

## Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 19

***"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 my last post, we looked at several passages of Scripture that clearly look at what sin is. We left off by asking: 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 attempt to answer this question in this post.

### Putting Sin to Death ~ Part B

***"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

I am indebted to Jerry Bridges for introducing me to the following in his book, "The Pursuit of Holiness." He writes:

"Years ago a friend gave me what he called his 'Formula: How to Know Right from Wrong.' The formula asks four questions based on three verses in I Corinthians:

- **Question 1: Is it helpful - physically, spiritually, and mentally?** ***"Everything is permitted. Maybe, but not everything is helpful."*** (I Corinthians 6:12)
- **Question 2: Does it bring me under its power?** ***"Everything is permitted. Maybe, but I am not going to let anything gain control over me."*** (I Corinthians 6:12)
- **Question 3: Does it hurt others?** ***"To sum up, if food will be a snare for my brother, I will never eat meat again, lest I cause my brother to sin."*** (I Corinthians 8:13)
- **Question 4: Does it glorify God?** ***"Well, whatever you do, whether it's eating or drinking or anything else, do it all so as to bring glory to God."*** (I Corinthians 10:31)

As simple as this formula may appear, it is powerful in developing conviction - if we are willing to use it. These questions can get rather searching. But they must be asked if we are to pursue holiness as a total way of life."

Let's apply these principles to some typical situations. Take the television programs you watch, for example. Are they helpful - physically, spiritually, or mentally? For some programs the answer may be yes, but for many today you must honestly answer no, you should consider not viewing them.

What about the question, ***"Does it bring me under its power?"*** Have certain programs "grabbed" you so that you just cannot miss them? If so, they have brought you under their power. In my case the answer is, Yes! The DVR is a great invention. My wife and I do enjoy watching several network shows, especially ones in the law and order genre or our favorite football team. It may not be the activity itself that determines whether something is sinful for us, but rather our response to that activity.

Let's examine the next question, ***"Does it hurt others?"*** Many activities, strictly speaking, are morally neutral, but because of some immoral associations in a person's past it may be detrimental to that person, at

least for a time. Those of us who do not have that immoral association must be considerate of these people lest we cause them to slip back into an activity that is sinful for them.

But what about those areas in which Believers differ in their convictions as to God's will? Sha'ul speaks to this question in Romans 14, where he takes up the problem of eating certain food. He lays down three general principles to guide us. The first is that we should not judge those whose convictions are different from ours (verses 1-4). The second principle is that whatever our convictions are, they must be *"to honor the Lord"* (verses 5-8). The third principle is that whatever convictions we have developed as "to honor the Lord," we must be true to them (verse 23). If we go against our convictions, we are sinning, even though others may have perfect freedom in that particular thing.

The question we must ask in a serious pursuit of holiness is this: "Am I willing to develop convictions from the Scriptures and to live by these convictions?" This is often where the rub comes. We hesitate to face up to God's standard of holiness in a specific area of life. We know that to do so will require obedience that we are unwilling to give.

In my last post, I stated that if we are to destroy the strength and vitality of sin, we must develop *conviction*. This leads us to the second quality we must develop if we are to put to death the misdeeds of the body. That quality is *commitment*. Yeshua said, *"So every one of you who doesn't renounce all that he has cannot be my talmid."* (Luke 14:33) We must honestly face the question, *"Am I willing to give up a certain practice or habit that is keeping me from holiness?"*

It is at this point of commitment that most of us fail. We prefer to dally with sin, to try to play with it a little without getting too deeply involved.

We have the "just one more time" syndrome. We will take just one more lustful look, eat just one more rich dessert before starting our diet, watch just one more television program before sitting down to our Bible study. In all of this we are postponing the day of commitment, the day when we say to sin, *"Enough!"*

Solomon tells us that *"human eyes are never satisfied."* (Proverbs 27:20) One more lustful look or one more piece of pie never satisfies. In fact, quite the opposite takes place. Every time we say 'yes' to temptation, we make it harder to say 'no' the next time.

We must recognize that we have developed habit patterns of sin. We have developed the habit of shading the facts a little bit when it is to our advantage. We have developed the habit of giving in to the inertia that refuses to let us get up in the morning. These habits must be broken, but they never will till we make a basic commitment to a life of holiness without exceptions.

Yochanan said, *"My children, I am writing you these things so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we have Yeshua the Messiah, the Tzaddik [Righteous Person], who pleads our cause with the Father."* (I John 2:1) The whole purpose of John's letter, he says, is that we won't sin.

Can you imagine a soldier going into battle with the aim of "not getting hit very much?" The very suggestion is ridiculous. His aim is not to get hit at all! Yet if we have not made a commitment to holiness without exception, we are like a soldier going into battle with the aim of not getting hit very much. We can be sure if that is our aim, we will be hit - not with bullets, but with temptation over and over again.

It is only by learning to deny temptation that we will ever put to death the misdeeds of the body. Learning this is usually a slow and painful process, fraught with much failure. Our old desires and our sinful habits and hang-ups are not easily dislodged. To break them requires persistence, often in the face of little success. But this is the path we must tread, painful though it may be.

In my next post, we will look at the place of personal discipline.