

BROOMFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD



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The Call to Holiness

The Battle for Holiness, Part 1

One of my favorite Bible characters is the Apostle Paul. He was born and raised in Tarsus¹ as a Roman citizen.² At the age of 13, he was sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel.³ During his time under Gamaliel, Paul memorized and learned to interpret Scripture according to rabbinical tradition, notably that of the Talmud. He became a Pharisee — which was a religious sect in Judaism. And he emerged as a leader in Judaism with an incredibly bright future.⁴ Phil. 3:4-6.

And yet, as you know Paul left all of this to become a follower of Christ — and thus, an outcast in Judaism. In fact, the last letter that Paul ever wrote, 2 Timothy, finds him in a Roman prison. He is in need. He is bereft of his friends. And from this world's perspective and from the perspective of Judaism, Paul's life was a tragedy. He began with such promise and ended in such shame, ruin, and loss.

Yet, I ask why the seemingly “wasted” life? Paul himself even referred to himself as “the scum of the world” and “the dregs of all things.”⁵ Why did Paul forfeit so bright a future in Judaism only to die as a criminal in Rome?

Paul answers these questions.

2 Timothy 1:11-12, “**Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things:** nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

See, Paul suffered so much because he was moved and burdened — He had a PASSION! God had called him to preach the Gospel! And it was this call that served as the motivating factor throughout his life. It determined where he went. It dictated his joy and sorrow. It determined his associates. Through all things and in all things it was the motivating factor of his life.

¹ Compare Acts 9:11

² Compare Acts 22:28

³ Compare Acts 22:3

⁴ Compare Philippians 3:4-6

⁵ Compare 1 Corinthians 4:13

Now brothers and sisters, Paul's PASSION to preach the gospel is a beautiful picture of the passion we ought to have for holy living. See like Paul's call to preach, God has called us to be holy.

Psalm 24:3-4, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? [in other words, who may fellowship with God?] He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

Hebrews 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Here the Hebrew writer calls us to "pursue... sanctification." It is a command!

1 Peter 1:15-16, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

The battle for holiness is a passion that must rest upon each and everyone in Christ! Yet often times we don't have this passion. At times we are less than enthusiastic about holiness. The sacrifice seems too great and the reward too small. And thus, more often than not we are content with the standard of moral purity that we have attained, and thus apply little effort when it comes to the pursuit of holy living.

And that is why I am so thankful for Romans 6:21-23. In this text Paul gives three lines of motivation for holy living. And don't miss it! This text is about holiness.

In Romans 6:15 Paul begins this section by asking this: "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?"

In other words, shall we just live a life of rebellion against God? After all we have been saved by grace! And we will never be perfect on this side of the grave. And after all, every passage which calls us to be holy is ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

Paul answers this question with the strong words, "God forbid" (Romans 6:15b). In fact, in Romans 6:16-20 Paul gives an impassioned defense for holy living on account of the relationship we have in Christ which has made us a servant of righteousness.

Now all of this is brought to a climax in our text in which Paul gives three arguments for why the believer ought to be holy.

Romans 6:22a (NASB), "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification..."

That our Passion for holy living might be "kindled afresh," let us examine this text and allow it to bear upon our heart and soul. Toward this end, notice the first motivation Paul gives that we might long for holiness.

Live Holy Because of Sin

Romans 6:21, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? [This refers to the ultimate end of something] For the end of those things is death."

Romans 6:23, “For the wages⁶ of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This is an incredible truth in view of our world's valuation of sin. In our day, sin promises freedom, excitement, and fullness of life. And yet according to this text sin brings nothing less than death!

And what does this text mean by death?

Death is classified four ways in the Bible. It can refer to spiritual death.⁷ This is the death of the soul and its consequent enslavement to Satan.

Secondly, death can refer to moral death.⁸ This is the loss of conformity to God's character — His righteousness, holiness, and knowledge.

Thirdly, there is physical death.⁹ This is the separation of the soul from the body.

Finally, there is eternal death.¹⁰ This is also known as the second death and it speaks of eternal separation from God.

Now the death spoken about here references all of these. And thus, no matter what angle you take, the net effect of sin is death. From the smallest sin to the largest, the result is the same —death.

- Slavery to Satan!
- The loss of God's moral character!
- The destruction of physical life!
- Eternal separation from God!

In fact, notice verse 23. Paul couldn't have put it more clearly when he wrote “for the wages of sin is death.” The term wages is the combination of two Greek terms which refer cooked food or meat which one buys. The combination of these words was used of the ration money paid to soldiers. From this it came to be used of “pay” or “wages.” And thus, “the wages of sin — the just payment of sin — is DEATH!”

And so we see that death is the consequence of sin! The person who willingly participates in sin will ever and always reap in his person: slavery, loss, destruction, separation!

Now, Paul knew that for the believer, this truth would translate to holy living.

Why?

Because of all people it is only the Christian who has and continues to come face to face with the reality of this passage!

⁶ οψωνιον opsonion That part of the soldier's support given in place of pay [i.e. rations] and the money in which he is paid

⁷ Compare Ephesians 2:1-2, 4:18; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:14

⁸ Compare Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:24

⁹ Compare Hebrew 9:27 and James 2:26

¹⁰ Compare Revelation 21:8

Luke 22:19, “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance¹¹ of me.”

For the Hebrew, to remember meant much more than simply to bring something to mind or merely to recall that it happened. To remember is to go back in one's mind and recapture as much of the reality and significance of an event or experience as one possibly can. It is to hear, taste, touch, smell and see again that which is remembered. It is to relive, as much as is humanly possible, the thing remembered. And thus to remember Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross is to relive His agony, suffering, and death on account of our sin.

Now based on Luke 22:19, we know that each of us in Christ have come face-to-face with the reality of the wages of sin — every time we participate in the Lord's Supper. Through faith we have beheld the grief and pain of the cross. Through faith we have seen His suffering. Through faith we have heard His groaning. Through faith we have observed the sweat-drops of blood. Through faith we sat in horror as He was crucified. Through faith we have seen His final hour and we have wept over it!

Now, we who love Christ recognize that this horrible death occurred on account of our sin! And thus just as the romanticist is sobered by the reality of war so also we who at times might be tempted to rationalize sin, flirt with it, justify it, laugh at it, and down play it are sobered by the reality of its ultimate payment —which is Christ's death. And it is this sobering reality, this coming face-to-face with the cross, that cultivates in the Christian a PASSION for holy living!

Thomas Kelly put it this way, speaking of the cross:

“Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great, here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.”¹²

In fact, so well are we acquainted with the wages of sin, notice how Paul describes us.

Romans 6:21, “**What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?** for the end of those things is death.”

The Christian is one who lives in shame! In fact, to be without shame is to testify to a sin-dominated life.

¹³ This does not mean that we go around with our heads bowed because of past sin — mourning and grieving as though we were still condemned. Rather, it means that as we look at our life and behold our sin. We do not laugh at it or down play it. BUT we regret it, abhor it, despise, it and turn from it!

And yet, we do this not because we fear its penalty but because, as ones delivered from its condemnation, we see sin for what it really is: Death!

Now this is so important for we live at a time in which even the CHURCH downplays the importance of shame. It says “Shame is bad.” “Don't feel guilty about your sin.”

Yet the truth is, guilt and shame are the soul's natural response to sin¹⁴ just as pain is our body's natural

¹¹ ἀναμνησις anamnesis

¹² New Trinity Hymnal, Hymn 257

¹³ Compare Jeremiah 8:12

¹⁴ Compare 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

response to physical injury. And thus to downplay the shame we ought to have over sin is to risk the hardening of our hearts! And so do not squelch the shame/guilt that arises from your sin. Rather, take it to the cross, and there be freed from its crippling effects! Yet never lose your sense of shame over your sin — Paul didn't.

1 Corinthians 15:9, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

And so, Paul presents the first motivation for holy living — The Consequence of Sin.

Live Holy for Sanctification

Romans 6:22, (NASB) **“But now having been freed [“once for all”- this is an aorist] from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”**

As we just saw, one of the elements of being freed from sin and enslaved to God is sanctification — holy living is part and parcel of salvation.

Now, what is the consequence of sanctification?

Romans 6:22, (NASB) **“But now having been freed [“once for all”- this is an aorist] from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”**

The ultimate end of holy living is the participation in eternal life! And what is that?

The phrase *eternal life* means life pertaining to the age. And thus, while most think of eternal life as an endless existence, we see here that it is much, much more. Eternal life primarily refers to an existence that pertains to THE AGE — which in Scripture refers to the age to come where the Kingdom of God has come in its fullness. It is THE AGE in which these things occur:

- God directly reigns over His people, Revelation 19: 6b
- Righteousness dwells, Romans 14:17
- Sin is eliminated, Revelation 21:3-4
- Fellowship is perfectly enjoyed, Revelation 19:7-10
- Discord and division are done away, Revelation 21:3-4
- Love abounds, 1 Corinthians 13:13
- Hope is realized, 1 Thessalonians. 4:17
- Righteousness, peace, and joy are fully enjoyed, Romans 14:17

That's what eternal life is all about. It ultimately references the life that will occur in the New Heavens and the New Earth. And thus the person who receives eternal life is one who has begun living the life of the coming kingdom of God today — in the present state of sin and misery.

This is not saying that sanctification — Holy Living — merits Eternal Life, only the cross of Christ does that. RATHER, this means that the experiential participation in the life that pertains to the age to come occurs ONLY in the realm of holy living!

It's like a Foreign Language

The more you use a foreign language, the more you experience its benefits. Right?

So also it is with eternal life

The more you live according to it — being holy — the more you experience its benefits! That's the point here. The outcome of sanctification in the life of the believer is that it enables us to live according to the age to come. As we are holy, as we deny sin and live unto righteousness in this age, we experientially participate in the joy that accompanies life pertaining to the age to come. It also allows us to enjoy the peace that flows from eternal life. It also allows us to enjoy the fellowship that attends eternal life. It also allows us to enjoy the love of God. It also allows us to enjoy the unity of body.

So many Christians are looking for “something more” via experience. Yet the “benefits” of kingdom living only come as we live according to the kingdom. We are holy!

Accordingly, unholy Christians are miserable Christians! Why? Because through Christ they have received a life that has reference to the kingdom of God, and yet they have squelched this life by living according to the present evil age!

And thus we see the second motivation that Paul gives that we might cultivate a PASSION for Holy Living: The fact that sanctification results in enjoying the riches of Eternal Life.

Do you want to be a Christian who is filled with Joy, Peace, Love?

Do you want to experientially participate in the Eternal Life that you have received in Christ?

Is the testimony of your life as a Christian one of dissatisfaction?

The answer to these questions is this: BE HOLY!

1 Peter 3:10-11, “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.”

In other words, if you want to experientially participate in “life according to the age to come” — a life which is yours in Christ — BE HOLY! To willingly participate in sin as a Christian will not forfeit your salvation but it will hinder the experiential participating in it! Thus after David sinned, he prayed, “Restore the JOY of Thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12).

Unholy living destroyed David's joy. In fact, notice the result of unrepentant sin in the life of the Christian.

Psalm 32:3, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.”

It is possible to lose one's health on account of unrepentant sin. Did you know that? Notice the link James makes with sickness and unconfessed sin. Accordingly he exhorts this:

James 5:14-16, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray

over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

This is not to say that every illness is the result of unconfessed sin. However, it is to say that when we give ourselves to a life pertaining to this passing age, we may reap the dire benefits in our bodies! From all of this we see that holy living on the part of the child of God enables us to enjoy the many blessings of the coming age today!

If you want to know “Love, joy, peace, patience, etc”¹⁵ then regardless of the consequences live according to the age to come. Live for the glory of God. Live endeavoring to be holy in thought, word, and deed. This is the second motivation behind holy living- it enables us to experientially participate in the life that pertains to the age to come!

Live Holy Because of the Content of Salvation

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death; **but the gift¹⁶ of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**”

This verse describes what the child of God receives at salvation, Eternal Life. Now Paul submits this as the third truth that motivates holy living on the part of the Christian.

How does this motivate holy living?

It motivates holy living because of the content of the eternal life referenced in verse 22. Notice that eternal life consists of being (1) Freed from Sin. This literally means “Freed once for all from Sin.” Sin no longer rules the Christian. (2) It consists of being enslaved to God. This is a passive servitude. In Christ we have been placed in the service of God. (3) It consists in our being sanctified. This is a dedication to God which results in a morally upright life.

When asked what they receive from Christ at conversion, most Christians typically mention the first two blessings referenced in verse 22: Freedom from sin, and enslavement to God. Most think that the third blessing, SANCTIFICATION, is an option that flows from salvation.

Yet, the truth according to this text is the gift that God grants at the moment of salvation is eternal life which includes these:

1. Freedom from sin
2. Enslavement to God
3. And SANCTIFICATION.=.

The Point?

¹⁵ Compare Galatians 5:22

¹⁶ The NASB renders this the “free gift of God” By definition gifts are free, thus we see that Paul is emphasizing the “freeness” of salvation.

Holy Living is not a second blessing reserved only for those with enough faith. Rather, it is a grace that is SECURED at the beginning of our salvation, and thus the expected fruit of all God's children.

John 14:15, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Titus 2:14, “Who [Christ] gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Now Paul knew that this truth would motivate holy living. How so? It motivates holy living because the implication here is that growing in holiness is not out of the grasp of anyone in Christ! In fact, through the cross all in Christ are assured victory — though it may be long in coming, nevertheless in the end it will be ours!

Philippians 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 2:13, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

It is so important that we keep this truth in mind. For as we labor toward holy living there will no doubt come times when we are tempted to give up. Yet we must ever be of good hope. Holy Living is a grace that is secured at the moment of our Salvation!

I like to think of it in these terms: Imagine if we were forced to organize into a football team and charged with playing the Broncos. And yet at the outset we were given a glimpse into the future where we saw the final score and the fact that no one would be crippled or killed and that we would win! While the prospect of being tackled, blocked, and hit by 350 pound giants isn't very pleasant, we nevertheless would train and play with vigor, excitement, zeal and joy. Why? Because we can't lose — we are assured of the outcome!

Well brothers and sisters, that is the case when it comes to holy living. In Christ we are assured of ultimate victory! Truly when it comes to the Battle for Holiness we are like David facing Goliath. We are like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego facing the fire. We are like the people of God entering the Promised Land. We are like Moses facing the Pharaoh. And thus even though we know that the road is rough and the path steep and at times there will be injury, pain, and struggle we nevertheless are filled with zeal — we can't lose and we won't lose!

For, get this, someday we are going to stand before Christ clothed in white¹⁷ which is a picture of purity. The sword will be replaced by a palm of victory. And we will love Christ with a love untainted by sin. When that day comes, no more shall we struggle to be holy- for “we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2b). Until then, we strive and do not lose heart — for the battle in which we daily labor has already been won!

Accordingly today, receive the battle cry for Holiness. May this be our priority and passion!

¹⁷ Compare Revelation 3:5 and 7:13

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 27, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.