticus 19:12 says, “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”

Instead, of taking God's name in vain, they needed to remember that God's name is holy and reverend (awesome)! Psalm 111:9 says, “He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name.” To use God's name in vain, then, would be to use it in a way that is worthless and empty of its full meaning!

Where is the holiness in using God's holy and awesome name in a way that is empty and devoid of its full meaning? Again, God directly condemns such corrupt (worthless) speech, as we observed in Ephesians 4:29. Speaking in this way simply does not show that we truly recognize the magnificence of God! Instead, many use the word “God” as a meaningless expression about their frustration, surprise, etc. So, I ask you to consider: Whenever you use the name of God (or even the term “God”), evaluate whether you are really using it in a way that brings honor to Him – or if you are using it in a way that is lower than its true magnificence!

Euphemisms

A euphemism is a term that is used as a substitute for profanity that is usually considered less offensive and more acceptable. For every one term of profanity, there are many euphemistic expressions that are substituted for the same! There are even euphemistic terms/expressions that are used to take God's name in vain.

How do you know whether a term is a euphemistic expression or not? Some terms we hear frequently, but we may not view them as being terms

of profanity. Yet, we must not just give these words a “pass.” We must be diligent to evaluate *every* word we speak, recognizing that we will be held accountable before God for our words (Matthew 12:36)! Simply ask yourself whether the terms you use are substitutes for profanity or for taking God’s name in vain. Some examples of euphemistic expressions are: “OMG,” “shoot,” and many others I do not wish to write. Again, there are many websites that will demonstrate words that are used in euphemistic ways, helping you even to see which words/phrases they are substitutes for.

While some may view this as being too “strict” or just knit-picking, this is really about the need for us to be holy in our speech! How can we consider our speech to be holy if we are trying to curse – without really cursing? You see, holiness is *not* about trying to get as close to the “line” between right and wrong as we can get! Instead, we should have the desire to get as far away from evil as we can possibly get. Remember, we must abstain from “every form” of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22) – not just the “really bad” kinds of evil!

Gossip

Gossip is useless talk or rumor, especially regarding the personal or private affairs of others. We must recognize that gossip is *not* just about contributing to the spread of false information (though it is often manifested as such). Instead, gossip can also occur when we are spreading information that is true! Gossip (also consider the Bible terms “whisperers” and “busybodies”) is always condemned in the Bible (i.e. Romans 1:29; 1 Timothy 5:13; 1 Peter 4:15).

Gossip is simply not fitting with God’s standard for holiness in our speech! Not only is it directly condemned in the Scriptures, but it is contrary to the instructions of God to speak things that edify (Ephesians 4:29)! Gossip is distinguished from other forms of speech in its intent. The intent of gossip is not to bring about anything that is constructive and spiritually helpful. Instead, the intent is just to talk about someone else, to tear down someone’s reputation, to be popular with others, to spread news about others just for the sake of spreading news, etc. So, gossip reflects a heart that

does not have the best interest of others as a primary concern!

Coarse jesting

Coarse jesting is also condemned in Ephesians 5:4. It is included in the speech that has no part in the Christian’s life. This, along with the other sins listed in this passage, will keep us out of the kingdom of Christ and God!

Coarse jesting implies witty speech that is not fitting with the grace and love which ought to flavor the Christian’s every word! This may be manifested in the use of “suggestive humor” (suggestive of things that are not pure), double or hidden meanings (which are not pure), etc. The NIV (2011) translates this word, “coarse joking.” So, this term applies to any attempt at humor or the use of one’s wit that runs contrary to the purity God expects from His people in their speech. Again, this kind of speech is contrary to the way of God (His standard for our holiness)!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That we must put all of our words to the test, recognizing the importance of the words we use. (2) That the Scriptures identify many words that are according to the will of God we must be diligent to cling to. And, (3) that the Scriptures identify many words that are contrary to the will of God we must be diligent to abstain from.

Have you been pressing toward perfect holiness? We must always remember the power of our words – and that we will be held accountable for the words that we have used during our lives when we stand before the throne of God on the Day of Judgment! In all areas, we must be using sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8).

Are you perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord by being holy in word (testing every word, clinging to the good, and abstaining from every form of evil)? If not, make your life right with Him today! Determine that you will use your words to accomplish the purposes of God today. Do not delay!

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

What does it mean to be holy?

What is your responsibility to be holy throughout your life?

1. Test

What is the importance of your words?

What is the importance of being transformed in your speech?

2. Cling

What kind of words must you cling to?

Explain the following types of words you must cling to:

1. Worship –

2. Sound speech that cannot be condemned –

3. Seasoned with salt –

4. Full of the word of God –

5. Words of edification to the hearers –

6. Words of truth –

7. Let your “yes” be “yes” –

3. Abstain

What kind of words must you abstain from?

Explain the following types of words you must abstain from:

1. Filthy and corrupt words –

2. Profanity –

3. Using God’s name in vain –

4. Euphemisms –

5. Gossip –

6. Coarse jesting –

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 7:

Holy In Conduct

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

To be holy is to be separate or set apart. In the spiritual sense, it refers to our responsibility to be separate from the ways of the world (the ways that are common, profane, and sinful) in order to be entirely devoted to God! The standard that must be used to determine our holiness is God (who is perfectly holy), and the message that He has revealed to mankind. Furthermore, it is only by the grace of God that we can be made holy after we have sinned – and that grace which has been shown toward us ought to provoke us to giving our lives entirely to the service of the Lord! Our continued responsibility, then, is to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1).

But, what does perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord really look like? Previously, I suggested that 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 should be used as a model for perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. This passage says, “Test all things; hold fast what is

good. Abstain from every form of evil.” We saw that this model involves three steps: Test, Cling, and Abstain.

To test means that we must examine everything in order to see its true nature (whether it is pleasing to God or not pleasing to Him). Then, we must cling (hold fast) to everything that is found to be in harmony with the will of God (that is, we must make it part of who we are and what we do). And, we must abstain (get away) from everything that is not found to be in harmony with the will of God (that is, we must give it no place in who we are and what we do).

This model has wide-reaching implications for our lives – in our thoughts, in our words, and in our conduct. During this section of lessons, we are spending our time evaluating each one of these three areas in order to see how we can be holy! This lesson will focus on our conduct.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how we can be holy in our conduct by putting all things to the test, clinging to what is in harmony with God’s will, and abstaining from that which is contrary to God’s will.

Test

We must test/evaluate our conduct. The ways in which we conduct ourselves are important to God. We can either conduct ourselves in ways that are pleasing to God or we can conduct ourselves in ways that are not pleasing to God. Therefore, as we evaluate our conduct, recognize that we must be willing to evaluate every area of our conduct in order to see whether they are pleasing to God or not. We must not intentionally overlook *any* area. And, also remember that the standard for evaluating our conduct must be God’s word. Only this will help us to perfectly understand what kind of conduct is pleasing to God and what kind fails to please God.

The importance of our conduct

As we begin evaluating our conduct, we must understand the importance of the ways in which we

conduct our lives. Our conduct, as we will see, reveals what is in our hearts. And, we are warned that someday we will reap according to whether we have conducted our lives in holy ways or not. I believe that a few simple points will help us to understand the importance of our conduct.

(1) The Bible presents a clear standard for the way in which we conduct our lives. In this lesson, we will be considering some specific elements of conduct the Bible instructs us to cling to. For now, we must recognize that God will judge us for how we conduct our lives on this earth – even for the things that we do in “secret”!

2 Corinthians 5:10 is a general passage that indicates we will be held accountable to God for everything that we have done during the course of our lifetimes. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” All points of how we conduct our lives on this earth will be subject to the great judgment of God, both the good and the bad.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.” This passage indicates that our entire purpose in life is to fear God and to keep His commandments. The reason that is given for this is in recognition of the fact that God will bring every work (every deed we have done) into judgment – including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

2 Peter 3:10-14 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved,

looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”

Of course, the Scriptures reveal that this final Judgment will take place when the Lord Jesus returns (see Matthew 25). So, those who are Christians ought to be conducting their lives in a way that they can look forward to this great Day (because this will be the Day of salvation for them)! But, in order to be able to look forward to this Day in which the world will be destroyed and we will all be judged, this passage teaches that we must be living in “holy conduct and godliness,” being diligent to be “found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.”

Of course, as with everything in life, the Bible is the standard by which we will all be judged – and is the standard for holiness (Revelation 20:11-15)! Our conduct is not made “right” because we *feel* as if it is right, or because we have been *told* by someone else that it is right, etc. Consider how Saul (who later became known as the apostle Paul) had lived in “all good conscience before God” (Acts 23:1), even though he had been killing Christians (Acts 22:3-5). Instead, our conduct is only “right” in God’s sight if it is according to His standard of holiness and righteousness!

(2) The Bible teaches that our conduct reveals our hearts. Remember that the word “heart” is often used in the Bible as performing functions of the mind (i.e. Hebrews 4:12 mentions the thoughts and intents of the heart). Also remember the principles we established in a previous lesson regarding our thoughts (from Proverbs 4:23; Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:18-19) – that our thoughts and intents lead to conduct that is either godly or ungodly. If our hearts are ungodly, they will produce ungodly actions (i.e. just as David committed the sinful act of adultery with Bathsheba as a result of his lustful thoughts). If, however, our hearts are godly, they will produce godly actions (i.e. just as Joseph refused to commit adultery with Potiphar’s wife because he had made the determination not to sin against God).

In addition, Jesus teaches that our hearts are found wherever our treasures are. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves

break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Consider the implications of the teaching in verse 21. Jesus is teaching that when we identify the things that we treasure most, we will also be able to identify whether our hearts are focused on earthly things or on heavenly things! So, if we spend the majority of our “free time” watching television, surfing the web, and playing games – and not using that time to study God’s word, to do good to others, to teach the gospel of Christ to the lost, to fulfill our God-given roles in our families, etc., we can know that our hearts are focused on earthly things instead of on heavenly things! In addition, if our first financial considerations involve the purchase of luxuries, entertainment, and other non-essential earthly things – and not using that money to advance the cause of Christ’s kingdom, to help those who are in need, to give to the work of the local church, etc., we can know that our hearts are focused on earthly things and not on heavenly things!

Again, this passage simply states the same truth as Proverbs 23:7 does (and the other passages I mentioned), just in reverse! Our hearts lead us to action – and the things that we do reveal where our hearts are!

Consider, then, the importance of exercising care regarding the kind of conduct we put ourselves around! Remember, our five senses are the ways in which things gain access into our minds (they are the “entrance gates” I spoke of in lesson 5). So, we need to be careful what kind of conduct we *willingly* subject our minds to from entertainment sources (i.e. television, radio, music, the places we choose to go, etc.). We need to choose our friends wisely (1 Corinthians 15:33) – and not *willingly* spend time around those who are conducting themselves in sinful ways (Ephesians 5:11). We also need to *do our best* to remove ourselves from situations/environments in which folks are conducting themselves in sinful ways (i.e. by asking the conduct to stop, leaving the room, etc.).

Remember the principle once more: Garbage in, garbage out! While this is not always true in our

lives (because we can choose *not* to be involved in the sinful things around us), it is generally true! The more that we are *willing* to put ourselves around sin, the more we will tend to become desensitized to sin – often resulting in imitating the same kinds of sinful behavior.

(3) The Bible teaches that we will reap what we sow. Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

However we choose to conduct our lives, we must always remember that we will reap what we sow. This is a basic principle of agriculture. If a farmer plants corn, he will reap corn at the time of harvest (not tomatoes or green beans). If a farmer plants peppers, he will reap peppers at the time of harvest (not corn or cucumbers).

This basic principle of agriculture has great application to the ways in which we choose to conduct our lives on this earth! The text teaches us that if we conduct our lives according to our own fleshly desires (and not according to the desires of God), we will reap corruption (i.e. everlasting punishment in Hell, Revelation 21:8). However, if we conduct our lives according to God’s desires (rather than our own physical desires), we will reap eternal life (in Heaven, 1 Peter 1:3-9).

So, there is a fundamental choice that must be made regarding the way in which we choose to conduct our lives: Will we conduct our lives in the way that pleases God – or the way that pleases our own flesh? God has given us the free will to make this decision. He has not forced us to follow Him! However, He has warned us that we will reap whatever we sow! So, choose wisely!

(4) The Bible teaches that our conduct can influence others – either for the good or for the bad. First, the ways in which we choose to conduct our lives can have an evil influence on those who see our lives. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” Now, this passage should not only serve as a warning to us concerning those we are closely associated with

(warning that evil companions can corrupt our own good habits); but, it should also serve to warn that we can corrupt the good habits of others by our evil conduct! 1 Corinthians 5 also describes how the sinful conduct of one member of a local church is capable of negatively influencing the entire congregation, having a “leavening” effect on the entire church (consider the exhortations in verses 6, 7, and 13).

However, the ways we choose to conduct our lives can also have a good influence on those who see our lives. Matthew 5:13-16 describes how the Christian’s life should be in comparison to the rest of the world (i.e. how it ought to stand out from the sinful decisions that are routinely made by those in the world). In fact, this passage teaches that it is even possible for those who see our godly lives to glorify God in their own lives, through the examples that we have set! Additionally, 1 Peter 3:1-2 demonstrates how Christian women can even convert their own husbands to Christ without a word, by living their lives according to the instructions of God’s word (leaving a good example for their unbelieving husbands)!

So, we need to be considering what kind of influence we are having on those who see our lives (i.e. those who are members of the same local church we are members of, those we work with, those we go to school with, our friends, our family members, our neighbors, strangers we meet, etc.). Will we be influencing them to commit wickedness and sin against God? Will we be leaving them a bad example of how Christians ought to live? Will we be damaging the reputation of the local church we are members of? Or, will we be influencing them to live holy lives that are right in the sight of God? Will we be leaving them a proper example of how Christians ought to live? Will we be leaving a positive impression of the local church we are members of?

Our conduct must be transformed

The transformation that is required of Christians involves the renewing of our minds. We considered this as part of a previous study. Go back and review Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:22-24; and Colossians 3:1-4.

As you consider some of the passages that describe the Christian’s transformation, you should also notice that our conduct is involved in this transformation. Ephesians 4:25-6:9 demonstrates that there are some things which must have no part in our conduct any longer – and there are some things which must become part of the ways in which we conduct our lives (even affecting our relationships). Colossians 3:5-4:1 also identifies some ways of conducting our lives that are part of the “old man” of sin which must be put to death – as well as some ways of conducting our lives that are part of the “new man” of righteousness that must be put on!

The Christian, then, must be devoted to exercising self-control over his/her own conduct. Proverbs 25:28 says, “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 also demonstrates the importance of self-discipline: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

It is generally accepted that self-discipline is necessary for an athlete to train in order to win the prize he/she is competing for. In fact, many athletes go to great lengths to be self-disciplined in their diets, training regimens, lifestyle choices, etc. so that they can win the prize they desire to achieve. Paul’s point is simply this: If athletes are willing to discipline themselves to obtain earthly prizes (which are perishable), Christians ought to be much more diligent in disciplining themselves in order to obtain their spiritual prize of eternal salvation in Heaven (which is imperishable)! Then, Paul states that even he (despite everything that he had accomplished for the Lord in his life) could become “disqualified” (i.e. he could lose his salvation) if he failed to exercise the proper self-discipline!

Cling

There are a number of things that are specifically mentioned in the Scriptures that are approved of God related to how we conduct our lives. We need to hold to these things – so that we will be living in the way that pleases God! Now, we will certainly not discuss every single element of our conduct that is appropriate and right in the sight of God (that will take an ongoing study of the Scriptures and constant evaluation of our conduct). However, we will identify some specific things that are identified in the Scriptures as being approved of God.

Bringing glory to God

Bringing glory to God is our true purpose in life! So, we must cling to anything and everything that will accomplish this great task. Consider the following passages.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 teaches that those who are Christians have the responsibility to glorify God in their bodies and spirits because they have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” This involves dedicating all of our energies and abilities to accomplishing this great mission of bringing glory to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 teaches that Christians must glorify God in every decision that they make on this earth: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Nothing is excluded from this. Everything that we do must have the end result of bringing glory to God. If it does not, our conduct is not pleasing to God.

Matthew 5:16 teaches that the way in which we conduct our lives can lead others to giving glory to God: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” So, not only can we glorify God through our own conduct; but, our dedication to glorify God in our conduct can even result in others glorifying God!

The only way we can glorify God in our lives is if we are obedient to Him! We do not glorify God if we conduct our lives in a way that is *not* in harmony with His commandments. However, when we obey His commandments, we *do* glorify God! So, this general principle has many specific applications – both in things we must do and things we must abstain from in order to glorify God (some of which we'll be considering in this lesson)! Please keep this point in mind throughout the remainder of our study.

Preaching God's word

God's people have been given the responsibility of spreading God's saving message to others (Romans 10:13-18). Without this, God's message will not be spread! So, it is up to His people (every Christian) to accomplish this great task.

Involved in the preaching of the gospel of Christ is the intention to preach and the preparedness to preach. In Mark 16:15, Jesus instructed His disciples to “go” and preach. This involved a particular type of conduct! This involves looking for and praying for open doors of opportunity to preach God's saving message to others! And, in order to preach the message of the gospel, Christians need to conduct themselves in a way so as to be prepared to spread His message to others (Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15).

Bible study

In order to live in a way that pleases God, we must know what God's will is (so that we can be obedient to it). Recognize that faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of God (Romans 10:17)! So, if we do not study the message of the gospel, we will not have saving faith (a faith that is obedient to God). Then, if we do not study the Bible, we will not be able to teach others about the saving message of the gospel.

Therefore, we need to conduct our lives in a way that purposefully sets aside time and puts forth the effort to study our Bibles! Acts 17:11 shows an excellent example of individuals who studied the Scriptures every day in order to learn the will of God! This ought to be our desire if we want to live in a way that pleases God!

Serving

In John 13:1-17, Jesus provided a great example of serving others. Jesus Christ (who was God manifested in the flesh) willingly took the job that was designated for the lowest of servants. This was the job of washing feet. He did not do this to institute some meaningless religious practice of foot washing. Instead, He did this to leave an example of how His disciples must seek to serve others! In fact, Jesus taught His disciples that true greatness in the kingdom of God is found through serving, not in trying to exalt ourselves (Matthew 20:27-28)!

We ought to be conducting our lives in a way that seeks to do good to everyone, as we have opportunity! Galatians 6:10 instructs that we do good to everyone (especially to our Christian brethren), as we have opportunity! So, we must be keeping our eyes open for opportunities to serve – and be willing to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented. We learn this lesson from Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). We learn that we have the responsibility to help everyone we have the opportunity and ability to help! And, we learn that doing this is how we fulfill the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27).

Encouraging our brethren

There are actually many responsibilities we have toward our brethren – and we must be conducting our lives in a way so as to fulfill each one of these responsibilities! For instance, (1) we must greet one another in an affectionate way (Romans 16:16). (2) We must bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). (3) We must love one another (1 Peter 4:8). (4) We must be hospitable toward one another (1 Peter 4:9). (5) We must teach and admonish one another through singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). And, there are many other "one another" responsibilities given in the Scriptures we must fulfill.

Then, one of the ways in which we must conduct our lives toward our Christian brethren is to encourage them. Hebrews 3:12-13 tells us that we have the responsibility to encourage one another on a daily basis. This is so that we will not be hardened

by the deceitfulness of sin! Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us that we need to be considering one another, looking for and taking advantage of opportunities to provoke one another to love and good works. We can accomplish this by faithfully attending the assemblies of the local church, speaking words of encouragement, setting good examples, restoring those who have sinned, studying God's word together, praying together, etc.

Good stewardship

Matthew 25:14-30 demonstrates that we are stewards (managers) of the things that have been entrusted to our care during our lives on this earth. And, as this passage demonstrates, we will be accountable to God for how we have managed these things – whether we have put them to good use in His service or if we have been lazy and failed in the way we have managed these things. Only those who are found to be faithful (good) stewards will be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven. Those who are judged to have been unfaithful stewards will be punished with everlasting punishment in Hell.

So, we must conduct our lives in a way that we will be considered good (faithful) stewards. This involves being good managers of our time by using our time to serve God and not misusing our time. This involves being good managers of our money by using our money to serve God and not misusing our money. This involves being good managers of our physical bodies by using our bodies in a way that glorifies God and not misusing our bodies. The same points can be made for everything that has been entrusted to our care on this earth!

Abstain

In contrast with these types of conduct that are approved of God, there are a number of things that are specifically mentioned in the Scriptures that are not approved of God related to how we conduct our lives. We need to keep away from these things – because conducting our lives in these ways fails to please God! Now, we will certainly not talk about every single element of our conduct that is

inappropriate and sinful in the sight of God (that will take an ongoing study of the Scriptures and constant evaluation of our conduct). However, we will discuss some specific things which are identified in the Scriptures as not being approved of God.

Fornication

Fornication refers to all acts of sexual intercourse that are outside of God's law (including sexual relations outside of marriage, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality). Fornication is condemned in many Scriptures, including 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5. The only situation in which God approves of sexual relations is between a man and a woman in a God-approved marriage (see Hebrews 13:4).

Lewdness

Lewdness refers to all impure/unchaste behavior (especially of a sexual nature). Lewd behavior is shameful conduct – and is condemned in Galatians 5:19-21. Lewd behavior would include dancing that involves bodily movements that are not proper. Lewd behavior would include inappropriate (unholy) contact between those who are not married. Lewd behavior would also include the lack of restraint in the entertainment we participate in (i.e. participating in entertainment that includes sexually inappropriate scenes/references). And, it would include wearing clothing that does not meet God's standard for modesty.

Idolatry

Idolatry is also condemned repeatedly in the Scriptures (i.e. Galatians 5:19-21). However, idolatry is not just the result of worshiping and serving images of false gods that are made of gold, silver, bronze, wood, etc. Instead, idolatry is the result whenever we worship and serve anything/anyone besides the one true God! For instance, the Scriptures identify covetousness as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). So, our money can be an idol. Our family members can be idols. Our pursuit of earthly pleasures can be an idol. Our jobs can be idols. Our hobbies can be idols. And many, many, other things can be idols!

Consuming alcohol

It is often understood that God condemns drunkenness (i.e. Ephesians 5:18). However, many religious people believe that it is OK to consume some alcoholic beverages in moderation (i.e. social drinking). Yet, the Bible actually condemns the entire process of becoming drunk (a process which begins with the very first drink)! For instance, 1 Peter 4:3-4 not only condemns drunkenness; but, it also condemns a half-drunken state (“revelries” in the NKJV) and social drinking (“drinking parties” in the NKJV)! In addition, any time alcohol is used in these ways, it is contrary to the commandment of God to be sober-minded (i.e. 1 Peter 1:13 and 1 Peter 5:8).

Smoking

Smoking cigarettes and using other tobacco products have been proven and are widely known to harm the body. They are known for causing all sorts of cancer in the body (particularly in the lungs and in the mouth/throat). In addition to cancer, tobacco products are known to cause other diseases (i.e. COPD). If the Christian is aware of the dangers of this habit and chooses to continue that habit, he/she is willingly choosing to abuse his/her body (contrary to the instruction in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20) – and fails to be a good steward of his/her health!

Drugs

Drugs that are used for “recreational” purposes are also known to produce many of the same types of harmful effects as tobacco products (and often produces other harmful effects as well). The Christian, then, must abstain from using these products for the same reason we have just considered! In addition, the Christian has the responsibility to obey the laws of the land (as long as they do not cause us to violate God's laws), according to Romans 13:1-7. So, a Christian cannot be involved in the use of illegal drugs and still please God!

Sinful entertainment/recreation

The Christian must abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22) and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness

(Ephesians 5:11). So, the Christian must stay away from forms of entertainment and recreation that consists of anything that is contrary to God's standard of holiness. This would apply to television programs, movies, music, internet sites, books, magazines, etc. that use language that is not approved of God, displays individuals who are immodestly clothed, shows sexual acts being performed, etc. This would also apply to forms of recreation that are not entirely pure – such as participating in athletic events that require you to dress immodestly, being involved in school functions that require you to miss the assemblies of the local church, etc.

Immodest dress

God has set a particular standard for how we are to clothe ourselves. 1 Timothy 2:9-10 instructs that we clothe ourselves (particularly addressed to women) in a way that is modest (well-arranged), with propriety (a sense of shame and bashfulness), and with moderation (with self-control and soundness of mind). The Christian's clothing must also be such that it professes godliness with good works. That is, our clothing must show Christ to others – not show off our bodies to others! In addition to this passage, the Bible demonstrates that God has a particular standard for clothing (i.e. Genesis 3:6-7, 21 and Exodus 28:42). This standard demonstrates that God chose to clothe people from the neck to the knees (at a minimum)! So, tight fitting jeans/shorts, short clothing (i.e. shorts/skirts that do not cover the thigh), see-through clothing, low-cut clothing, bathing suits, strapless dresses, etc. are all examples of clothing that is not fitting for the Christian to wear!

Forsaking assemblies of the local church

Hebrews 10:24-25 plainly commands that Christians do not forsake the assembling together with the local church: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” However, many people choose not to assemble with the local churches they have joined themselves to once or more each week (often on Sunday evenings or for midweek services)! Yet, when Christians

willfully neglect to assemble together with their brethren (for any reason that is within their control), they sin and actually harm the local church!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That we must put all of our conduct to the test, recognizing the importance of the ways in which we conduct our lives. (2) That the Scriptures identify many ways we should conduct our lives that are according to the will of God which we must be diligent to cling to. And, (3) that the Scriptures identify many ways we should not conduct our lives that are contrary to the will of God which we must be diligent to abstain from.

Have you been pressing toward perfect holiness? We must remember that we will give an account for how we have conducted our lives on the Day of Judgment – and that we will reap what we have sown. In all areas, let us be diligent to live our lives in “holy conduct and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11), as we anticipate this great Day!

Are you perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord by being holy in conduct (testing everything you do, clinging to the good, and abstaining from every form of evil)? If not, make your life right with Him today! Choose to use all of your conduct to bring glory to God by accomplishing His purposes through your life. Do not delay! “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

What does it mean to be holy?

What is your responsibility to be holy throughout your life?

1. Test

What is the importance of your conduct?

What is the importance of being transformed in your conduct?

2. Cling

What kind of conduct must you cling to?

Explain the following types of conduct you must cling to:

1. Bringing glory to God –

2. Preaching God's word –

3. Bible study –

4. Serving –

5. Encouraging brethren –

6. Good stewardship –

3. Abstain

What kind of conduct must you abstain from?

Explain the following types of conduct you must abstain from:

1. Fornication –

2. Lewdness –

3. Idolatry –

4. Consuming alcohol –

5. Smoking –

6. Drugs –

7. Sinful entertainment/recreation –

8. Immodest dress –

9. Forsaking assemblies –

“Be Holy, For I Am Holy”

Lesson 8:

Overcoming

Obstacles To

Holiness

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Christian’s life is expected to be different from the ways of the world – and from the ways in which he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian. The life of a Christian is a holy life that is patterned after God’s holiness!

To be holy is to be separate or set apart. In the spiritual sense, it refers to our responsibility to be separate from the ways of the world (the ways that are common, profane, and sinful) in order to be entirely devoted to God! The standard that must be used to determine our holiness is God (who is perfectly holy), and the message that He has revealed to mankind. Furthermore, it is only by the grace of God that we can be made holy after we have sinned – and that grace which has been shown toward us ought to provoke us to giving our lives entirely to the service of the Lord! Our continued responsibility, then, is to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2

Corinthians 7:1) – in thought, in word, and in conduct. We can do this by testing all things about our lives by the standard of God’s word, clinging to the good, and abstaining from the evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

But, since we are in the world, we experience obstacles in our pursuit of holiness. We have an enemy who is trying to destroy us in Satan. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” Ephesians 6:11 identifies Satan as having schemes (or, strategies) for defeating us, while Ephesians 6:16 pictures Satan as hurling fiery darts at us. Furthermore, 2 Timothy 2:26 indicates that the devil attempts to trap us and keep us enslaved to do his will.

Specifically, temptation and deception is the way Satan attempts to destroy us. He attempts to lure us away from being in fellowship with our holy God by using things that appeal to our fleshly desires. Notice James 1:14-15: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” This is the same thing that he did with Adam and Eve (in Genesis 3:1-6). And, this is the same thing that he did with Jesus, albeit unsuccessfully (in Matthew 4:1-11).

There are many things and many people Satan uses to try to lure us away from God. He may appeal to our desires for earthly wealth, earthly possessions, or earthly pleasures. He may appeal to our earthly desires for ease and comfort of living. He may appeal to our earthly desires to be popular among our friends and family members (Note that Satan can tempt us through other people, just as he tempted Jesus through Peter in Matthew 16:21-23). But, in all things, we are taught that we must resist the devil and his lies! 1 Peter 5:9 instructs us to resist the devil and be steadfast in our faiths. James 4:7 instructs us, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

The purpose of this final lesson in our series on holiness is to consider some specific obstacles that are commonly used by Satan to lure us away from God – and to consider how we can overcome them all!

Obstacles To Holiness

Throughout this series, we have been considering what holiness means, the holiness of God, and how we can be holy in God’s sight. But, as we focus on living lives of holiness, we also need to recognize the real presence of things that try to disrupt our pursuit of perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. Fortunately, there are things mentioned in the Bible that help us to identify these common obstacles. 2 Corinthians 2:11 says that we “are not ignorant of [Satan’s] devices.” As we study and make application of God’s word, we can identify these obstacles and overcome them. So, let’s begin by identifying some obstacles to holiness.

Fleshly desires

1 Peter 2:11 begs those who are Christians to view themselves as “sojourners and pilgrims” (temporary residents) in this world so that they will “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Satan wants to distract us from pursuing holiness by our fleshly lusts (desires). Therefore, let’s consider some passages that will help us understand this obstacle.

(1) Romans 8:5-8. Romans 8:5-8 says, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Earlier (in chapter 7), Paul identified the inward conflict between the ways of the flesh and the ways of the Spirit. He demonstrated that he often found himself violating the commandments of God and fulfilling the desires of his flesh. Under the Law

of Moses, there was no remedy for this problem. Such an individual would be confined under sin. However, through Christ, those who choose to conduct their lives according to the instructions of God rather than the desires of their own flesh are able to escape the bondage of sin (8:1)!

Now, having the opportunity to be forgiven of our past sin, it is our responsibilities to set our minds on the things of God rather than the things of the flesh. For, 1 John 2:15-17 identifies that everything in the world (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life) is not of the Father, but is of the world (and the whole world lies under the sway/influence of Satan, 1 John 5:19). However, if we are focused on the physical things of the flesh, we will be conducting our lives according to those things – and we will not be able to please God (compare with Galatians 5:19-21)! But, if we are focused on the spiritual things of God, we will be conducting our lives according to those things (compare with Galatians 5:22-23).

(2) Matthew 19:16-22. Here is one Biblical example of this principle. In this passage, Jesus met an individual who desired to have eternal life. The man was even doing many things that were pleasing to God. However, when Jesus instructed this rich, young man to “go, sell what you have and give to the poor,” the man went away sorrowful because he had a great amount of earthly possessions (verses 21-22).

What was the problem? Although he desired the spiritual reward of eternal life to some extent, his desire for earthly things (things of the flesh) was greater! He was simply unwilling to devote his entire life to the service of God and make all of the sacrifices God wanted Him to make! Instead, he chose to pursue his own fleshly desires.

In the same way, there are many people today who have the desire to have eternal salvation in Heaven. Many of them even come to Jesus in order to find it. However, they are unwilling to devote their entire lives to His service. There is some fleshly desire they (ultimately) choose to pursue rather than seeking holiness through Jesus Christ.

(3) Galatians 2:20. Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

This type of commitment to Christ will enable us to overcome all fleshly desires that will try to pull us away from God! Paul no longer viewed his life as being his own. Instead, his life had been offered as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). As a result, he would not be focused on pursuing his own earthly desires any longer (Galatians 5:24).

Instead of living his life to fulfill his own fleshly desires, Paul had dedicated himself to living entirely in the service of the Lord. So, he willingly committed his life to the proclamation of the gospel – even to the point of being persecuted frequently (see 2 Corinthians 11:22-33). Eventually, according to historical record, Paul was even beheaded for his commitment to serve the Lord! This is the type of commitment God requires of everyone who desires to follow after Him – that they seek Him above their own fleshly desires.

False standards

There are many times we can become distracted by Satan from our pursuit of holiness by thinking that a false standard is a true standard for determining our holiness. There are many different standards Satan would like for us to appeal to concerning holiness that do not actually lead us to true holiness. Yet, they make us feel good about ourselves and make us believe that we are living according to the ways God would have us to live. Therefore, let’s consider some passages that will help us understand this obstacle.

(1) 1 Peter 1:15-16. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

As we discussed in lesson 2 of this series, God is our standard of holiness. We saw that God is entirely holy and that we must be holy in order to be in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:5-7). Therefore, if we walk in the ways of sin and darkness, we fail to be in fellowship with this holy God (also see Isaiah 59:1-2).

This standard for holiness applies to every area of our conduct (according to verse 15). So, as

we seek to conduct our lives in a way that is approved of God, we must live by His standard. We read about this standard for holiness in the message He has revealed through His Holy Spirit (in the gospel of Jesus Christ). Therefore, all of the words that are contained within the Divine revelation forms this standard by which we will all be judged (John 12:48; Revelation 20:11-15).

(2) Jeremiah 10:23. Jeremiah 10:23 says, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”

Thankfully, God *has* given us a standard to live by! For, this passage teaches us that it is outside of man’s ability to direct our own steps and live in a way that pleases God! God’s ways are much higher than our ways, and His thoughts are much higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). So, without this God-given revelation that tells us how to live in a way that is acceptable to Him, we would not be able to know what is right or live in a way that is pleasing to God!

(3) Proverbs 14:12. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”

Mankind often attempts to direct his own ways. As he does this, he attempts to do the things that *seem* right in his own eyes. So, he may act from his own intuition, his past experience, his learning, etc. However, God reveals that conducting our lives in this way leads to death! Our own thoughts, ideas, and feelings are not sufficient in guiding our lives in a way that pleases God! Instead, God requires that we fully submit ourselves to His laws! This is the only way that will result in being pleasing to God!

(4) Matthew 15:3-9. One of the false standards that mankind often appeals to is his own tradition and teaching. This was true about the Pharisees (as you consider this passage). They appeared to be serving and worshiping God – and even seemed to believe that they were doing so themselves.

However, serving God according to man’s own traditions and teachings fails to please God! This only leads to a form of religion, an outward appearance of religion, and a false confidence in

salvation. But, this does not actually help us grow closer to God and serve Him!

(5) Acts 23:1. Acts 23:1 says, “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’”

Another false standard mankind commonly appeals to is his own conscience. It is commonly believed that an individual pleases God as long as he/she does not violate his/her own conscience. Paul even said that he had conducted his life in “all good conscience before God.” However, simply living according to the direction of one’s own conscience is not an acceptable standard for our holiness. This is even seen by Paul. Other passages indicate how he had persecuted and killed Christians – and did so in good conscience (i.e. Acts 26:9-11). While our consciences can be very helpful in serving the Lord, they only will do so if we train them according to God’s standard! Our consciences, of themselves, are not proper standards for living in a way that pleases God.

Culture

All who are pursuing holiness live in this world. And, living in this world is full of challenges to holiness. Satan wants to distract us from pursuing holiness by things related to how those who are living around us believe and live. Therefore, let’s consider some passages that will help us understand this obstacle.

(1) John 15:18-21. In John 15:18-21, Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

The ways of the world are different from God’s ways. If they were the same, the world would not hate those who would speak God’s message to

them or those who would live their lives according to God’s standard. However, the world has repeatedly demonstrated that its ways are different from God’s! Being “in” the world, therefore, will present numerous obstacles to those who desire to follow God – as there will be pressure placed on the Christian to become like the sinful culture around him/her (i.e. to become assimilated into the culture).

Therefore, God’s people (who are pursuing holiness) must view themselves as being “in” the world, but not as being “of” the world. That is, Christians must view themselves as being temporary residents of this world who are longing for an eternal home in Heaven! This way of thinking leads to abstaining from the fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11-12). So, Christians are not to be cut from the same mold the world is cut from. Romans 12:2 instructs that we do not conform to the world. Instead, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds in order to prove what is that “good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

(2) Deuteronomy 7:1-8. As God prepared to bring His holy people (the nation of Israel) into the promised land (the land of Canaan), He gave them instructions concerning the people and culture of that land (in Deuteronomy 7:1-8). God knew that if they did not destroy the sinful elements of the culture in that land, they would be ensnared by those things and live in the same sinful ways. For instance, God knew that if they allowed the altars, pillars, and carved images from that culture’s idolatrous worship to remain in the land, the Israelites would eventually become ensnared by those things and begin to worship those false gods.

So, God instructed that they destroy those sinful elements of the culture in the land. They were not to make marriages with the peoples of the land, they were to destroy all the elements of their idol worship, etc. This would all help them to remain God’s holy people (separated from the profane and sinful ways of the world). However, as you read the books of Joshua and Judges, you discover that the Israelites were (in large part) not obedient to these warnings and instructions. As a result, the Lord delivered them into the hands of their enemies (read Judges 1-2).

Clearly, God recognizes the obstacles living in a world full of wickedness poses to an individual's pursuit of holiness. God's holy people must do as much as is within their power to get away from the evil and unholy activities of a culture in order to keep from being negatively influenced by it.

(3) 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. As we have considered from this passage in previous lessons, God's people must live different from their sinful culture. Christians must not participate in the same sinful things ("Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?," verse 14). Just as Christ has no part with the evil one, God's people should have no participation in the same sinful things as unbelievers!

Therefore, God's people are instructed to come out and be separate from the world, pressing on toward perfect holiness. Quite simply, if we desire the blessings that come from being children of the Almighty God, we must live according to His instructions. We must be separate from the sinful cultures around us – just as God wanted the Israelites to remain holy when they entered the promised land! We must not view ourselves as permanent residents on this earth who want to experience all that this world has to offer. Instead, we must view ourselves as sojourners and pilgrims who are passing through this world on a quest for a better (a Heavenly) homeland (1 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13-16).

Peers

One of the elements that make living holy lives in a world full of wickedness so difficult is that we live around many people who are being used by Satan to distract us from our pursuits of holiness. For instance, Matthew 16:21-23 even demonstrates how that the apostle Peter was used on one occasion to tempt Jesus (albeit unsuccessfully). Therefore, let's consider some passages that will help us understand this obstacle.

(1) 1 Corinthians 15:33. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'"

The people we put ourselves around can have negative influences on us! In its context, this passage is talking of those who were spreading lies about the resurrection. And, they were apparently being successful in convincing others *not* to believe in the resurrection! So, the Corinthians were not to deceive themselves so as to believe that the people they put themselves around would have no influence on them!

In fact, the Scriptures consistently teach us that the people we put ourselves around *can* influence us – either for the good or for the bad. This passage demonstrates that the people we put ourselves around (i.e. our family members, friends, co-workers, etc.) can lead to the ruin of our good morals/good habits. 1 Corinthians 5:6 (as well as the entirety of chapter 5) demonstrates that it does not even take much association with evil influences to negatively affect our good morals! The passages says that a "little leaven leavens the whole lump." In contrast, passages like Matthew 5:13-16 and 1 Peter 3:1-2 demonstrate that it is also possible to be influenced by godly individuals for the good!

(2) 1 Kings 11:1-8. This passage records the downfall of an extremely wise man – because of the influence of his peers. We have already seen that God did not want His holy people to make marriages with those of other nations, because He knew that doing so would result in the Israelites turning away from Him. Now, this is demonstrated to be true by Solomon in this passage. Even though he was an extremely wise man (who was known for his great wisdom and wrote much of the book of Proverbs, which contains many pieces of great wisdom), the foreign women he allowed to be in his life successfully influenced him to turn away from God.

Solomon's good morals, thus, were corrupted by these evil influences. This is a perfect demonstration of the truth we have just discussed from 1 Corinthians 15:33. Solomon had written (in the book of Proverbs) about being aware of and staying away from immoral and evil women. Yet, he allowed himself to be negatively influenced by them.

(3) Proverbs 1:10-19. Proverbs 1:10-19 says, "My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without

cause; Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit; We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil; Cast in your lot among us, Let us all have one purse' — My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path; For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird; But they lie in wait for their own blood, They lurk secretly for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.”

This text describes the often played-out scene in which evil people attempt to influence others to participate in their wickedness with them. The text records how that these individuals often make false and empty promises (i.e. promises that there will not be any consequences for their actions, promises that they will not get caught, promises for great gain or pleasure as a result of their evil deeds, etc.). However, the text warns that participating along with these evil individuals will result in serious consequences.

So, this passage simply exhorts us to refuse to participate in the ways of sinners – no matter who they are! God exhorted His people not to follow a crowd to do what is evil (Exodus 23:2). Even if you will be alienated from those who you love and spend time with, God wants you to refuse to participate in evil with them! This applies to all of your peers – whether it be your family members, your friends, your co-workers, your neighbors, your classmates, etc.

Apathy

Satan wants God's people to lose their passion (zeal) for serving the Lord and pursuing holiness. He is even OK with people claiming to follow Jesus Christ, as long as they only have a casual interest in doing so. You see Satan wants to distract us from pursuing holiness by becoming apathetic (not overly concerned or interested in pursuing holiness). He wants people to think that they do not need to be too “radical” in pursuing holiness. He wants us to think that a “little” sin is permissible. Therefore, let's consider some passages that will help us understand this obstacle.

(1) Titus 2:11-14. Titus 2:11-14 says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

God's grace has made salvation available to all mankind. Without the grace of God, none of us could be saved from our sins. Therefore, as we discussed in lesson 3 of this series, it is only by the grace of God that we can be made holy in the sight of God after we have sinned.

God's grace, therefore, ought to provoke us to be zealous for every good work. The grace of God will lead those who are honest and sincere away from ungodliness and worldly lusts – and toward living soberly, righteously, and godly. In fact, everyone who is a Christian must realize that Christ did not give His life on the cross so that His people would be apathetic (i.e. not very interested or passionate) in their service to Him! Instead, the Christian must realize that Jesus Christ sacrificed His life so that he/she would give his/her life entirely to the Lord's service! The word “zealous” has to do with the picture of a burning fire or passion. Therefore, God expects each Christian to burn with passion in His service! This includes having a burning passion for pursuing holiness in the fear of God.

(2) Matthew 12:30. Matthew 12:30 says, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”

Jesus makes it clear that He demands our complete allegiance. Just as He also demonstrates in Matthew 6:24. He taught, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

So, Jesus' teachings challenge those who desire to be apathetic! Jesus tells those who only desire to follow Him some of the time or only partially pursue holiness that they are actually His enemies. They are not on His side! In order to correct

this, we must determine to be entirely “with” Christ (in all things, at all times)!

(3) Revelation 3:15-16. Revelation 3:15-16 says, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

There were so-called “Christians” in the first century who were apathetic in their service to the Lord. This was the church in Laodicea. They appear to have been going through the motions of doing some good things for Christ. But, they really were not following Christ in a zealous kind of way.

As a result of their attempt to serve the Lord in this way, Jesus rebuked them for their lukewarmness! Their service to Christ was as useful as a lukewarm beverage to someone who needs a refreshing drink! In fact, I believe that this passage demonstrates Jesus would rather that we be all the way against Him than for us to be lukewarm followers of His. Therefore, Jesus said that He would vomit them out of His mouth – and He will do the same to those who are only partially committed to following Him today (if we will not repent)!

How To Overcome All Obstacles To Holiness

We face many real obstacles to living lives of holiness. I am sure that the ones we have discussed are only a few. However, consider the promise that our holy God (who cannot lie, Titus 1:2) made in 1 Corinthians 10:13. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” God has promised that you can overcome all temptations and obstacles to being holy! He simply will not allow Satan to tempt you so as to put an insurmountable obstacle in front of you. No matter what the obstacle is, God has promised that there is a path to holiness. Therefore, before we conclude this series of lessons, I ask that you

consider a few points that will help you be holy through any temptation.

Recognize the true value of your soul

Jesus teaches that your soul is more valuable than anything in this world. In Matthew 16:26, He said, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Also consider what Jesus said in the following passages.

In Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus said that it would be better to physically mutilate your body than it would be to have your soul cast into Hell: “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus taught that it would be better to be killed physically than for your soul to be cast into Hell: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

So, no matter how Satan is trying to lure you away from serving God, you must know that nothing and no one is worth losing your soul for! Therefore, no matter how much living for sin might appeal to your physical desires, no matter how much you would like to be accepted by the world and your peers, no matter how pleasurable your culture makes sin appear, etc. – you must determine that none of these physical things are worth the price of forfeiting eternal salvation in Heaven and spending eternity in Hell’s torment!

Count the cost of discipleship

You must understand that there is great cost associated with living a holy life in service of the Lord. Jesus identified this cost in Luke 14:25-27, 33 (which we’ll discuss in just a moment). For now, realize that the cost of discipleship is complete dedication to serving God, that He must come absolutely first in your life.

However, before you become a child of God, you need to seriously consider whether you are *willing* to give what God requires of you! Luke 14:28-32 talks about how folks realize the need to count the cost in other areas of life (i.e. like a man who intends to build a tower or a king who contemplates going to war against another king). So, if this principle is recognized in other areas, it certainly must be applied to our lives as Christians – so that we do not start out to live for God, only to refuse to give our lives entirely to His service.

So, you need to seriously consider whether or not you are willing to devote your entire life to God's service. But, you need to make this decision with the full understanding that (as has been discussed in other lessons in this series) you will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7-8). If you decide not to give your life fully to God, you will spend eternity in Hell fire. However, if you decide to give your life entirely to God, you will spend eternity in Heaven!

Seek God absolutely first

There are many passages that describe the type of commitment God requires of those who will follow after Him. But, remember that we have already seen God does not accept anything less than a full commitment to serving Him (go back and review Matthew 6:24 and Matthew 12:30). Now, consider the following passages to continue to see what kind of commitment God requires you to make in serving Him.

Matthew 6:33 indicates that we must seek all that is involved in being part of God's kingdom and living according to His righteousness absolutely first in our lives: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Luke 14:26-27, 33 indicates that we must seek God first – even above our own family relationships, physical possessions, and our own earthly lives! And, if we fail to follow Christ above everything and everyone else, He says that we cannot be His disciples. Verses 26-27 say, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever

does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Verse 33 says, "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

This means that we must give ourselves entirely to seeking the ways of God and submit ourselves to Him. Ephesians 5:17 instructs that we "understand what the will of the Lord is." 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 instructs that we put all things to the test, clinging to everything that is found to be in harmony with the will of God, and abstaining from everything that is found to be contrary to the will of God. So, you must determine not to allow anything or anybody to come before God in your life!

Practice self-discipline

Jesus says that the one who desires to follow after Him must "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). In the larger context (Luke 9:21-26), the extent of this self-denial is that we must even be willing to deny ourselves of our physical lives! Certainly, we must be willing to deny ourselves of anything and everything that conflicts with the will of God!

Paul also demonstrated the necessity of self-discipline in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (as discussed in lesson 7). He demonstrated how self-discipline is essential for athletes who are attempting to win an earthly (temporary) prize. Then, he made the point that those who are Christians (those who are seeking after a Heavenly and imperishable prize) must be even more willing to exercise self-discipline in order to live in a way that pleases God! If you fail to exercise the proper self-discipline, you can become "disqualified" of eternal life!

So, you must be willing to discipline your body and your desires, bringing them into the complete obedience of Jesus Christ! Remember, nothing and no one is more valuable than your soul. Therefore, you must simply say "no" to any of your desires that run contrary to the desires of God!

Put on the whole armor of God

Earlier in this study, we talked about our enemy who attempts to lure us away from God by appealing to our earthly desires. We talked about

how he is trying to destroy us and ensnare us. We talked about how he employs schemes to get us to fall and how he is hurling “fiery darts” at us.

As an answer to this, God has given us armor for protection. This armor is of a spiritual nature and is identified in Ephesians 6:10-18. Notice that if we put on the *whole* armor that God provides, we will be able to stand – and withstand the devil!

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

So, we must diligently work to put on truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God – and pray always! If we do, we will be victorious in our fight against the devil and overcome all obstacles to holiness!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have observed: (1) That there are many obstacles we face in living lives of holiness and complete dedication to God. And, (2) that we can overcome these (and all) obstacles to our holiness by making the proper commitment to Christ!

Are you living a holy life? Consider 1 Peter 1:15-16 once more (before closing this study): “but

as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” If you are not living a holy life, make your life right with God today! God has given you the opportunity to be holy. Now, you must take advantage of that opportunity. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Study Questions

What does it mean to be holy?

Will you experience any obstacles to holiness? Why or why not?

1. Obstacles To Holiness

Discuss some lessons from the following passages about the obstacle of fleshly desires:

1. Romans 8:5-8 –

2. Matthew 19:16-22 –

3. Galatians 2:20 –

Discuss some lessons from the following passages about the obstacle of false standards:

1. 1 Peter 1:15-16 –

2. Jeremiah 10:23 –

3. Proverbs 14:12 –

4. Matthew 15:3-9 –

5. Acts 23:1 –

Discuss some lessons from the following passages about the obstacle of culture:

1. John 15:18-21 –
2. Deuteronomy 7:1-8 –
3. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 –

Discuss some lessons from the following passages about the obstacle of your peers:

1. 1 Corinthians 15:33 –
2. 1 Kings 11:1-8 –
3. Proverbs 1:10-19 –

Discuss some lessons from the following passages about the obstacle of apathy:

1. Titus 2:11-14 –
2. Matthew 12:30 –
3. Revelation 3:15-16 –

2. How To Overcome All Obstacles To Holiness

How will recognizing the true value of your soul help you overcome all obstacles to holiness?

How will counting the cost help you overcome all obstacles to holiness?

How will seeking God absolutely first help you overcome all obstacles to holiness?

How will practicing self-discipline help you overcome all obstacles to holiness?

How will putting on the whole armor of God help you overcome all obstacles to holiness?