

**“Be Holy”**

*The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy’ (Leviticus 19:1-2).*

- I. On Wednesday, I read this passage to my Bible class and when I asked for their reaction to what they had just heard, one member slowly raised her hand and said, “What does God mean here when He says: ‘Be holy?’”
- II. What does God mean when He says, “be holy”?
- A. The way we answer this question has eternal implications.
1. This question forces us to consider our relationship with God.
  2. This question is the first step in understanding what God requires of us.
  3. And the answer to this question sets us on the path that leads to life or the path that leads to death.
- B. Holy means holy.
1. Holy does not mean better.
    - a. Holiness does not give grades.
    - b. It either is or it is not.
  2. Holy is an absolute concept.
    - a. Holy means never messing up.
    - b. Holy means never giving in to temptation.
    - c. Holy means never going back on your word.
    - d. Holy means always doing the right thing.
  3. Jesus answers this question in today’s gospel reading when He says: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- D. We are required to be holy...and we are not!
1. We know this from our own experience in the world.
  2. We know this from the Word.
    - a. “There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who seeks God.”
    - b. “All have turned away...there is no one who does good” (Romans 3:10-12).
    - c. The Law of God requires us to be holy and we are not!
    - d. The result of our sin is that we are disconnected from God.
  3. Our attempts to make ourselves holy only create a deeper divide.
    - a. Friday night my neighbor got her car stuck in the ice.
    - b. The harder she worked to free herself from the ice, the worse it got.
  4. Holiness is unattainable and the harder we try to do it on our own, the worse we become.
    - a. We become more judgmental of others.
    - b. We find it difficult to forgive ourselves.
    - c. The uncompromising, unbending Law of God makes perfection impossible.
    - d. Holy means holy!
- III. Only God is holy.
- A. In the revealed truth of the Bible, we find holiness in God alone.
1. God is all of things we are not and cannot be.
  2. God is honest, God is faithful, God is just, God is pure and God is perfect.
  3. This still doesn’t help us.
- B. Most importantly for us, the holiness of God is shown in the truth that God is love.

1. God reveals His holiness in the Shepherd who leaves 99 sheep to pursue one sheep that has strayed (Luke 15:4-6).
2. God reveals His holiness in the Father who runs to celebrate his prodigal son “was lost and now is found” (Luke 15:24).
3. And God reveals His holiness in the Father who pleads with the self-righteous brother who is disgusted by his Father’s grace to his foolish brother (Luke 15:28-31).
4. Paul describes the holiness of God in clear and concise language when he writes, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

C. This pursuing, sacrificial, restoring aspect of God’s love changes us.

1. God’s love for us in Christ makes us holy.
2. The unbending, uncompromising Law of God destroys us.
3. Christ has given us a new heart and a new life.
4. Saturday’s verse of the day: “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him...There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us” (I John 4:16-19).

D. In Christ, we have new identity.

1. Paul describes this new identity in Christ when he writes, “Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. <sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.”
2. Through Baptism and by faith we are given new clothes to wear.
  - a. We have been dressed in His righteousness.
  - b. We have “put on Christ” and when God looks at us, He sees Christ!
  - c. And we now can appear like Christ to the world (Christ’s words become descriptive of us).
    - i. We can show mercy without seeking revenge (We can turn the other cheek).
    - ii. We can live generously without expecting repayment (We can give your cloak as well).
    - iii. We can sacrifice our own comfort without expecting any reward (We can go the extra mile).
3. The holiness that we have received by faith in Jesus Christ comes with no strings, it makes no demands of us; instead it motivates us and it promises us a new life that will last forever.
  - a. This is the holiness John describes in his picture of heaven from Revelation 7.
  - b. After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands...Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9-14).

IV. When God said, “Be holy” He meant it. And in Jesus Christ He did it! In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God revealed true holiness and *on this very day* this holiness has been given to you through the preaching of the Gospel! And the righteousness of Christ that has justified you with God and saved you for eternal life also now gives you the power to live as Christ in the world. In Jesus Christ, you are holy. You can believe this. And you can boldly wear the robe of righteousness that Jesus died to give you.

*Lord, put to death our sinful nature that clings to its own filthy rags and by your Holy Spirit, dress us in the robe of Christ’s righteousness that makes us truly holy; in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

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