

THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

Message 2: Why Holiness?

Romans 6:14 (ESV)

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Why do we struggle so with holiness?

Adapted from *The Pursuit of Holiness*, chapter 1

1) Our attitude toward sin is more _____ than _____.

_____ is more important than “_____”.

We weigh the seriousness of sin more on our perceived _____, rather than in their _____.

2) We have misunderstood “_____”

Personal _____ and _____ as well as _____ is needed.

The Holy Spirit's work in transforming us more and more into the likeness of Christ is called sanctification. Our involvement and cooperation with him in His work is what I call the pursuit of holiness. That expression is not original to me. Rather, it is taken from Hebrews 12:14: "Make every effort [literally: pursue] ... to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

The pursuit of holiness requires sustained and vigorous effort. It allows for no indolence, no lethargy, no half-hearted commitment, and no laissez faire attitude toward even the smallest sins. In short, it demands the highest priority in the life of a Christian, because to be holy is to be like Christ – God's goal for every Christian.

The word pursue in this context means to strive or gain or accomplish. Not the strong verb strive ... The Greek word for pursue is translated “make every effort” in Hebrews 12:14. In Philippians 3:12-14, it is translated “press on.” The most common use of it in the New Testament, however, is translated “persecute” and carries the common meaning of that word – to track down in order to harm or destroy. It is a very vigorous word.

At the same time, however, the pursuit of holiness must be anchored in the grace of God; otherwise it is doomed to failure.

— Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, p.12

3) We don't take sin _____.

A. We don't take sin seriously _____.

The very word “sin”, which seems to have disappeared, was once a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word ... But the word went away. It has almost disappeared – the word along with the notion. Why? Doesn’t anyone sin anymore?

Doesn’t anyone believe in sin?

— Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin* (1973)

QUESTION: Is our definition of **sin** off?

“Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.”

— Susanna Wesley (Letter to her son, John, June 8, 1725)

What is sin? Sin is:

- The glory of God not honored.
- The holiness of God not reverenced.
- The greatness of God not admired.
- The power of God not praised.
- The truth of God not sought.
- The wisdom of God not esteemed.
- The beauty of God not treasured.
- The goodness of God not savored.
- The faithfulness of God not trusted.
- The promises of God not believed.
- The commandments of God not obeyed.
- The justice of God not respected.
- The wrath of God not feared.
- The grace of God not cherished.
- The presence of God not prized.
- The person of God not loved.

— John Piper (*from the Desiring God 2015 Conference for Pastors*)

B. We don't take the sins of the _____ nearly as seriously as we do the sins of the _____!

“Conservative evangelicals have become so preoccupied with some of the major sins of society around us that we have lost sight of the need to deal with our own more ‘refined’ or subtle sins.”

— Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*

In what ways is this true?

How important is holiness to us?

To our witness?

To our mission?

C. We don't see all sin as _____.

Holiness is God's crown. Imagine for a moment that God possessed omnipotence (infinite power), omniscience (perfect and complete knowledge), and omnipresence (everywhere present), but without perfect holiness. Such a one could no longer be described as God. Holiness is the perfection of all other attributes.: His power is holy power; His mercy is holy mercy; His wisdom is holy wisdom. It is His holiness more than any other attribute that makes Him worthy of our praise.

But God demands more than that we acknowledge His holiness. He says to us, "Be holy, because I am holy." God rightfully demands perfect holiness in all of His moral creatures. It cannot be otherwise.

— Jerry Bridges, *The Holiness of God*, p.25

*"... many other people (including many Christians) are living in a kind of moral/ethical 'Flatland,' with a two-dimensional view of sin. On this view, sin is something you do to another person or something another person does to you. Granted, most Christians recognize that some sins are sins against God, but the sins they think of as falling into this category are usually those aimed directly at injuring God, such as the worship of other gods, idolatry, or taking the Lord's name in vain. Of course, breaking the first three commandments is sinning against God. But so is breaking **any** of the Ten Commandments ..."*

- Stephen Witmer, *"A God-Centered Understanding of Sin"*

A case study: _____

Examples:

4 reasons why **all sin is sin against God**:

1. God is _____

Proverbs 14:31 (ESV)

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

Ephesians 5:5 (ESV)

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Sin offends God not only because it bereaves or assaults God directly, as in impiety or blasphemy, but also because it bereaves and assaults what God has made.

- Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*

2. God is _____ See: Lev. 18, Deuteronomy 1:26-46, etc.

Deuteronomy 9:24 (ESV)

You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you.

'...indeed the only way in which I can make real to myself what theology teaches about the heinousness of sin is to remember that every sin is the distortion of an energy breathed into us - an energy which, if not thus distorted, would have blossomed into one of those holy acts whereof "God did it" and "I did it" are both true descriptions. We poison the wine as He decants it into us; murder a melody He would play with us as the instrument. We caricature the self-portrait He would paint. Hence all sin, whatever else it is, is sacrilege.'

- C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*

3. Sin calls God's _____ into question

Numbers 16:7b-11 (ESV)

⁷"... You have gone too far, sons of Levi!" ⁸And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, ¹⁰and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? ¹¹Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?"

Isaiah 45:9 (ESV)

"Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'?

Psalm 37:1-4 (ESV)

¹Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! ²For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. ³Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

4. God has _____ us

1 Corinthians 8:8-13 (ESV)

⁸Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹²Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

CONCLUSION: Where holiness begins: _____

1 Peter 1:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ ... 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.**"

Why do we fight sin? Sometimes simply because we hate its consequences, or because we're ashamed of the stigma attached to it, or because we want to experience the thrill of victory in conquering it. These are inadequate reasons. Realizing that all sin is sin against God helps us to fight sin for the right reason - because we know it hurts God, and that is the last thing we want. Jerry Bridges says it well when he explains that our problem 'is that our attitude towards sin is more self-centered than God-centered. We are more concerned about our own "victory" over sin than we are about the fact that our sins grieve the heart of God.'

- Stephen Witmer