

Hebrews Chapter 12E

Pursue Holiness

IN the Summer of 1984, Sharon and I took our first short term mission trip to help a struggling church in the little town of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

- We packed up the kids and drove to Portland Maine where we boarded a ferry boat that took us on a 12-hour cruise across the Bay of Fundy into Yarmouth.
- The coast of Nova Scotia is well known for the dense fog that covers it almost every morning.

As we were entering the harbor the ship that we were aboard sounded its fog horn numerous times and in the distance there were other horns sounding from other ships.

- I learned that depending on the signal, the sound of the horn instructed the ships' pilot to slow down or change lanes in order to avoid collision.
- You could also hear a different sound that originated from the lighthouse that helped the ship's pilot measure the distance from the boat to the shoreline.

During our stay in Yarmouth we learned that if you left the windows open over night the fog would literally enter into the house. And because we were close to the Bay you could hear the sounds of approaching ships as their horns bellowed.

Now I would compare the author of the book of Hebrews to the ship's Captain. He has the awesome task of guiding his flock into their heavenly harbor, navigating through all of the dangers that they face in this dark and foggy world.

With that image in mind, I would submit to you that the concluding exhortations recorded in this book of Hebrews function like the intrusive sound of the foghorn that warns foggy travelers of the dangers that lie just in front of them.

- The Author sounds a warning
- Lift up those drooping hands Strengthen your weak knees.
- Pursue Holiness without which no one will see God.
- See to it that no one is sexually immoral or unholy.

The seriousness of the author's warning with regard to Holiness is hard to miss. Like the imposing blast of a fog horn he speaks of the necessity of holiness for all those who would see God.

Earlier in the chapter the author captured our attention when he said we are to view the hardships and trials of this life as the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father.

- He told us that this discipline has come in order that we, who are sinful might share in His holiness.

Before we move on in our study of Hebrews 12, I would like to take a closer look at the subject of Holiness. I believe that this is a very important issue about which there is much confusion.

FIRST: Let me give you a working definition of Holiness from J.C. Ryle
“Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find his mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment – hating what he hates, loving what he loves and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.”

This morning I would like to consider these three aspects of Holiness:

1. The Need for Holiness
2. The Source of Holiness
3. The Fruit of Holiness

1 The Need for Holiness:

Our need for holiness is made clear by the author of Hebrews when he writes Hebrews 12: 14 **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**

- Our motivation for action, our incentive for the pursuit of holiness is found in the prohibition that forbids anything and anyone who is unholy from seeing God, from entering into His glorious presence.
- This prohibition is not unique to the book of Hebrews,

After revealing the beauty of the New Jerusalem in all of its brilliance coming down out of heaven from God. After describing the foundations, the walls and gates The Apostle John writes:

Re 21:27 **But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.**

- The sheep of God’s flock the redeemed of the Lord are described here in their final state of perfection. Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will finally and fully be made holy.
- In a very similar fashion the Prophet Isaiah describes the highway leading to the city where the redeemed of the Lord shall come with singing.

Isa 35:8 **And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.**

- We live with the hope of a glorious kingdom where our Lord Jesus will rule and reign in perfect righteousness. The former things will pass away and all things will be made new.

- Until that glorious day, it is the will of God that His people should continually grow in holiness.
- Paul tells the Believers at Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

- Our need for holiness is held up in stark contrast to the immorality in which we used to live.
- We who are led by the Spirit are no longer slaves to sin, (Romans 6) “We have become slaves of righteousness.”
- Peter clearly affirms our need for holiness when he writes:

1 Peter 1: 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

I am aware that broaching the subject of Holiness can be very dangerous but as you can see, we simply must understand it, The writer of Hebrews said: “without holiness no one will see God.”

- As we study this important topic, we need to recognize that there are extremes on both sides of the subject that can be truly debilitating for the believer.

On the one hand it is possible to teach the doctrine of sanctification / holiness in such a way as to undermine the free grace of God in Justification.

- Those who do this give a passing nod to the grace of God in Christ and then quickly move on to build an elaborate system of rules and regulations, dos and don'ts that promote an external holiness that really doesn't transform the heart.
- The emphasis is on the efforts of man rather than the fruit of a living union with Christ.
- If your hair is cut a certain way and you refrain from wearing jewelry; if your skirt is no higher than credit card length below your knee; If you don't go to the movies and you don't play cards, then you just may be viewed as living a holy life.

On the other hand: There is a danger in teaching that sanctification / holiness is an optional work of grace that some people have and others don't. There are some who teach that you can have justification without sanctification. They would say that a changed life really isn't necessary in order to be saved. The purveyors of this type of free grace promote the false idea that Jesus can be a person's savior without being the Lord of his life.

- They would describe individuals who claim to be born of God but remain in the same immoral lifestyle as “Carnal Christians.” They want you to believe that individuals can be saved by Jesus but Not yield to Him as the Lord of their lives.
 - The Bible has a word for those individuals, they are goats living among the sheep, they are tares growing alongside of the wheat.

These opposing views of sanctification are often spoken of as Legalism and License.

- Legalism, Do these works, act this way, memorize these rules and provided you live within these parameters you could be considered holy.
- License, you don’t need to do anything, Jesus did it all so it doesn’t matter how you live your life.
- BOTH of these extremes pervert the Biblical doctrine of God’s saving, sanctifying grace.

Legalists tend to promote the idea that believers have to make a decision between holiness and happiness.

- You may even have heard some legalistic preacher declare with great zeal, “God want’s you holy not happy.” (*I believe there is great joy in holiness*)

On the other end of the spectrum there are those who say that you “Just need to let go and let God!” They mistakenly teach that sanctification is a process in which believers are totally passive. You just float into it like a feather on the wind of the Spirit.

We understand from the Word of God that Holiness is absolutely necessary if we are going to see God. BUT neither legalism nor License will get you there

- SO I have to ask, What is the Source of Holiness?

2 The source of Holiness

Holiness finds its source in the once for all cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:3b, **After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,**

All of those who have been cleansed by the atoning work of Christ are brought into a covenant relationship with Him AND on the basis of that relationship they are being continually sanctified.

- This is what the writer of Hebrews told us in Chapter 9.

Hebrews 9: 14 **how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**

- Again the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the source of our sanctification.

Hebrews 10: 10 **And by that will (God’s will sending Jesus to earth to dwell among us) we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

For His glory and by His great power, through the New Birth, God has brought about a definite moral change in the lives of the redeemed.

- The Apostle Paul speaks of this change as the “**Washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit**” in his letter to Titus (3:5)

Now that we have been born of God, given a new spirit and a new heart we can no longer live continually, habitually in a lifestyle of sin. We are new creatures in Christ.

John tells us this 1 Joh. 3:9 **No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.**

Along with this initial, internal transformation (*at the new birth*) comes the power of God that equips us for the lifelong process of sanctification.

One of the doctrinal truths that was reaffirmed during the Protestant Reformation is the doctrine of “*Duplex Gratia.*”

- You might call this the “*Double Barreled Grace of God*” This great salvation that God lavished on us at regeneration provides believers not only with Justification, (the forensic declaration of being right with God) it also comes with sufficient grace for Sanctification, everything we need to be progressively changed into the image of Christ.

The Institutes of the Christian Religion, penned during the Reformation states it this way: “Christ was given to us by God’s generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge, a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.”

- So When we consider the Grace of God for salvation we understand that it includes both initial justification and final holiness.

1Corinthians 1:28 **God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."**

“**Because of HIM**” through His direct agency we have been brought into a living union with Jesus. IN HIM we have both redemption and sanctification.

SO when we speak of the SOURCE of our Sanctification, the origin of our holiness we must go back to the one who is the giver of every good and perfect gift, The Father of Lights.

Since God has provided BOTH the grace for salvation as well as sufficient Grace for holiness the Apostle Paul can write to the church at Philippi:

Philippians 2:12 **Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**

- Because the power of sin has been broken, because sanctifying grace is actively at work in the lives of those who believe, by the power of God they are enabled to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

When we consider the nature of true Holiness as described in the Bible we come to understand that holiness is a lifelong process that is worked out in us by the means of grace that God has provided for our spiritual growth.

- Contrary to what many Christians would hope, there really is NO “Quick Fix” that immediately imparts practical holiness to the life of a believer.
- William Wilberforce, **“There is no short cut to holiness, it must be the business of our whole lives.**

In a crude illustration: I might liken this process of sanctification to my yard work, my labors to have a lawn that is Wholly Grass, all grass, a lawn that is free from weeds, bugs, Baby maple trees and grubs that destroy. I want to see holy grass.

How is my desire for Wholly Grass worked out in a world that is full of dandelion seeds and those Maple tree whirly things?

- I could lay my hands on the grass and cast out the spirit of dandelions.
- I could stand on the sidewalk and authoritatively bind the vermin that infest my yard.

BUT if I really want a lawn that is wholly grass nothing works better than daily watering, seasonal feedings of healthy nutrients, weekly mulching and continual tender care.

Friends after more than 40 years of walking with Jesus I am convinced that there are no quick fixes to a life of holiness. God has provided all believers with the ordinary means of grace through which they may grow in holiness.

- The washing of the water of the Word of God as it is read and proclaimed.
- The nutrients of prayer, personal and corporate worship
- The weeding of the soul that takes place when we gather around the Lord’s Table, evaluate our lives in light of the cross.

J.C. Ryle “I wish it to be distinctly understood that growth in holiness is bound up with the use of these means within the reach of all believers and that as a general rule growing souls are what they are because they use these means.”

- By not availing ourselves of the means of Grace that God provides we are cutting ourselves off from the resources that God has given for our transformation.
- One of the oxy-morons of today is the term “Churchless Christianity.”

OK we understand our need for Holiness and we know that God is the source of all holiness. And He has graciously provided all that we need to grow in holiness throughout our lives. NOW how CAN I know that I am growing in holiness? What kind of fruit can I look for in my life as the fruit of holiness?

3 The Fruit of Holiness

Before I elaborate on the fruit of holiness in the lives of the redeemed I want you to understand that OUR acceptance before God, as adopted sons and daughters is not contingent upon the measure of holiness that we attain.

We can never be more justified than we are right now. We could never be more loved by God than we are right now, we could never be more forgiven, never be more pardoned, we could never be more reconciled to God than we are right now.

- Our justification, our reconciliation with God was completed, our eternal redemption secured the moment that Jesus cried out “**It is Finished.**”

No measure of good works, no self-denial or sacrificial service can add one thing to the righteousness of Christ that has been given to us as a gift of God’s amazing grace.

Through His Sacrifice our legal standing with God was once and for all time settled. We stand before God in the perfect righteousness of Christ. BUT the experiential aspect of our holiness is being worked out through our day to day relationship with God.

- And the fruit of that holiness grows as we ABIDE in the VINE of Christ.

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

- Already you are clean – There is the first part of “Duplex Gratia.” We have been justified, declared righteous by the grace of God through faith in Christ.
- The grace of Sanctification comes as we abide in Him.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- Abiding in Christ, remaining in Him through the means of grace that he has provided will lead to a very fruitful life.

As the Spirit who IS Holy dwells in US, the FRUIT that grows in us is the fruit of holiness.

Galatians 5: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

- In my study of Scripture throughout the years I have found that the fruit of the Spirit provide a beautiful description of the character and nature of God.
- God is LOVE, by his very nature he is good, you cannot study the history of Israel without seeing his abundant patience and kindness.

As we grow in holiness the image of God that was severely distorted when Adam and Eve fell into sin is being restored by the indwelling Spirit.

- The evidence of Christ's redemption in the lives of those who believe is the continual growth of the fruit of the Spirit.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.