

Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 21

"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 began to look at the place of personal discipline in our journey to pursue holiness. We learned that discipline is not punishment, but rather learning the ways of God by *hearing* the Word, *reading* the Word, *studying* the Word and *memorizing* the Word. In this post I want to focus on the Biblical discipline of *meditating* on the Word and *perseverance* in pursuing holiness.

Discipline ... Really?? ~ Part B

If we are to pursue holiness with discipline, we must do more than hear, read, study, or memorize Scripture. We must *meditate* on it. God said to Joshua, as he was assuming leadership over Israel, *"Keep this book of the Torah on your lips, and meditate on it day and night, so that you will take care to act according to everything written in it. Then your undertakings will prosper, and you will succeed."* (Joshua 1:8) To meditate on the Scriptures is to think about them, turning them over in our minds, and applying them to our life's situations. Meditation is analogous to contemplate and ruminate. For some reason, I prefer ruminate. That's what a cow will do when they chew their food. They chew it up, swallow and bring it back up and chew it again to get the last ounce of nutrition out of it. Kind of gross, but it helps to visualize the import of meditating on God's Word which provides much more than just physical nourishment.

Few of us practice meditation on the Scriptures. Somehow the idea of meditation sounds like something medieval monks or New-Agers do.

The practice of meditation on the Word of God - simply thinking about it and its application to life - is a practice we develop through discipline. Most of us think we don't have time for this, but there are blocks of minutes during the day when we can meditate if we develop the habit.

I must confess that this has been a hard habit for me to develop. In my quest to learn as much as I could from God's Word and godly devotionals as quickly as I could, I found myself running out of time to really ruminate on what I had learned. My solution was to slow down and take my time and implement the suggestions that I have learned and am sharing with you in this post.

The objective of our rumination is application - obedience to the Scriptures. This too requires discipline. Obeying the Scripture usually requires change in our patterns of life. Because we are sinful by nature, we have developed sinful patterns, which we call bad habits. Discipline is required to break any habit, good or bad. Our patterns of disobedience to God have been developed over a number of years and are not broken easily or without discipline. Just as you need a plan for regular Bible reading or study, so you need a plan for applying the Word to your life.

As you read or study the Scriptures and ruminate on them during the day, ask yourself these three questions:

1. What does this passage teach concerning God's will for a holy life?
2. How does my life measure up to that Scripture; specifically where and how do I fall short? (Be specific; don't generalize.)
3. What definite steps of action do I need to take to obey?

The most important part of this process is the specific application of the Scripture to specific life situations. We are prone to vagueness at this point because commitment to specific actions makes us uncomfortable. But we must

avoid general commitments to obedience and instead aim for specific obedience in specific instances. The Bible says, ***"Don't deceive yourselves by only hearing what the Word says, but do it!"*** (James 1:22)

Suppose you want to ruminate on I Corinthians 13, the great love chapter. As you think about the chapter, you realize the importance of love, and you also see the practical applications of love: ***"Love is patient and kind, not jealous, not boastful."*** (1 Corinthians 13:4) You ask yourself, *"Am I impatient or unkind or jealous toward anyone?"* As you think about this, you realize you are envious toward some co-workers who seem to be getting all the breaks. You confess this sin to God, being very specific to name them and your sinful reaction to their good fortune. You ask God to bless them even more and to give you a spirit of contentment so that you will not continue to envy them, but will instead love them. You might memorize I Corinthians 13:4 and think about it as you see them at work. You even look for ways to help them. Then you do the same thing tomorrow, the next day and the next until finally you see God working a spirit of love in your heart toward them.

This is discipline toward holiness. You will never put to death that spirit of envy without a structured plan for doing it. That plan is what we call discipline.

Perseverance

You can readily see that this structured training in holiness is a lifelong process. So, a necessary ingredient of discipline is *perseverance*. Sha'ul wrote to Timothy, ***"Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness."*** (1 Timothy 6:11)

Any training - physical, mental, or spiritual - is characterized at first by failure. We fail more often than we succeed. But if we persevere, we gradually see progress until we are succeeding more often than failing. At first it seems we are making no progress, so we become discouraged and think, *What's the use? I can never overcome that sin.* That is exactly what HaSatan wants us to think.

It is at this point that we must exercise perseverance. We want instant success, but holiness doesn't come that way. Our sinful habits are not broken overnight. Follow-through is required to make any change in our lives, and follow-through requires perseverance. God wants us to persevere in the discipline of holiness.

Sha'ul laments, ***"I don't understand my own behavior - I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate!"*** (Romans 7:15) Who can deny that this is often our own experience? The truth is, the more we see the holiness of God and His law revealed to us in the Scripture, the more we recognize how far short we fall.

Isaiah walked in the righteousness of God's commandments. Yet on seeing the Lord God in all His holiness, he was compelled to cry out, ***"Woe to me! I too am doomed! - because I, a man with unclean lips, living among a people with unclean lips, have seen with my own eyes the King, Adonai-Tzva'ot!"*** (Isaiah 6:5).

As we grow in the *knowledge* of God's holiness, even though we are also growing in the discipline of holiness it seems the gap between our knowledge and our practice always gets wider. This is the Ruach's way of drawing us to more and more holiness.

As we progress in holiness, we come to hate sin (Psalm 119:104) and to delight in God's law (Romans 7:22). We see the perfection of God's law and the rightness of all He requires of us. We agree that ***"His commands are not burdensome"*** (I John 5:3), but are ***"holy, just, and good"*** (Romans 7:12). If we would succeed in our pursuit of holiness we must persevere in spite of failure.

In my next post, we will begin to look at pursuing holiness in our body, mind and will.