

ASPECTS OF HOLINESS

HOLINESS: SO, WHAT'S THE STANDARD?

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme remains, 'aspects of holiness'

Subject of holiness is an avoided, almost taboo topic

When talked about it generates a great deal of controversy

Arguments from two polarised standpoints:

Legalists versus antinomians

There are problems with the two extremes

This message is titled, 'holiness - what's the standard?'

Message raises a number of questions:

1. What is the standard by which we measure holiness or holy living?
Put another way, what is the benchmark?
2. Whose standard are we to follow?
3. How do you measure it?
4. Is it objectively verifiable or is it purely subjective?

2. BIBLE PASSAGE AND TEXTS:

TEXTS:

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; (1 Peter 1:15-17)

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: ^[d]adultery, ^[e]fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, ^[f]murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ ^[g]gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:16-24)

3. WHAT'S THE STANDARD OR BENCHMARK AND WHOSE STANDARD OR BENCHMARK?

A standard or benchmark is a level that has been set which has to be attained if a person is to be deemed fit or qualified for a role, position or function

There is a minimum qualifying standard that has to be met before a person is admitted into the guild, association or profession

Same principle applies to holiness

Jesus makes us holy. However, we have to continuously seek to please God by making choices that help us to that end

Holiness is part of god's plan to restore humanity to the ideal of Eden

Holiness is the only basis on which we relate to god (Hebrews 12:14)

Whose standard or benchmark is the measure of holiness?

It is God's standard. God is the benchmark and He has told us what the standard is:

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; (1 Peter 1:15-17)

God is saying, 'be like me. I want you to be holy as I am.'

God the Father wants us to be like His son Jesus (Romans 8:29)

The standard of holiness that God demands is high, as seen in our second text, which says:

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

The Scribes and Pharisees were the ultimate legalists, but their high standard was not high enough

The truth is that no one can be righteous in his or her own strength or own doing

That is why Jesus came - Saviour, Healer, Sanctifier; the One who makes us righteous before a holy god

God the Father and his Son Jesus are the standard and they set the standard for holiness. That's why God says, 'be holy, for I am holy'

God is the standard or measure and He sets it; not man, a church, Denomination or Movement

4. HOW DO WE MEASURE IT?

Simple answer is: to what extent am I becoming more like Jesus everyday - in thought, words and deeds?

This covers the choices we make even in the minutiae of life

There is a huge difference between a commandment or order, and a suggestion

5. IMPERATIVES, DIRECTIVES AND INDICATIVES

5.1 IMPERATIVES AND DIRECTIVES

An imperative is a non-negotiable order or command

A directive is an instruction that is not subject to variation

They are one and the same thing

God's command and requirement to us is that we be holy

God's word is full of imperatives and directives. These are not suggestions for discussion. They are commands to be obeyed

Through the ages a lot of focus on the outward - ritual or behavioural aspects of what it means to be holy. The result is that people have focused so much on the letter and lost sight of the spirit

Reason why people focus on external behaviour:

Leviticus 18-20 contains the ethical and moral code that God gave to Israel in terms of how they should conduct themselves; first, in relation to Himself and secondly, with regard to each other

5.2 INDICATIVES

An indicative is a pointer. It signals or shows. An indicative is suggestive

When we look at the bible there are many examples of indicatives:

- (I) Paul to Philemon about his servant Onesimus
- (II) Paul speaking about Christian liberty and conscience in relation to the consumption of meat (1 Corinthians 8:13; Romans 14:21)

In these instances God is not commanding but showing us the best way to live - which is a life based on the principle of love

6. HOLINESS IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

- God and man
- Man and man
- Man and the rest of creation
- This is the basis of the Ten Commandments. The focus is on how we relate with god, our neighbour and world around us.
- That is why Jesus summarised the whole law as follows:

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)

7. HOLINESS IMPACTS TWO MAJOR AREAS OF LIFE THE MOST:

- Money (resources) - generosity (vs. greed)
- Human relationship - sexuality
- Holiness is about everything that belongs to god:
'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof' (Psalm 24:1)

That includes mankind, all the resources on earth and of course money, which is a key measure of value

Our behaviour in relation to the earth and its resources should be informed and underpinned by a deep awareness of, love and reverence for its owner. So, we handle it with great care

For example, all resources on earth belong to God; handle them and money with great generosity and consideration for others

Your neighbour's wife, animals, goods, etc., belong to them. They are a gift from God to them. So, do not violate their right to enjoy the very thing or things that God has graciously given to them. So, no stealing or any other form of interference

Your neighbour is poor and hungry, feed him. What should you feed him with? Feed him with the resources that belong to God, which He has graciously given to you to steward

8. HOLINESS: PRIMARY DRIVER AND DIMENSIONS:

Jesus summarised the whole law as follows:

- Love God with all you have
- Love your neighbour as yourself

9. HOW DO WE MAINTAIN THE STANDARD?

9.1 FOLLOW THE LAW OF LOVE

'If you love me, you will obey my commands' (John 14:15)

'Love is the fulfillment of the law' (Romans 8:8-13)

9.2 CONTINUOUS TRUSTING IN CHRIST'S FINISHED WORK ON THE CROSS

Holiness is not about self-effort that earns us salvation with God. It is loving obedience and submission in response to what God has done for us on the cross through His son Jesus Christ; so that every day we seek and strive to please and honour Him through our words, attitude and actions

9.3 DAILY APPLICATION OF THE WORD AND PLEADING OF THE BLOOD

Sanctification is a deliberate and conscious process

Spiritual disciplines - prayer, worship, fasting, retreats, etc.

Jesus observed His own daily disciplines, as have many who have gone before us

Reading, meditating on the word and pleading the cleansing, sanctifying power of the blood over our lives, is a must

9.4 WALK IN THE SPIRIT, DAILY CRUCIFYING THE FLESH

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: ^[d]adultery, ^[e]fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, ^[f]murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ ^[g]gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:16-24)

What this means is that anyone who indulges in any of the works of the flesh mentioned in verses 19-21 is not living a holy life

Two main aspects of our walk with god that need close monitoring if we are to live holily:

9.4.1 THINKING - THOUGHT LIFE - WHAT IS NOT SEEN

'Search me O God...' (Psalm 139:23-24)

9.4.2 ATTITUDE, WORDS (SPEECH) AND BEHAVIOUR - WHAT IS SEEN

- Am I proud, haughty, and arrogant?
- Am I critical, self-righteous and snobbish?
- Am I loving, gracious and kind
- Am I doing something that Jesus would not do and the Father would not approve of, based on the word?

When we walk in the Spirit, we produce the fruits of the Spirit. Notice that it is fruits, not something manufactured. Fruit production is a natural process, not an artificial one. God wants us to produce fruits, good fruits, for his glory

How do we walk in the spirit?

Obey the word, for the word and the spirit are one. When we do so, the fruits will come - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, etc.

10. IS THE TEST OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE?

- Always base it on God's word
- Do not use personal standards
- Do not use the standard of the prevailing culture
- The standard is always the word of god and the person of Jesus

When we do so, we walk in the spirit and produce the fruits of the Spirit, which are nothing but the fruits of a holy life

11. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

- 'Holiness: what's the standard?'
- God is the standard and he sets the standard
- God desires and calls us to be like Him
- His word is full of imperatives and directives. These are non-negotiable
- Even the indicatives in His word are calls for us to operate from a place of love
- Holiness is about relationship: God and man; man and man; man and creation
- The command to be holy impacts two major areas of life the most: (i) money (resources) - generosity (vs. greed); (ii) human relationship - sexuality
- Holiness is about everything that belongs to God: 'the earth is the lord's and the fullness thereof' (Psalm 24:1)

- Holiness has one primary driver across two dimensions: (i) love God with all you have; (ii) love your neighbour as yourself
- How do we maintain the standard?: (i) follow the law of love; (ii) continuous trusting in Christ's finished work on the Cross; (iii) daily application of the word and pleading of the blood; (iv) walk in the spirit, daily crucifying the flesh
- It affects two main areas: (i) thinking - thought life - what is not seen - 'search me O God...'; (ii) attitude, words (speech) and behaviour - what is seen
- The test is objectively verifiable and is always based on God's word and not our personal opinion