

Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 28

"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 will wrap-up this series by exploring the joy of holiness.

The Joy of Holiness

"For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh." ~ Romans 14:17

God intends the Messianic life to be a life of joy - not drudgery. The idea that holiness is associated with a dour disposition is a terrible caricature. In fact, just the opposite is true. Only those who walk in holiness experience true joy.

Yeshua said, ***"If you keep my commands, you will stay in my love - just as I have kept my Father's commands and stay in his love. I have said this to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy be complete."*** (John 15:10-11) In this statement Yeshua links obedience and joy in a cause and effect manner; that is, joy results from obedience. Only those who are obedient - who are pursuing holiness as a way of life - will know the joy that comes from God. [In my next series, we will take an in-depth look at the commands of Yeshua.]

In what way does holiness produce joy? For one thing, there is the joy of ***fellowship with God***. David said, ***"You make me know the path of life; in your presence is unbounded joy, in your right hand eternal delight."*** (Psalm 16:11) True joy comes only from God, and He shares this joy with those who walk in fellowship with Him. When David committed the sins of adultery and murder, he lost his sense of God's joy because he lost fellowship with God. After this, in his penitential prayer he asked God to ***"Restore my joy in your salvation, and let a willing spirit uphold me."*** (Psalm 51:12). A life of disobedience cannot be a life of joy.

The daily experience of Yeshua's love is linked to our obedience to Him. It is not that His love is ***conditioned*** on our obedience. That would be legalism. But our ***experience*** of His love is dependent upon our obedience.

When I am obeying God, I am no longer resisting Him in some particular area of my life. This joy is especially apparent when, after a long struggle between the Spirit and our sinful natures, we have by His grace finally and radically dealt with some besetting sin that had previously mastered us. We might call this the joy of victory; I prefer to call it the joy of obedience.

In addition to the joy of fellowship with the Holy God, a holy life also produces the joy ***of anticipated reward***. The writer of Hebrews said, ***"Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Yeshua, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne."*** (Hebrews 12:1-2 ^{HCSB}, emphasis added) Yeshua was motivated to endure by anticipating the joy of His reward. No amount of hardship and struggle could deprive Him of that anticipation.

In the parable of the talents, the Lord said to the two servants who used their talents, *"Well done, good and faithful slave...Share your master's joy."* (Matthew 25:21, 23 ^{HCSB}). One of the "talents" God has given to every Believer is the possibility of walking in holiness, being free from the dominion of sin. We, too, can look forward to entering into the joy of the Lord as we walk in holiness to the end of our days.

Joy not only *results* from a holy life, but there is also a sense in which joy helps *produce* a holy life. Nehemiah said to the dispirited exiles who returned to Jerusalem, *"The joy of Adonai is your strength"* (Nehemiah 8:10). The Believer living in disobedience also lives devoid of joy and hope. But when he begins to understand that Yeshua has delivered him from the reign of sin, when he begins to see that he is united to Him who has all power and authority, and that it is possible to walk in obedience, he begins to have hope. As he hopes in Yeshua, he begins to have joy. In the strength of this joy he begins to overcome the sins that so easily entangle him. He then finds that the joy of a holy walk is infinitely more satisfying than the fleeting pleasures of sin.

But to experience this joy, we must make some choices. We must choose to forsake sin, not only because it is defeating to us, but because it grieves the heart of God. We must choose to count on the fact that we are dead to sin, freed from its reign and dominion, and we can now actually say **NO** to sin. We must choose to accept our responsibility to discipline our lives for obedience.

God has provided all we need for our pursuit of holiness. He has delivered us from the reign of sin and given us His indwelling Ruach. He has revealed His will for holy living in His Word, and He works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. He has sent pastors and teachers to exhort and encourage us in the path of holiness; and He answers our prayers when we cry to Him for strength against temptation.

Truly the choice is ours. What will we choose? Will we accept our responsibility and discipline ourselves to live in habitual obedience to the will of God? Will we persevere in the face of frequent failure, resolving never to give up? Will we decide that personal holiness is worth the price of saying no to our body's demands to indulge its appetites?

In Part ~ 6 in this series, we considered the farmer who, in dependence on God, fulfills his responsibility to produce a harvest. He does not sit back and wait for God to act; rather he acts himself, trusting God to do His part. If we are to attain any measure of holiness we must have a similar attitude. God has clearly said, *"Be holy, because I am holy."* (Vayikra 11:44)

Surely He has not commanded us to be holy without providing the means to be holy. The privilege of being holy is yours, and the decision and responsibility to be holy is yours. If you make that decision, you will experience the fullness of joy which Yeshua has promised to those who walk in obedience to Him.

In my next post, we will start a new series on the Commands of Yeshua.