

Session 1: Introduction to *Positive Holiness*

The word *holiness* means “set apart; separate”. To say that God is holy means that He is not part of the universe and the universe is not part of Him. He is unique. But God’s uniqueness is seen not only in the nature of His existence (He is everywhere, He can do anything He wants, etc.), but also in His activities. He does not *act* like mankind. For example, we sin—He never does. Therefore, the word *holy* came to be applied to the “apartness,” or difference, between the character of God and the character of mankind.

Because holiness refers to being “apart” and “separate”, many of us have adopted the mistaken notion that holiness is primarily a matter of what we *avoid*. It is therefore defined in negative terms – that which we *don’t* do. This lesson will demonstrate that holiness is primarily a matter of what we are trying to accomplish in our Christian lives, and that which we avoid is a result of that *positive* goal.

I. Positive Holiness and Rules

- A. Most of the 10 commandments are stated negatively – i.e. 8 of 10 are what we should *not* do.
- B. Jesus saw the negative as a means to achieve the positive:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:34-40)

Note: Jesus quoted two positive commands as encompassing the whole of the law, including the negative commands:

- 1. Love God – this covers the first four of the 10 commandments (no other gods, no images, no misuses of His name, no work on the Sabbath)
- 2. Love Neighbor – this covers the last six (don’t steal, lie, murder, covet, etc.)

So, what we avoid is the result of what we’re trying to accomplish – love for God and neighbor.

II. Positive Holiness and Reasons

Although the Bible does not directly address every issue we face, it does cover all issues either in precept or principle. However, when we face an issue we usually ask, “What’s *wrong* with it?” The idea is that if it doesn’t violate any direct command, then it’s okay – there’s nothing “wrong with it.” But positive holiness requires that we take an action because it is right. For instance:

- A. “To eat or not to eat, that is the question.”

1 Corinthians 8-10 deals with the issue of whether one should eat particular kinds of food. It is important to note that Paul says directly that the food itself is not *inherently* evil (1 Corinthians 8:8) or, put another way, “there’s nothing wrong with it.” However, that does not settle the issue. One must engage in the activity in question (in this case, eating a particular food) if it “leads to peace and to mutual edification,” or is “beneficial” and “constructive.” (1 Corinthians 10:23) Therefore, one must ask “What is *right* with it?” rather than “What is *wrong* with it?”

- B. “When in doubt, don’t”

The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)

The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes the teaching of this concluding verse of Romans 14:

*As Paul generalized, **Everything that does not come from** (ek, “out of”) **faith is sin.** (NIV) *The principle is, “When in doubt, don’t.”**

III. Positive Holiness and Righteousness

- A. The Golden Rule verses the silver rule.
- B. “Do you have to be good to go to Heaven?”
- C. Righteousness is NOT merely having sin paid for; it is having perfection applied to you.

IV. Positive Holiness and Motivation

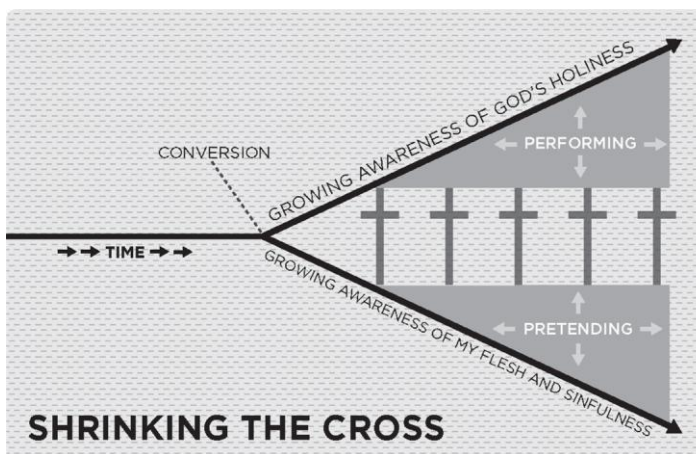
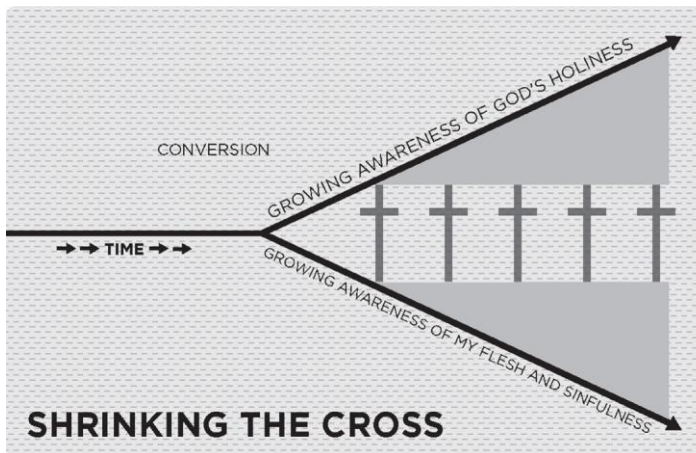
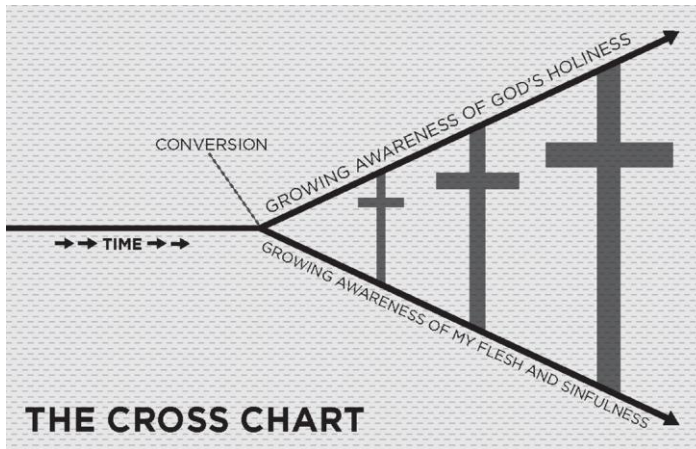
We say “no” because we have a greater “yes.” Our holiness is negative because it is first positive.

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. (Titus 2:11-12)

This passage tells us that what we “deny” is because of what we’re trying to attain – sober, righteous, and godly living.

V. Positive Holiness and the Gospel

A. The "Gospel Grid"¹



¹ From *The Gospel-Centered Life*, New Growth Press. Used by permission.

THE ORPHAN

THE SON/DAUGHTER

Lacks a vital daily intimacy with God	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feels freed from worry because of God's love for you
Anxious about friends, money, school, grades, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning to live in a daily partnership with God
Feels as if no one cares about you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not fearful of God
Lives on a success/fail basis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feels forgiven and totally accepted
Needs to look good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A daily trust in God's sovereign plan for your life
Feels guilty and condemned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prayer is a first resort
Struggles to trust things to God	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Content in relationships b/c you are accepted by God
Has to fix your problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Freedom from making a name for yourself
Not very teachable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is teachable by others
Is defensive when accused of error or weakness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Open to criticism b/c you rest on Christ's perfection
Needs to be right	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Able to examine your deeper motives
Lacks confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Able to takes risks—even to fail
Feels discouraged and defeated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encouraged by the Spirit working in you
Strong-willed with ideas, agendas, and opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Able to see God's goodness in dark times
Solution to failure: "Try harder"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Content with what Christ has provided
Has a critical spirit (complaining and bitterness)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trusting less in self and more in the Holy Spirit
Tears others down	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Aware of inability to fix life, people, and problems
A "competent analyst" of others' weaknesses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is able to freely confess your faults to others
Tends to compare yourself with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doesn't always have to be right
Feels powerless to defeat the flesh	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does not gain value from man-made "props"
Needs to be in control of situations and others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Experiences more and more victory over the flesh
Looks for satisfaction in "positions"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prayer is a vital, ongoing part of the day
Looks for satisfaction in "possessions"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jesus is more and more the subject of conversation
Tends to be motivated by obligation and duty, not love	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	God truly satisfies your soul

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B. The solution to performing and pretending

1. Repentance

2. Believing the Gospel

Session Two: The Necessity of Holiness

“You Shall Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You...Odd”

I. Solving the World’s Problems.

The Bible has much to say about the dangers of “the world” or being “worldly”:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....(Romans 12:2)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: ...to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Yet, how do we avoid the world since, in fact, we live in it? Jesus addressed this issue when He said of His followers:

*“...they are...**in** the world [but] ... they are not **of** the world..” (John 17:11, 16)*

The problem with the world is not being *IN* it, but being *OF* it. In fact, the “world” as used in the above passages does not refer to a *place* but rather a false belief *system*. It can be defined as follows:

[The world is the] ...thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world...which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably exhale.²

Clearly something is wrong with the “world” and therefore we must avoid being contaminated by it. But how? Jesus gave the answer in the passage quoted above:

*“...they are...**in** the world [but] ... they are not **of** the world...Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:11, 16-17)*

Sanctify means “to set apart, to make holy”. The solution to the problem of worldliness is holiness because....

² G.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, pp. 217-18.

II. Worldliness is Idolatry.

How did the good world that God created become corrupted? The Bible presents this in two phases, creation and fall.

A. In the beginning there was Truth.

1. Man is created to receive God's revelation.
2. Man is created to interpret God's revelation
3. Man is created to be a worshiper.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.
(Romans 1:21-23, 25)

B. And then the fall...

If indeed man was made for God, then any deviation from God's design is a matter of idolatry in that it has placed someone or something as primary other than God. The "fall" of Genesis 3 involved a radical reordering of the relationship of man-to-God and man-to-man:

1. The vertical effect of sin.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (Genesis 3:8-10)

From this day forward it is 'natural' for man to hide from God.

2. The horizontal effect of sin.

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:11-13)

From this day forward blame-shifting to others (including God) became 'natural'.

3. The environmental effect.

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:16-19)

From this day forward sickness, disease, death and the 'battle of the sexes' became 'natural'.

C. And the rest is history...

The entrance of sin into God's world did not result in a lack of worship, just different objects of worship. Therefore, idols rule the sinful human heart. These idolatries are generated from within us and impressed on us from outside ourselves.

1 John ends in a way which, at first glance, is quite curious:

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)

Since the words "idol" and "idolatry" are not mentioned in the 105 verses of the letter, one might wonder what, if anything, this ending has to do with the content of the letter. Yet, a closer examination reveals that the letter is entirely about idolatry:

John's last line leaves us with that most basic question which God continually poses to each human heart. Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken title to your heart's trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight? It is a question bearing on the immediate motivation for one's behavior, thoughts, and feelings. In the Bible, ... the motivation question is the lordship question. Who or what "rules" my behavior, the Lord or a substitute? The undesirable answers to this question – answers which inform our understanding of the "idolatry" we are to avoid – are most graphically presented in 1 John 2:15-17, 3:7-10, 4:1-6, and 5:19.³

1. The internal motivation to idolatry (worldliness) – the "flesh"
2. The external motivation to idolatry (worldliness) – the "world"
3. The demonological motivation to idolatry (worldliness) – the "devil"

All three of these motivations conspire to move us to idolatry (worldliness). The "flesh" (1 John 2:16) is our self-centeredness: the wants, hopes, fears, expectations, and "needs" that crowd our hearts. The "world" (1 John 2:15-17, 4:1-6) is all that invites, models, reinforces, and conditions us into such self-centeredness, teaching us lies. The demonological dimension is the Devil's behavior-determining lordship (1 John 3:7-10, 5:19), standing as ruler over his kingdom of flesh and world.

³ David Powlison, *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1995).