
Lesson 5: A Study of Holiness

Holiness is one of the most misunderstood words in the Christian faith. This lesson attempts to look at what it is, and what it is not. It does seem that holiness is perceived as an old-fashioned, irrelevant concept today, even within the Christian faith. However, the scriptures are clear. God has always commanded His people to be holy. Holiness is essential to being a Christian.

- Hebrews 12:14 - Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.

As we take a closer look at holiness, we will attempt to answer several questions.

- What is Holiness?
- How can we apply it practically to our lives today?
- How can we be holy, and why should we?
- Where do standards of holiness come from?
- Are these standards universal and unchanging OR cultural and temporary?

A couple of weeks ago, you learned about Salvation, which is the initial experience, but it does not end there. There is a continuing work of sanctification. A process of becoming progressively more like Christ. This process starts at the New Birth (salvation experience) and ends with sinless perfection (when we make it to heaven).

A salvation experience is a beginning, not an ending. We must also pursue holiness or sanctification to see the Lord. Let's first address a misconception on holiness. Holiness is not a means of salvation but rather, holiness is a *result* of salvation. You cannot be truly Holy without the Holy Ghost. Paul said a powerful truth that in our flesh, dwells nothing good. This means that we cannot manufacture our own holiness. We are only partakers of God's Holiness.

- Hebrews 12:10 ...that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Now, just because we are partakers of His holiness does not exempt us from our responsibility of holiness. Pursuing holiness does require effort on our part. Holiness is a two-part process: God empowers us to be holy by His Spirit, but there is an effort that we must put forth to achieve holiness. In his book, *In the Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges writes, "The pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely, no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking. He does not do that for us."

A perfect analogy is a farmer. A farmer is totally dependent on God for sunshine, rain, and the miracle of life in the seed. However, the farmer will not have a crop unless he cultivates, plants, tends, and harvests. Someone said it this way, "We cannot do what God must do, but God will not do what we can do."

We also must understand that holiness is a process. Holiness is not instantaneous, and sanctification is not completed all at once. It takes time.

The Old Testament concept of holiness was separation from worldliness or sin, and dedication to God. For example, the Sabbath day was holy. On the Sabbath day a person was to be separated from work, travel, and other activities, and be dedicated to resting and thinking on the Lord. Holiness still has a two-part definition; separation from the world and sin, and dedication to Him.

Marriage is a great analogy of this concept. As wedding vows are made, a spouse will pledge their intention to forsake all others, to love, to honor, to cherish, till death do you part. This is separation from others, and dedication to one.

Here are some of Apostle Paul's teaching on separation:

- II Corinthians 6:17 - Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.
- Ephesians 4:22-24 - That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

One of the questions we started with was, "What is Holiness?" Holiness means to imitate Christ so we can be Christ-like. A holy person strives to be Christ-like in all areas of their life; to be separated from the world and dedicated to Christ.

Holiness also means that we do not love the ungodliness in the world. We are not to be identified with ungodliness, attached to it, or participate in it.

- James 4:4 - ...Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

James also tells us that one important aspect of pure and undefiled religion is to be unspotted from the world. Holiness involves both the inner and outer person. For example, the Bible tells us that adultery is sinful, but it also instructs us that lustful thoughts are sinful as well. The Bible tells us that murder is sinful, but it also instructs us that hatred is sinful as well. So, holiness not only includes actions and appearance, but also attitudes and thoughts. We work on the inside and the outside. People can use holiness outwardly to cover up unholiness inwardly. This will only work for a while because what is on the inside will eventually come out. A corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit.

We should strive to be holy inside and out. Jesus often talked about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He compared them to a cup that had been washed on the outside, but the inside was filthy. He also likened them to a stone tomb, beautiful on the outside but full of deadness on the inside. So, holiness must be inward and outward.

We can never forget that the ultimate source of holiness teaching comes from the Bible.

- II Timothy 3:16 - All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

All holiness teaching must come from the Bible. A standard of holiness is either; 1) specifically stated in Bible or, 2) an application of a Biblical principle. For example, the Bible teaches that drunkenness is sinful, but it does not specifically mention meth or cocaine. The underlying principle is that all intoxication is sinful. There are certain things that are not mentioned but the principle is there. The Bible is not a list of rules, even though that is how some view it. Although the Bible cannot provide specific instructions for every possible scenario we humans will face for all of time, it is a complete work. The Bible gives us principles and guidelines that apply to all cultures, times, and situations.

Another source of standards of holiness is the Holy Spirit / Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God teaches us through promptings and convictions. The Bible says that one of the purposes of the Spirit is to guide and teach us.

- John 16:13 - Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth...

The Bible and God's Spirit work in harmony. It is God's Word and it is God's Spirit. The Holy Ghost is called the Spirit of Truth, and It will guide us into all truth. The Spirit leads us to the Word of God. The Bible is our final authority, and the Holy Spirit will never contradict the Word of God.

For many people holiness has become a negative word; we don't do this, we don't do that! Holiness is a simple concept, and has a two-part definition; separation from the world and dedication to Him. It is a process to become more and more like Jesus Christ. Pray. Sincerely read the Bible. Allow the Spirit to lead you.

- I Peter 1:15 But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation...
- I Peter 1:15 (NLT) But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God, who chose you to be His children, is holy.

The Lord that has called us is Holy, so we should strive to be Holy. Not to be holy in some generic way but strive to be holy in everything we do! Holiness should affect our everyday lives. But what does that look like?

Let's cover a couple areas of Holiness that get asked about the most. Typically, questions about Holiness from visitors, co-workers, friends, and family usually fall into these two areas.

- Hair
- Dress

We will look at these two areas scripturally and how we apply them to our current culture. The question for all Christians today is, "How do I take a book written thousands of years ago and apply it into my life today?" We know the Bible says. "Be ye Holy, for I am Holy," but exactly how can we be holy today?

HAIR

The main scriptures concerning hair are found in the New Testament, in the book of I Corinthians. Let's first look at the biblical principle for men's hair.

- I Corinthians 11:14 - Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him?
- I Corinthians 11:14 (NLT) - Isn't it obvious that it is disgraceful for a man to have long hair?

The Bible is pretty clear: long hair on a man is a shame to him or disgraceful. There is an interesting phrase there... "Nature itself teaches you." Generally, men go bald, not women. That is why they call it male pattern baldness. Men naturally have short hair.

Now let's look at the biblical principle for women's hair.

- I Corinthians 11:5 - But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.
- I Corinthians 11:5 (NLT) But a woman dishonors her husband if she prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, for this is the same as shaving her head.
- I Corinthians 11:6 - For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.
- I Corinthians 11:6 (NLT) Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair. And since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, then she should wear a covering.

Notice the use of two different words;

- SHORN: to cut with shears, to remove by cutting
- SHAVEN: to cut near the surface or make bare, smooth

It is a shame for a woman to be shorn, which means to have her hair cut, or to be shaven, which means to have her head shaved.

We only find three lengths of hair in the Bible:

- Shaved (totally removed)
- Shorn (cut)
- Long (uncut)

Here the Bible says that being shaven and shorn are shameful for a woman. A woman's uncut hair is her glory.

- I Corinthians 11:14-15 - Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

The scriptures are clear. Men are not to have long hair and women should have long hair. Some would ask in reference to women's hair, "How long is long?"

- The Bible says women's hair is not to be cut or shaven. Therefore, long hair is uncut hair.
- Nature determine the length. Some women are unable to grow long hair. However, but as long as it is uncut, they have long hair. The length is not important. You cannot determine what length is appropriate. Nature does that for us. The important thing is that it is not shorn or shaven.

From the very beginning of creation, God has created a distinction of the genders. Society has tried to blur the lines, but God has set some guidelines in our lives to prevent that.

DRESS

We can break the subject of dress into two different areas; distinction and modesty. First let's look at this area of distinction. Just like hair, it started back at creation.

- Genesis 1:27 - So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.
- Deuteronomy 22:5 - The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.
- Deuteronomy 22:5 (NLT) - A woman must not put on men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. Anyone who does this is detestable in the sight of the Lord your God.

Some would argue, “Why would you dig up some old, ancient scripture, blow the dust off and try to live by it?” In fact, many use the argument that this same chapter bans plowing with an ox and a donkey together or that it bans mixing wool and linen together. If these do not apply, why should we obey the part concerning dress?

Well, this chapter also contains laws against adultery, rape, and incest. Obviously, we still think those things are wrong and it is acceptable to teach and preach against those things. The key to interpreting this chapter is to realize that Christ’s death abolished the ceremonial law, but not God’s moral law. God’s moral law stands forever. There are certainly things that we no longer have to do ceremonially, but an abomination to God is always an abomination.

Abomination is the strongest word for God’s disapproval, and as we read in Deuteronomy, God is using this word in relation to how we dress. The Biblical Principle is this; men and women should wear clothing that clearly distinguishes them as male and female.

We witness every day how the world tries to blur the lines between the genders. This is especially true in the area of dress. This idea of unisex clothing or gender-neutral clothing. For example, there was a huge fashion show where a new line of Unisex clothing was unveiled. A procession of men and women paraded down a narrow runway. With their identical clothing and their identical bowl-cut haircuts it was nearly impossible to tell the men from women. But that was the point.

The designer Rad Hourani said he believes in a gender-neutral outlook to fashion. He said, “I don’t understand why a man has certain things he’s allowed to wear and women have certain things they are allowed to wear. I don’t understand who made these rules.” He concludes in the article, “I think the concept of Unisex is something very important in our society.” Unisex is not just a garment reference. It implies that age does not exist, religion does not exist, and so on. There are no boundaries. The Bible requires that men and women should dress distinctive to their genders.

Even in much of the world today, that is the case. Think about the universal bathroom signs. They acknowledge there is a distinction between men and women.

However, it is not only the type of clothing we wear. A guy can wear pants and still be immodest. A lady can wear a skirt and still be immodest. Let’s look at the second part; modesty. The Apostle Paul in I Timothy says we need to wear modest apparel.

- I Samuel 16:7 ...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

This scripture is used many times to debate modesty. The argument is that the Lord looks on the heart, not on the outside. So, why does it matter? However, what is in the heart will manifest itself on the outside.

We cannot neglect the part of this verse, “man looketh on the outward appearance.” It implies human beings do perceive others according to their physical appearances. You may have a heart that love holiness, but people cannot see your heart. People look on the outward appearance. We should adorn ourselves outwardly to reflect what we have inwardly. We cannot dress unholy on the outside and claim a Holy Spirit on the inside.

In one of the best biblical illustrations of modesty, Jesus encountered a man possessed with demons. He lived in the cemetery. He cried out day and night. And he is naked. Jesus casts out the demons and then the man puts on clothes.

- Possessed with Devils - No clothes (immodest, ungodly, uncovered)
- Devils Cast Out - Put on clothes (modest, godly, covered)

The clothes we wear may not seem all that important in the grand scheme of life, but our clothes speak volumes about us. Complete strangers may be able to determine our gender, age, economic status, vocation, personality, and even our character based solely upon what we wear. We have all heard the expression, “You can’t judge a book by its cover.” Whoever came up with that probably was not in the publishing industry because publishing houses have proven that a cover may not tell you what is inside a book, but the cover is one of the main reasons that we pick up one over another.

The clothes you wear reflect the things that are hidden deep inside of you. The clothes we wear reflect our standards, morals, character, and values. “Fashion is a way of turning yourself inside out.” – Elisabeth Rohm.

In the area of dress, the Bible gives us two clear commandments; distinction and modesty. Holiness is much more than hair or dress, but is also our attitude. Remember Simon Peter admonished us that we must be holy in everything you do, that is all areas of our lives.

QUESTIONS?