

Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 18

"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 to look at putting sin to death.

Putting Sin to Death ~ Part A

"Therefore, put to death the earthly parts of your nature - sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed (which is a form of idolatry)." ~ Colossians 3:5

As we previously learned the Bible leaves no doubt that holiness is our responsibility. If we are to pursue holiness, we must take some decisive action. The action we are to take is to put to death the practices or misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13). Sha'ul uses the similar expression in Colossians: ***"put to death the earthly parts of your nature."*** (see above quote) What does the expression *put to death* mean? The *King James Version* uses the term *mortify*. According to the dictionary, mortify means *"to destroy the strength, vitality, or functioning of; to subdue or deaden."* To put to death the earthly parts of our nature, then, is to destroy the strength and vitality of sin as it tries to reign in our bodies.

It must be clear to us that mortification, though it is something we do, cannot be carried out in our own strength. Mortification must be done by the strength and under the direction of the Ruach; it is nevertheless a work which we must do. Without the Ruach's strength there will be no mortification, but without our working in His strength there will also be no mortification.

The crucial question then is, "How do we destroy the strength and vitality of sin?" If we are to work at this difficult task, we must first have **conviction**. We must be persuaded that a holy life is God's will for every Believer. We must believe that the pursuit of holiness is worth the effort and the pain required to mortify the misdeeds of the body. We must be convinced that we are to ***"Keep pursuing shalom with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."*** (Hebrews 12:14)

Not only must we develop conviction for living a holy life in general, but we must also develop convictions in specific areas of obedience.

These convictions are developed through exposure to the Word of God. Our minds have far too long been accustomed to the world's values. Even after we become Believers, the world around us constantly seeks to conform us to its value system. We are bombarded on every side by temptations to indulge our sinful natures. That is why Sha'ul said, ***"Do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the 'olam hazeh. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed."*** (Romans 12:2)

Only through God's Word are our minds remolded and our values renewed. When giving instructions for the future kings of Israel, God said that a copy of His Law ***"is to remain with him, and he is to read in it every day, as long as he lives; so that he will learn to fear Adonai his God and keep all the words of this Torah and these laws and obey them."*** (Deuteronomy 17:19) The king was to read God's law all the days of his life to learn to fear the Lord. In that way he could learn the necessity of holiness, and how he might know God's specific will in various situations. It's clear from history and the Bible that many of the Kings ignored this commandment.

Yeshua said, ***"Whoever has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me, and the one who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."*** (John 14:21) Obedience is the pathway to holiness, but it is only as we *have* His commands ¹ that we can obey them. God's Word must be so strongly fixed in our minds that it becomes the dominant influence in our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions. One of the most effective ways of influencing our minds is through memorizing Scripture. David said, ***"I treasure your word in my heart, so that I won't sin against you."*** (Psalm 119:11)

To memorize Scripture effectively, you must have a plan. The plan should include a selection of well-chosen verses, a practical system for learning those verses, a systematic means of reviewing them to keep them fresh in your memory, and simple rules for continuing Scripture memory on your own. There are a wide variety of memorization plans on the market today. I keep a stack of 3x5 index cards close by as I am reading the Word during my devotional time in the morning. As I come across a verse or passage that especially 'talked to me,' I'll jot it down on the card. I keep those cards in my journal or in a stack next to my recliner so I can thumb through them as a refresher.

The goal of memorization is application of the Scripture to one's daily life. It is through the application of Scripture to specific life situations that we develop the kind of conviction to see us through the temptations that trip us up so easily. This is the way we develop conviction - by bringing God's Word to bear on specific situations that arise in our lives and determining God's will in that situation from the Word.

Many issues of life are clearly addressed in the Bible, and we would do well to memorize verses that speak to those issues. For example, God's will concerning honesty is plainly spelled out: ***"Let everyone speak truth with his neighbor ... otherwise you leave room for the Adversary ... the thief must stop stealing; instead, he should make an honest living by his own efforts."*** (Ephesians 4:25 - 28) His will concerning abstinence from sexual immorality also is described clearly: ***"What God wants is that you be holy, that you keep away from sexual immorality."*** (I Thessalonians 4:3) These are clearly stated issues where we should have no difficulty developing convictions as to God's will if we are willing to obey His Word.

But what about issues that are not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures - how do we determine God's will and develop conviction in those areas? I'll answer this in my next post.

¹ The Lord has been leading me of late to do a series on the commands of Yeshua. Please let me know if this would be helpful to you.