

Sunday, July 31, 2022 am

## **CLOSER TO GOD (23)** **Pursuing Holiness (7)**

We are continuing to examine our 2022 theme, “Closer to God”. As a subcategory, we have been addressing holiness. Thus far we have defined what holiness noting that it means to be set apart and sacred. We have continually noted that we have an example of holiness we are to imitate. And we have examined that object of our holiness - God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Today, we want to begin addressing the pursuit of holiness. By that I mean, WHAT does it mean to be holy? How do we live holy lives? This lesson will introduce that with some Biblical descriptions related to holiness. Then in coming lessons we will address how these qualities will impact every aspect of our lives.

### **I. We will devote ourselves to Him –**

1. The word devote means to wholeheartedly commit to someone or something. It means that whatever (or whoever) it is, that becomes our focus, the very center of our lives. It is a strong word with complete and total dedication.
2. We have some interesting illustrations of this in the Old Testament.
  - a. Leviticus 27:28-29 – *‘Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to the Lord of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to the Lord.* This text indicates that when something is dedicated to God, it wholly belongs to Him. This is not something one “sort of” complies with or gives to Him. It is His period.
  - b. Notice vs. 29, *“No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death.”* The expression, “under the ban” is a reference to one who has been condemned to death (for a capital crime). The command is that you cannot ignore the sentence or alter it. God has given clear instructions related to national purity and holiness. To alter what God has decreed shows Him disrespect and that one is NOT devoted to Him.
  - c. Joshua 6:17-18 instructions were given to Israel concerning Jericho. The words “doomed” and “accursed” are this same word. That city and everything in it was DEVOTED to God. It was His and to be treated as such. Consider that when we read of Achan in Joshua 7:1. Because of his greedy sin, God was not with His people so that some were lost in what should have been an easy battle against Ai. The people had to be cleansed because of this sin.
  - d. This ILLUSTRATES what it means to be devoted to God, either for good or judgment. What belongs to God must be respected as such.
3. Proverbs 20:25, *It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, And afterward to reconsider his vows.* When Jesus was teaching the cost of discipleship, He made some strong illustrations.
4. How does this apply to us?
  - a. When we become Christians, we are to be devoted to God and Jesus. This is a point we understand, but do we genuinely grasp the depth of that commitment.
  - b. Consider Luke 14:25-33 – where Jesus is calling for us to put Him first. He speaks of “hating” father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and even one’s own life. While this is hyperbole, it does show the level of commitment we must have in following Him and a willingness to put Him first and before all others. Jesus then proceeds to discuss counting the cost.
  - c. Luke 9:57-62 – Jesus addressed excuses many made putting off their obedience. Jesus wanted them understood the seriousness of this commitment.

- d. Luke 16:13 – *“No servant 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.”*
- e. Romans 12:1-2 – we present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, holy, acceptable to Him. There is a transformation that takes place.
- 5. 1 Corinthians 16:15 – the household of Stephanas had devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. As an example, it was clearly evident that this work was important, and they were willing to do what was needed to accomplish it.
- 6. In describing the holiness of Jesus a few lessons ago, we noted what He did for us. 1 Peter 2:21-23 describes how He *“committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”*
- 7. When we consider that holiness means that we set ourselves apart for God (i.e., we are sanctified), this is something that we need to be serious about. It requires total dedication – not a half-hearted or partial commitment. It is something that will be reflected in every aspect of our lives. As the say goes, *“We are all in”*. Psalm 119:2 says, *Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart!*

## II. We will faithfully serve Him

1. The very idea of holiness means that we now belong to God and are His servants.
2. The New Testament writers understood this as they often began their letters acknowledging this: Philippians 1:1 – Paul, a bondservant (along with Timothy); James 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1, Jude 1, Revelation 1:1 – *“His servant John”*, also, *“which God gave to show His servants...”*
3. Paul emphasized this in Romans 6:16-23 – slaves of righteousness for holiness, we have fruit to holiness. NOTE: In this text and others, we must never forget this is a relationship we enter into voluntarily.
4. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds us that a price was paid for us – the precious blood of Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19). 1 Corinthians 7:23 reminds us, *“You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”*
5. So, who (and what) do we serve?
  - a. God – Hebrews 9:13-14 – the blood of Jesus cleanses us and makes us without spot so that we can *“serve the living God”*. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 notes that we turn from idols to serve the living and true God. Remember also Matthew 4:10
  - b. Jesus – John 12:26, *“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”*
  - c. Righteousness – Romans 6:18 & 19 – meaning, when we serve God and Jesus, we are going to be living righteous lives.
  - d. One other – Galatians 5:13 – through love we are to serve one another.
6. Consider what it means to be faithful –
  - a. The word faith is defined as: *“Firm persuasion, the conviction which is based upon hearing, not upon sight, or knowledge; a firmly relying confidence in what we have from God in His word.”*<sup>1</sup> (Bullinger)
  - b. When I define faith, I mention *“believing”* God, as opposed to merely *“believing in God”* and trust. That is genuine and total trust in Him.
  - c. In recent studies about God’s grace and our responsive faith, I would add to this faithfulness. In NT Greek, the word faithful is from the same root word as faith (hence the related English words). Faithfulness is the response of genuine faith. I would even go as far as saying, in practical terms you cannot separate them.
    - Required of stewards that one be found faithful – 1 Corinthians 4:2.
    - Recall James 2:17-18, Faith without works is dead. Show me your faith without your works, I will show you my faith BY my works.
    - We must not forget that we are His servants. Consider, *“Well done good and faithful servant”* – Matthew 25:23

---

<sup>1</sup> Bullinger, Ethelbert W. *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* 1908: n. pag. Print.

- d. So what does it mean to be faithful?
  - Someone that is faithful does what he is supposed to do WITH integrity and giving his very best. It is NOT out of mere obligation, but out of loyalty to his master. He believes in and trusts the one he is serving. Therefore, he is one who is trustworthy and dependable.
  - CAN God depend on us to the degree that we depend on Him? IF our faith in Him is what it ought to be, He can (cf. Job 1:8, *Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"*)
- e. "But God is faithful" (1 Corinthians 1:9, 10:13, etc.). He has established Himself as trustworthy. From Him we learn what it means to be faithful and WHY we ought to be faithful to Him. He can be counted upon!
- 7. If we are striving to be holy, we will be faithful.

### III. We will be separate -

1. Inherent in the word "holiness" is being set apart.
2. As we introduced the subject of holiness, we noted that being holy means:
  - a. We are set apart FOR God – that is the idea of consecration and sanctification. Titus 2:14 we are "his own special people" zealous for good work.
  - b. We are set apart FROM the world – 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 – come out from among them and be separate. John 17:14-16 – we are in the world but not of the world.
3. Appreciating the holiness of God, what are we willing to sacrifice for Him – Romans 12:1-2? Are we willing to "crucify the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24)? Are we willing to live differently?
4. In our studies of 1 Peter, we have noted how we are "not of this world" – our citizenship is in heaven – Philippians 3:20. 1 Peter 2:11 – we are described as "sojourners and pilgrims" both terms declaring, "this world is not my home."
5. Let us understand this is NOT just something that God does TO us (though He does), but it is something we MUST do! We need to be willing to take the steps necessary to be separate. We need to be willing to give up whatever stands in our way of pursuing holiness. We need to set our minds on heavenly things – Colossians 3:1-2, Matthew 6:19-21, Romans 8:5-6 – We live according to the Spirit, and not the flesh, and thus we set our minds on the things of the Spirit.
6. Also understand that this separation will cause us to be and look different. It WILL be noticeable.
7. In coming lessons, we are going to remind ourselves of what different looks like.

### IV. We will live lives of purity –

1. Because we are holy and belong to Him, we will not do anything to jeopardize that. And that means living lives of purity.
2. We have emphasized the importance of purity in our lives in times past. We have noted that being pure means both to be unpoluted and undiluted. Both apply to the life of a Christian in our pursuit of holiness.
  - a. Matthew 5:8, it is the pure in heart who will see God.
  - b. Psalm 24:3-4, *Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.*
3. 2 Corinthians 7:1, after calling for us to be separate, Paul concludes by noting, *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*
4. James 1:27 speaks of pure and undefiled religion – we care about others and we keep ourselves unspotted from the world.
5. 1 Peter 1:22, *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,*
6. God gets to set the standard of purity as well. Psalm 119:9, *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.* This CANNOT be emphasized enough! So many today want

to define their own standard of holiness before God. It will not work and ultimately it will not please God either. Cf. Luke 6:46, "Why do you call me Lord...?"

There are a few observations to be made as we pursue holiness. We need to be devoted to God, willing to faithfully serve Him, keep ourselves separate from the world and pure in His eyes (which means according to His will). When we do this, it will impact every aspect of our life – our attitude, how we think, what we wear, where we go, how we talk, who we associate with, how we manage our time, what we do, what we do NOT do, and so many other things. Some of these will be our focus in upcoming lessons as we continue to examine our pursuit of holiness so that we can draw closer to God. So how about you? Are you pursuing holiness according to His will?