

Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 24

"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 focused on holiness in our spirit. In this post we will look at holiness in our wills.

Holiness in Our Wills

In our pursuit of holiness it is the **will** that ultimately makes each individual choice of whether we sin or obey. It is the will that chooses to yield to temptation or to say no. Our wills, then, ultimately determine our moral destiny, whether we are holy or unholy in our character and conduct.

This being true, it is critically important that we understand how our wills function - what causes them to turn in one direction or the other, why they make the choices they do. Above all else, we must learn how to bring our wills into submission and obedience to the will of God on a practical, daily, hour-by-hour basis.

To help us understand how our wills function, let us review the definition of the heart presented in Post 15 & 16 in this series. The heart as used in the Bible generally denotes all the faculties of the soul as they work together in doing good or evil - the mind, the emotions, the conscience, and the will.

These faculties were all implanted in man's soul by God, but were all corrupted through man's fall in the Garden of Eden. Our intelligence was darkened (see Ephesians 4:18), our passions were entangled (see Ephesians 2:3), and our wills perverted (see John 5:40). With new birth our reason is again enlightened, our affections and desires redirected, and our wills subdued. But though this is true, it is not true all at once. In actual experience it is a growing process. We are told to renew our minds (see Romans 12:2), to set our affections on things above (Colossians 3:1), and to submit our wills to God (see James 4:7).

When God originally created man, the reason, the emotions, and the will all worked in perfect harmony. Reason led the way in understanding the will of God, the will consented to God's will, and the emotions delighted in doing it. But with the entrance of sin into man's soul, these three faculties began to work at cross-purposes to one another and to God. The will has become stubborn and rebellious and cannot consent to that which reason knows to be the will of God.

While the will is the ultimate determiner of all choices, it is influenced in its choices by the strongest forces brought to bear upon it – our mind and emotions.

These compelling forces come from a variety of sources. It may be the subtle suggestions of HaHaSatan and his world system (see Ephesians 2:2) or the evil enticements of our own sinful nature (see James 1:14). It may be the urgent voice of conscience, the earnest reasoning of a loving friend, or the quiet prompting of the Ruach. But from whatever source these compelling forces come, they reach our wills through either our reason or our emotions.

Therefore we must guard what enters our minds and what influences our emotions. Solomon said, ***"Above everything else, guard your heart; for it is the source of life's consequences."*** (Proverbs 4:23) If we diligently guard our minds and emotions, we shall see the Ruach working in us to conform our wills to His. Sha'ul writes, ***"So, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed when I was with you, it is even more important that you obey now when I am away from you: keep working out your deliverance with fear and trembling, for God is the one working among you both the willing and the working for what pleases him."*** (Philippians 2:12-13). How then do we guard our minds and emotions?

The Bible speaks to us primarily through our reason, and this is why it is so vitally important for our minds to be constantly brought under its influence. There is absolutely no shortcut to holiness that bypasses or gives little priority to a consistent intake, memorization and meditation of the Scriptures.

Solomon told us *"Wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will be enjoyable for you, discretion will watch over you, and discernment will guard you."* (Proverbs 2:10-12). These are qualities of our minds. How do we acquire these qualities? *"For Adonai gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding."* (Proverbs 2:6). But to whom does the Lord give these qualities? He gives them to the one who receives His sayings, who inwardly treasures His commandments, who makes his ear alert to wisdom and his heart ready for understanding, who prays for discernment and understanding, and who seeks understanding as if it were hidden treasure (see Proverbs 2:1-5).

Not only must we guard our minds, we must also guard our emotions. To do this, it is helpful first to realize that while God most often appeals to our wills through our reason, sin and HaSatan usually appeals to us through our desires or emotions. It is true HaSatan will attack our reason to confuse and cloud the issues, but that is only to enable him to conquer us through our desires and emotions. This is the strategy he employed with Eve (see Genesis 3:1-6). He attacked her reason by questioning God's integrity, but his primary temptation was to her desire. We read that Eve saw that the tree was *good* for food, it was a *delight* to the eyes, and *desirable* for making one wise.

Knowing that HaSatan attacks primarily through our desires, we should watch over them diligently and bring the Word of God to bear on them constantly. This is spiritual prudence. Each of us should seek to be aware of how sin attacks us through our desires and take preventive actions. This is what Sha'ul urged Timothy to do when he instructed him to *"flee the passions of youth"* (2 Timothy 2:22).

Guarding of our desires is more than fighting a rear-guard defensive action against temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. We must take the offensive. Sha'ul directs us to set our hearts on things above of God (see Colossians 3:1). The psalmist encourages us to *delight* ourselves on Adonai's Torah (Psalm 1:2). So, we are to set our desires on spiritual things and delight ourselves in the law and will of God.

So we have come full circle to discipline - to a structured plan. Normally our reason, will, and emotions should work in that order, but since we so often reverse the order, giving attention to our desires, we must work at directing those desires toward God's will.

Scripture is filled with "success" stories of real people who trusted God and obeyed Him and whose lives were changed dramatically or who significantly influenced the course of history. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives us a brief and partial index of some of these stories. These stories can motivate us to go and do likewise. So we would do well to constantly include the accounts of some of these people in our Bible reading to motivate us in areas of holiness.

In the final analysis it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. But we are expressly told by Sha'ul to work at this ourselves (Philippians 2:12). Our responsibility regarding our wills is to guard our minds and emotions, being aware of what influences our minds and stimulates our desires. As we do our part, we will see the Spirit of God do His part in making us more holy.

In my next post, we will explore some practical habits to pursue holiness.