

The Traveling Pulpit

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What Does It Mean To Be Holy?

“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.” (Ex. 19:4-6)

Introduction

This message on the subject of holiness is not intended to be an exhaustive study, but a simple reminder of what it means to be holy. From within our text, God has painted a picture of His expectation for His people. He expects us to live holy. Now, exactly what does it mean to be holy? In both the Hebrew and Greek, this word, holy, means to be set apart or separated to God. “Sanctification” (I Thess. 4:3-4), which means to make holy, has to do with the character and conduct of God’s people. God expects His people to be holy because He is holy and He has appointed them to be His earthly “ambassadors” (II Cor. 5:20) to a pagan world. If a lost sinner is to see God, then he must see Him in the lives of God’s redeemed people (Matt. 5:16).

Of all the attributes of God, “holiness” (Heb. 12:14) seems to occupy first place because of the manner in which it glorifies Him. Almighty God is absolutely pure and sinless, hating sin, but loving goodness and righteousness. He loves holiness so much that He was willing to sacrifice “His only begotten Son” (Jh. 3:16). Don’t ever forget when you think of the cross, that it stands for God’s holiness. The shed blood of Christ is the only way for the gap to be bridged between God’s holiness and man’s un-holiness. Our view of God’s holiness will be determined by our view and attitude of sin. If we think lightly of Calvary, then we’ll think lightly of God’s holiness. If we don’t have a correct view of sin, it’s because we don’t have a correct view of God. When Isaiah came into the presence of God’s holiness, he saw himself as “undone” and “unclean” (Isa. 6:1-5).

Under the Levitical order, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the Temple was a reminder to the people of how sin had separated man from God. Only on the basis of the shed blood could man find access into the Holy of Holies. Without meeting God on His sovereign terms, it's impossible for man to meet God at all. The majority of people, even professing Christians, seem to look upon God as an old grandfather image that sits in a rocking chair winking at sin. Upon conversion to Christ, God commands His people to pursue a life of "holiness" (I Pet. 1:14-16). Since God wants us to be holy, it would do us well to ask and seek to answer the question, what does it mean to be holy?

It Means Deliverance From The Power Of The Enemy (v.4)

God reminded Israel how He had delivered them from bondage in Egypt, which was not just liberation, but adoption thus making them His people. Notice how God uses the word, "myself," to declare His purpose in Israel's deliverance. The first prerequisite to spiritual holiness is Salvation when God brings us to Himself. It's impossible to ever be a holy people apart from being adopted into the spiritual family of God. The new birth, being "born again" (Jh. 3:3), establishes the ground upon which we can live holy lives. Unless we have been delivered from the power of the enemy, there is no hope for us to ever be holy. If Satan keeps us bound in his captivity, then we remain his slaves in the prison house of sin. Only by the power of Jesus Christ, can we be set free from spiritual bondage and delivered from the stronghold of Satan.

Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery is a picture of a sinner's deliverance from the captivity of sin. God describes their deliverance as being upon "eagle's wings." In Scripture, the eagle is a symbol of God's deity. The eagle is a greatly admired bird, known for its majesty and for being able to soar into magnificent heights. Just as an eagle flies beyond the reach of man, salvation is beyond man's ability and is dependent upon God's deliverance. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9), just as Israel's deliverance was from the "Egyptians." For over 400 years, the Israelites had been under the oppression of Egypt and powerless to help themselves. After much harsh treatment, God sent Moses to deliver Israel and mightily destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. Like Israel, sinners cannot help themselves out of the slime pits of sin. If deliverance is ever realized, it must be by the power of God's grace Who alone is capable of conquering the enemy of our souls.

God is declaring that He "brought" Israel out of bondage and gave them safe deliverance from the enemy. Even though Pharaoh followed and threatened to overtake them, God kept His people safe. He did for Israel, what Israel could not do for themselves, just as He does for His people of today. By using the metaphor of "eagle's wings," God is making reference to His paternal care over His redeemed people. God "brought" Israel out of Egypt to be a "holy nation" unto Himself. Therefore, we learn that holiness becomes a divine purpose in our redemption. Redemption means that we've been bought off the slave market of sin, never to be sold again. A redeemed soul should bare evidence of belonging to Christ by living holy. God does not save us to keep living like normal, but to live holy, totally devoted and dedicated to God, set aside for His glory and divine purpose, separated and different from the world, not blending in with the crowd, but possessing godly qualities of life.

It Means Obedience To The Will Of God (v.5)

God also reminded Israel that He had purchased them to be a "peculiar treasure," meaning a special purchased possession. This referred to how God had set them apart from the surrounding heathen nations unto Himself. The Lord had entered into a special "covenant" with Abraham that guaranteed spiritual blessings. Today, all believers are represented as the full inheritors of those spiritual blessings (Gal. 3:26-29).

In Christ, we can know positional sanctification, but progressive sanctification comes from growing "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:19). Knowing God's will is not enough, we must "obey" it and "keep" it if we are to live holy. God has a will which is revealed to

us in His Word and His will is the expression of His holiness. Only as we live according to His will can we identify with His holiness. In the Garden of Eden, God commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge and as long as he obeyed, he would be holy. When Adam chose to exercise his free will, he disregarded God's will and became un-holy leading the entire human race into sin. Holiness can only be restored to a fallen race by God's sovereign work of salvation. Sound Bible teaching must emphasize "godly" (Titus 2:11-14) living. Christians need to be as orthodox in their behavior as they are in their beliefs. Not only must we trust Christ as Savior, but as Lord, thus making holiness the goal of our lives.

In order for us to live holy, we must do the will of God by putting our Christian works into action (Jam. 1:22). It's not enough to "remember" what God's Word teaches, but we must put it into daily practice and "do" it (Num. 15:40). Proof of our obedience is in doing God's will, and not just thinking about it or talking about it. Whatever habits and desires we have that are not pleasing to God ought to be forsaken, because anything less than the will of God will keep us from living holy. Holiness is the full surrender of our wills to God's will. In Gethsemane, we see the conflict between the human will and divine will as Jesus prayed "not my will but thine be done" (Lk. 22:42). The only way to enter into the "will" of God is to count it more valuable than your own life. Even though Jesus was the Son of God "yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Unless our "will" is put to death, holiness will not be realized as it should in our lives. The pathway to perfect holiness is perfect obedience to the Father's will. Christ did for us what we could never do for ourselves, when He opened the pathway upon His death on the cross and rent the veil of the temple "in twain" (Matt. 27:51).

It Means Recognition Of A Special Position (v.6)

The nation of Israel was separated to receive the oracles of God and bring forth the Messiah into the world. Today, the true Israelite is the one who has been redeemed by God's grace and justified, like Abraham, by "faith" (Rom. 4, 9:6). The nation of Israel is called "holy," not because of their personal achievement, but because they were set apart from other nations. Likewise, the church of today has been set apart and that divine act of sanctification ought to cultivate holy living that brings glory to God. God does not save His people because they are special, but when He saves them He makes them special in His sight. In other words, Christians are not saved because of their own merit, but because of God's "grace" (Eph. 2:8-9). As God's "kingdom of priests," believers are to point the lost to Christ interceding on their behalf and offer "praises" to "him who hath called" us "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9).

To seek after holiness is to seek after the will of God for which God's people should be noted. The Spirit of God Who indwells believers is called Holy because He is the secret source of holiness, giving power for believers to obey the will of God (I Cor. 3:16-17). Holy Living is being led by the Holy Spirit (Jh. 14, 16) into the revealed will of God and drawing from His power to live a life pleasing to the Father. Through "sanctification" (II Thess 2:13, I Pet. 1:2) we learn how to yield ourselves by faith to God's will. Although sinless perfection will never be reached while in the flesh, God's people should never cease striving to grow in "grace" (II Pet. 3:18) and live holy lives. "Sanctification" (I Cor. 1:30) is what God does within us, separating us from a sinful world and dedicating us unto Himself. Learning how to live holy is a gradual process that involves daily dying to self and obedience to the will of God (I Cor. 15:31). It is a lifelong experience that will only be completed with the return of Christ (I Thess. 3:13).

Closing

Holiness is the essential attribute of God that makes Him perfect. We find in the Lord Jesus Christ, the personification of holiness. It's the will of God for His redeemed people to partake of His holiness

as they pattern their lives after Christ. In this life, we can learn to be holy through obedience to God's Word. In the life to come, we are guaranteed ultimate holiness and complete sanctification through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. There is not a single Christian who is exempt from striving toward a life of holiness. Evidence of being born again (Jh. 3:3) should be reflected in a desire for holiness. Nothing should challenge us more than to be all that God wills for us to be, including being a holy people (Eph. 5:26-27). God wants a pure and "peculiar people" (special people/treasured possession) who will live in such a way that God will be magnified and glorified in and through them (I Pet. 2:9).

God promises to make His people "a peculiar treasure ... a kingdom of priests ... an holy nation" if they will "obey" His "voice" and "keep" His "covenant." Along with our "covenant" position "in Christ" (II Cor. 5:17) goes responsibilities. Holiness is not merely a matter of how you part your hair or shine your shoes, but it is a matter of following and doing the will of God which means separation from the world. This kind of separated obedience is only possible through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

How do we rate when it comes to personal holiness? I hope that we can say, as did Israel, "all that the Lord hath spoken, we will do" (Ex. 19:8). If you find yourself having slid down the hill of holiness into a backslidden condition, then fellowship can be restored through confession of "sins" (I Jh. 1:9) and a commitment to "do" the will of God. Only the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit enables a believer to progress in holiness.

A Word From the Ministry

Beginning in September, changes have been made to the radio stations that are broadcasting our programs. Wilkins Radio Network offered us a special package that was too good to turn down. We are now broadcasting over WBXR out of Huntsville, Alabama, at 1:45 PM on Sundays and also over WELP out of Greenville, South Carolina at 9:15 PM on Sundays. You can also listen to these programs over live stream at www.wilkinsradio.com as they are being broadcasted.

We had a good almost six year run over WTRU out of Winston-Salem, NC, before their cost increase caused us to look elsewhere. It all turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Wilkins Radio Network is a Christian broadcasting company consisting of 21 stations across the country.

Also, it appears that we are having the most "hits" on our website so far this year that we've had in previous years. For this, we give God the glory and pray that He will use this little ministry for His good pleasure.

Currently, I'm in the process of reformatting my book, ***Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, What Does the Bible Really Teach?*** There are only a few copies left and due to the way this book has helped so many people, I plan to do a second printing in the near future. For the sake of economy, it will require a reformat. Hopefully, I'll have more copies to offer early next year. At the present time, I still have sufficient quantities of my autobiography, ***My Life as a Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep and Herding Goats***, to offer upon request. There is no charge in anything we do or offer. We are a faith ministry and depend upon God to supply our needs through the donations of God's people. As always, a big "thank you" to all our supporters that keeps COGM getting out the Word of God over both audio and printed page.

Because of His Sovereign GraceBWM

