

## Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 27

***"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 in this series, we looked at the issue of holiness and faith. In this post, we are going to explore the concept of holiness in an unholy world.

### Holiness in an Unholy World

***"I don't ask you to take them out of the world, but to protect them from the Evil One."* ~ John 17:15**

All Believers must live their lives in the context of an unholy world. Some face extraordinary temptation as they live in the midst of a flagrantly sinful atmosphere. Ever where we turn in our day-to-day life, we are bombarded with the assaults of the enemy. Unless the Believer is prepared for such evil assaults on his mind and heart, he will have great difficulty maintaining personal holiness.

James said that part of true religion consists in keeping ourselves ***"from being contaminated by the world"*** (James 1:27), and Sha'ul urged us to ***"go out from their midst, separate yourselves."*** (2 Corinthians 6:17) How should we respond when we find ourselves surrounded on every hand by the unrelenting pressures of a sinful world?

It is clear from our Lord's Prayer that He does not intend for us to withdraw from contact with the world of non-Believers (see John 17:15). Instead, He said we are to be ***"the salt of the earth"*** and ***"the light of the world"*** (Matthew 5:13-14). The writers of the Brit Hadashah take it for granted that Believers will live in the midst of an unholy world. (See such passages as I Corinthians 5:9-10; Philippians 2:14-15; I Peter 2:12, and 3:15-16.) We are never told that it will be easy to live in a godless environment. Instead, we are warned to expect ridicule and abuse (see John 15:19; 2 Timothy 3:12; I Peter 4:3-4). I distinctly recall that when I became a new Believer that my mentor told me that I hadn't signed up on a cruise ship, but on a battleship.

Instead of withdrawing from contact with the world, we must strive to resist its influence. To do this we must first of all resolve to live by the convictions God has given us from His Word. The convictions we develop about God's will for a holy life must be rock-solid enough to withstand the ridicule of the ungodly and the pressures they put on us to conform to their unholy ways.

One helpful reinforcement to living according to our convictions is to identify ourselves with Yeshua openly, wherever we find ourselves in the world. This must be done in a gracious yet clear-cut manner.

But even though we resolve to live in the world by the convictions God has given us from His Word, and we openly identify ourselves with Yeshua, we still are often subjected to the pollution of unholy surroundings. There are lewd pictures everywhere, obscene jokes told in our presence, and the endless recounting and boasting of immoral activities by those who do them, all serve to drag our minds down into the filth of this world. To this list we could add the dishonest shortcuts taken by business associates, the constant gossiping of our neighbors and coworkers, and the lies and half-truths we hear all around us.

The Bible is our best defense against this pollution. David said, ***"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your Word."*** (Psalm 119:9) The Bible will cleanse our minds of the defilement of the world if we meditate on its teachings. It will also serve as a continual warning to us not to succumb to frequent temptations to indulge our eyes and thoughts in the immorality around us.

Such passages of Scripture as *"Sh'ol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and human eyes are never satisfied"* (Proverbs 27:20), and *"Out of place are obscenity and stupid talk or coarse language; instead, you should be giving thanks"* (Ephesians 5:4) are verses we can memorize and meditate on as we find ourselves in corrupt surroundings.

We must be concerned not only for our own purity of mind and heart, but also for the eternal destiny of those who would pollute us. God has left us in the world to be both salt and light. The use of salt as a metaphor to describe our relationship to the world teaches us that Believers are to be a preserving power, an antiseptic, an agent to prevent and retard decay. As the "light of the world" we are the bearers of the good news of salvation.

Yeshua Himself is the true Light and, just as it was said of John the Baptist, we are to *"bear witness concerning the Light."* (See John 1:7-9) A Believer who witnesses in a spirit of genuine concern for another person is not likely to be corrupted by that person's immorality. Through gracious, loving concern, he may perhaps win that person to the Savior.

We do not act as the salt of the earth or shine as the light of the world by necessarily denouncing the sins of our worldly associates. Our own holy life will serve as a sufficient rebuke, and our interest in others at this point is not their conduct but their need of Yeshua as their Savior.

After Yeshua called Matthew the tax collector to Himself and was eating in Matthew's house with a number of his friends, the P'rushim complained, *"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"* Yeshua answered them, *"The ones who need a doctor aren't the healthy but the sick. I have not come to call the 'righteous,' but rather to call sinners to turn to God from their sins."* (Luke 5:30-32). Surely this is what God would have us do as we shine as lights in the world.

Finally, despite all our efforts, there may be a time when the corrupt environment becomes intolerable; where we, like Lot, become tormented by the lawless deeds we see and hear (see 2 Peter 2:7-8; Genesis 19). In these circumstances, we should prayerfully consider the need to leave that ungodly situation.

Maintaining personal holiness in an unholy world is admittedly difficult. The foregoing suggestions are not intended to make the problem seem easy, but to offer some practical help for a tough problem. Above all, we must look to Yeshua who, though He ate with tax collectors and sinners, was Himself *"holy, without evil, without stain, set apart from sinners and raised higher than the heavens."* (Hebrews 7:26) And we must claim His promise that *"No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way out, so that you will be able to endure."* (I Corinthians 10:13)

In my next post, we will wrap-up this series by exploring the joy of holiness.