

Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 6

***"I am Adonai, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore you are to be holy, because I am holy."* ~ Leviticus 11:45**

***"Following the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in your entire way of life; since the Tanakh says, 'You are to be holy because I am holy.'"* ~ 1 Kefa 1:15-16**

In this post, we will begin looking at the pursuit of holiness.

The Pursuit of Holiness

When I first returned to California, I spent three years working on my grandfather's date and citrus ranches in the Coachella Valley. One of the reasons I love living in the San Joaquin Valley of California is the agriculture. Since the Bible was written to a predominantly rural, agrarian society, knowing a little about farming helps me to more deeply understand some of the nuances contained in His Word.

A farmer plows his field, sows or plants the seed, the vines or the trees; fertilizes and cultivates the ground - all the while knowing that in the final analysis he is utterly dependent on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate or the vines and trees to mature before bearing their fruit, nor can he produce the rain and sunshine for growing and harvesting the crop. For a successful harvest, he is dependent on these things from God.

We can say just as accurately that the pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and the Believer. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking; He does not do that for us.

Many Believers greatly enjoy talking about the provision of God, how Yeshua defeated sin on the cross and gave us His Ruach to empower us to victory over sin. But we do not as readily talk about our own responsibility to walk in holiness. Two primary reasons for this are:

- 1. We are simply reluctant to face up to our responsibility.** We prefer to leave that to God. We pray for victory when we know we should be acting in obedience.
- 2. We do not understand the proper distinction between God's provision and our own responsibility for holiness.** I have struggled for a number of years with the question, *"What am I to do myself, and what am I to rely on God to do?"* Only as I came to see what the Bible teaches on this question, and then faced up to my own responsibility, have I seen any progress in my own "pursuit of holiness."

Holiness IS for You

Sha'ul wrote to the Romans, ***"All have sinned and come short of earning God's praise"*** (Romans 3:23) and three chapters later ***"For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace."*** (Romans 6:14) We are all sinners, but a Believer is a

sinner who has been saved by God's Grace and should consciously attempt to lead a holy (sinless) life.

Whatever your particular sin problem (or problems), the Bible does have the answer for you. There is hope. You and I can walk in obedience to God's Word and live a life of holiness. Holiness is not only expected; it is the promised birthright of every Believer.

If holiness is so basic to the Believer's life, why don't we experience it more in daily living? Why do so many Believers feel constantly defeated in their struggle with sin? Why does the Church so often seem to be more conformed to the world around it than to God?

At the risk of oversimplification, the answers to these questions can be grouped into three basic problem areas.

- 1. Our attitude toward 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. We cannot tolerate failure in our struggle with sin chiefly because we are success-oriented, not because we know it is offensive to God.

God wants us to walk in **obedience - not** victory. Obedience is oriented toward God; victory is oriented toward self. This may seem to be merely splitting hairs over semantics, but there is a subtle, self-centered attitude at the root of many of our difficulties with sin. Until we face this attitude and deal with it, we will not consistently walk in holiness.

- 2. We have misunderstood the phrase "live by faith" in Galatians 2:20.** Many of us think it means that no effort at holiness is required on our part. ***"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*** (HCSB) We must face the fact that we have a personal responsibility for our walk of holiness. Acknowledging that responsibility can have a dramatic effect in our own pursuit of holiness.

- 3. We do not take some sin seriously.** We have mentally categorized sins into that which is unacceptable and that which may be tolerated a bit. It is compromise on the little issues that leads to greater downfalls. ¹ And who is to say that a little ignoring of civil law is not a serious sin in the sight of God?

These three problems will be addressed in greater detail in subsequent posts. But before moving on, take time to settle these issues in your heart, right now. Will you begin to look at sin as an offense against a holy God, instead of as a personal defeat only? Will you begin to take personal responsibility for your sin, realizing that as you do, you must depend on the grace of God? Will you decide to obey God in all areas of life, however insignificant the issue may be?

In my next post, we will consider the holiness of God. It is only as we see His holiness, His absolute purity and moral hatred of sin, that we will be gripped by the awfulness of sin against the Holy God. To be gripped by that fact is the first step in our pursuit of holiness.

¹ For an excellent, in-depth study on this topic, let me recommend ["Bearing the Standard"](#) by my good friend Kevin Geoffrey.