

What is Holiness? Do You Want It?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 June 2014

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, last week we began a short series on holiness. And we talked about holiness as not being optional.

Holiness is not optional. That's what we said last week. And we mentioned four things, and I think we could probably say more, but we did mention these four things for which holiness is not optional. In order to be these things, you have to, or to have these things, you have to be holy. Do you remember what they were? Anyone? What was the first one that we talked about?

Heaven. Heaven. No holiness, no heaven. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12, 14. What was the second thing?

Assurance. Assurance. To have a comfortable walk with God, to know his friendship, his fellowship, closeness with him.

[1:04] That assurance of knowing that I'm his. Holiness is a necessary ingredient, or we will not have that assurance. What was the third thing?

Usefulness. When we looked at Timothy, the man who purifies himself from these things and sets himself to be useful, to be holy, will be useful to the master. And then what was the fourth thing?

Beauty. Yeah. In the Bible, holiness and beauty are put next to each other, close to one another. Sometimes it says, the beauty of holiness.

holiness. And so if we want to be beautiful people, we have to be holy people. Well, I hope that you went away from that lesson, hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

I know that I did. And I hope that you walked away saying, holiness is what I want. Holiness is so beautiful, so desirable.

[2:10] That's what I want. In a few minutes, we're going to talk about what holiness is. What it means to be holy. But before we do that, I want to ask, do you want it?

Do you want to be holy? If you don't want it, you'll never have it. As a Christian, if you don't want it, you will not have it.

If you won't pursue it, and you won't pursue it if you don't want it, we pursue the things that we desire, that we long for, that we want. Do you want to be holy?

One of the most soul-stirring pieces of Christian literature is Jonathan Edwards' personal narrative of his life. And it has stirred countless people, generation after generation, to desire holiness.

holiness. Because that was one thing that marked Jonathan Edwards. He wanted to be holy with a passion and with a desire that is rare. And I want to read a section of that personal narrative to you.

[3:20] And I hope that it is contagious. I hope that the fire that was burning in Jonathan Edwards' heart will then spread into your hearts as well. In these passages, he's telling us what it was like in the first years after he was converted.

He was converted as a 19-year-old, a 20-year-old, sometime around there. And so these are the first, he's explaining what it was like, what his personal walk with God was like in those first years after he was born again.

And this is what he said. And this is a long quote, but please listen. I felt then great satisfaction as to my good state, but that did not content me. I had vehement longings of soul after God and Christ and after more holiness, wherewith my heart seemed to be full and ready to break, which often brought to my mind the words of the psalmist, my soul breaks for the longing it has.

I often felt a mourning and a lamenting in my heart that I had not turned to God sooner, that I might have had more time to grow in grace. My mind was greatly fixed on divine things, almost perpetually in the contemplation of them.

I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year, often walking alone in the woods in solitary places for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God.

[4:51] And it was always my manner at such times to sing forth my contemplations, I was almost constantly in vocal prayer. Wherever I was, prayer seemed to be natural to me as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.

My longings after God and holiness were much increased. Pure and humble, holy and heavenly Christianity appeared exceedingly amiable to me.

I felt a burning desire to be in everything a complete Christian and conformed to the blessed image of Christ and that I might live in all things according to the pure, sweet, and blessed rules of the gospel.

I had an eager thirsting after progress in these things, which put me upon pursuing and pressing after them. It was my continual strife day and night and constant inquiry.

How should I be more holy and live more holily and more becoming a child of God and a disciple of Christ? I now saw an increase of grace and holiness and a holy life with much more earnestness than ever I sought grace before I had it.

[6:02] I remember the thoughts I used to have of holiness and said sometimes to myself, I do certainly know that I love holiness such as the gospel prescribes.

It appeared to me that there was nothing in it but what was ravishingly lovely. And the highest beauty and amiableness, a divine beauty, far purer than anything upon the earth, and that everything else was like mire and defilement in comparison of it.

And he goes on. Is there any part of your heart that echoes Edward's heart? Are you holy?

Do you want to be holy? Edwards, he said, I wanted it and so it made me strive after it was my continual strife day and night. How can I be more holy?

Well, those two questions, are you holy? Do you want holiness? Leads us to today's consideration and question and that is, what is biblical holiness?

[7:09] holiness? What do we mean by holy? What do we mean by being holy? And the question is, when I see biblical holiness, is that the thing that I want?

Is that what I'm after? Or am I on to something else? Or am I on to some other thing? Have I confused the matter? So what is biblical holiness?

I originally started out with seven points and I condensed it down into two. So what I'm saying is, we could probably say a lot more than what is being said, but our time constrains us to just saying these two things.

First, what does it mean to be holy? First, it is not endless doing, it is a heart dedicated to God.

We're going to see what I mean by that in a second, so don't jump to any conclusions at the moment, but it is not endless doing, it is a heart dedicated, devoted to God.

Now, so first let me clear something up. I'm not saying that holiness does not involve action. We're going to get to that later, that's the second point. But being holy is not piling up good things or holy things.

[8:26] It's first a devotion, a dedication to God in your heart. So what I'm trying to say is that you aren't being holy just when you're doing holy things.

You can be standing in your bedroom thinking about going for a walk, thinking about doing just something normal and natural and be holy.

You don't have to stand there and think, okay, what holy thing can I do right now? I want to be holy, so I have to do these specific holy things or I won't be holy because holiness is first a devotion to God in your heart.

It's giving, it's having God own and possess your heart. It's you loving God. And there is some relief to that because we don't have to exhaust ourselves measuring and trying to figure out is this action more holy than that action?

if I watch a movie with my family, is that being less holy than not? If I eat pizza tonight, instead of fasting and praying, does that mean I'm somehow less holy?

[9:38] The question is, the answer is maybe, maybe not. Does God have your heart? What about your heart? Where is your heart?

If God has your heart, if you want to please and enjoy him, then the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. The kingdom of God is of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Holiness is God having your heart. And so it's not a series of holy actions. Now, giving God your heart will necessarily produce holy actions.

But the order is important. The first thing is our heart. So Proverbs 4.23. What does Proverbs 4.23 say?

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Very good. So, do I want holiness? Well, it begins in your heart. So, am I striving to offer God the very core of my being?

[10:58] Am I striving to offer God myself? Think of Isaiah. When he saw the Lord high and lifted up, he said, here I am.

Isaiah wasn't putting conditions or considerations on his response to God. he was giving God himself. Remember John Calvin, I offer you my heart, oh God, promptly and sincerely.

And so, you're not offering him parts of you. You're not offering just your emotions or your will or your thoughts or your body. You're giving him yourself in its totality.

And so, it's a heart that's controlled and possessed by a love for God. God. You love God and so you give yourself into his hands. So, you can be standing there doing nothing and be holy if God has your heart.

So, in Providence, it might be time for you to play with your children. It might be time for you to do something natural and normal, going to a game, being a soccer coach or whatever.

[12:12] whatever. And you can be holy in that if God has your heart. And so, you don't have to fret and worry and say, well, I'm not being holy if I'm not doing these holy things.

No, holiness begins with your heart. Now, that being said, and understanding that, that means if we are to pursue holiness, Hebrews 12, 14, make every effort to be holy.

If we are to pursue holiness, holiness, we don't start by changing the outside. We start by working on the inside. And so, it's not first a matter of taking off vice and putting on virtue.

Obviously, we do that, and God commands us to do that, and we're going to see that in a minute.

But if we're going to pursue holiness, it means we give God our heart, and that means it starts with deep self-examination.

deep self-examination. Now, I'm always saying, and I say this frequently, God doesn't want us to be navel gazers.

[13:20] He doesn't want us to be focused on ourselves. But that's not what I'm talking about here. Self-absorbed navel gazing is about trying to find good reasons in ourselves, in our record, in our past, in our personalities, for God to love me and to save me.

It's looking for my relationship based on just what I'm doing and who I am. And that's not what I'm talking about. No, Jesus, this is all based on the gospel.

Jesus is my righteousness. I have been justified. I am accepted. I am a child of God. That's a given. That's a reality. And now the question is, does God have my heart?

Does he have my heart? Or is in some part of me trusting myself? Where are the idols in my heart? Where am I not giving God myself, but instead I'm selfishly keeping myself from him?

Or where am I sinfully giving myself to something other than God? Because holiness starts in your heart, it means you have to do self-examination.

[14:34] repentance. And the first step after examining yourself is then repentance. Repentance. And we talked about that over the last few weeks.

But I am afraid that too often we slap a band-aid on our sin. We cure ourselves too quickly. we rush too quickly to what we like about God and we don't see the things that pinch us.

Again, come right out of your sin to Jesus. Come right out of your sin to Jesus. But that does not mean that you slap a band-aid on your sin.

The gospel allows us and helps us and gives us the tools and gives us the position and the comfort, so to speak, to let us examine our wounds.

To search out our wounds. Because we know that Jesus has paid for our sins. We're not dealing with something that's going to destroy my relationship with God because Jesus has paid for my sins.

[15:42] We don't have to hide from the deep sins of our hearts. We don't have to hide from what's in our hearts because of Jesus, I am accepted, I am welcomed, I am forgiven in the greatest sense of the word.

God knows about my sins and now I rest in that and then I examine and dig out that sin in my heart. I've been doing a lot of weeding lately and you know when you're doing weeding you just can't pull the top off of the weed or it just grows right back.

And I've been so frustrated because there's been times where you can't get the root out. And I've torn everything out and there's nothing there except just this little stub of a weed.

And I can't get that out. And I just know that I'm going to have to come back and deal with that again. Repentance biblically is rooting that sin out.

So I rest in the gospel and then I dig out the places where God doesn't have my heart. I can dig down and I can throw up my sin.

[16:53] We've said this. The Puritans, one of them called repentance the vomit of the soul, vomiting of the soul. And no one vomits casually, do they? You don't.

You know how it is. And I know this isn't the most pleasant thing, but your whole body is involved and you're all in when you're doing that. It takes everything out of you and that's repentance. It's deep down work. It's that change of mind. It's rooting out that sin at the core. It's getting to the bottom and spewing up the poison.

And then out of that I give God my heart. I take God's side against my sin. I say what that is. What I am in doing this is foul and I hate it and I don't want to do it again and it's turning away from it.

And so it's humbling ourselves in God's hands. This is where holiness begins. It's humbling ourselves in God's hands. We know enough about being humbled. Circumstances humble us.

[18:02] Other things humble us. Do we know what it means to humble ourselves? Throwing ourselves at God's feet and with hatred and anger and indignation and sadness saying God what I am is not right.

What I have done is not right. Remember in the matter of in Corinth where that man was sleeping with his mother-in-law or his stepmother or something and in the Corinthians they reacted to it and it was with indignation and anger and they took care of the problem and Paul commended them for it. He said that's how you deal with sin. So God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble who don't commend themselves who don't excuse themselves who don't paint sin with makeup and make it look better than what it is.

In this matter of holiness we need to hear James words he said submit yourselves then to God resist the devil and he will flee from you come near to God and he will come near to you wash your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double minded grieve mourn and wail change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up the idea is not so that we are sad and weak people but the pathway to strength the pathway to fellowship the pathway to dealing with sin and having a closer walk with God the pathway to having God lift us up is by submitting ourselves is by doing this hard work of repentance and so do you want holiness do you want assurance do you want joy in your life do you not have those like to the degree that you would want them well maybe you're dealing with your sins too quickly putting a band-aid on your sin again I'm not saying

I'm not saying that we just navel gaze and we wait until we felt bad enough to deal with our sins no out of our sin we come right to Jesus but in our forgiveness in this view of mercy we go back and we deal with our sin we get it out so holiness it begins in the heart secondly holiness is being and acting like God holiness is being and acting like God listen to 1st Peter 1 15 but just as he who called you is holy so be holy in all you do for it is written be holy because I am holy holiness is doing what God does did you notice that that Peter is talking about being holy in all that you do so holiness is it begins with the heart but holiness is seeing it bears fruit it actually comes into life into fruition in our actions and again we don't limit our holiness to just some set holy actions like coming to church or I'm just holy when I pray no holiness can be seen in how we parent and how we live with our kids how we eat with our family how we work at work how we do the everyday things it's being holy it means being clean it means being upright and sacred like

[21:44] God being different from the world and so God says the world is one way I'm another way the world is perverted bent crooked compromised it will dip into sin it loves sin it will compromise at any chance it has but God is upright God is right he is just he is fair he is good he's immovable in righteousness he's immovable in goodness he can't be compromised he won't be compromised he loves righteousness and he hates wickedness and so he won't dip for any reason he won't compromise for any reason holy holy holy holy he's holy in all that he is he's holy in all that he does and nothing that he does is not holy so what is holiness in your life it's hating sin and loving righteousness it's hating sin and loving righteousness it's loving it's hating disobedience and it's loving obedience it means adding one virtue to another it means taking off a vice and putting on virtue in its place and the bible is so practical about this how many lists are in the bible think about

in the paul loves lists of the people in the world will do this this this this this this is what they're like this this this this and people who live like that will not inherit eternal life but the righteous but love is this but as children of god you do this the bible is so practical why because these lists help us they tell us what we should be pursuing what we should be doing what we should be getting rid of in our!

turn in your bibles to colossians chapter 3 colossians chapter 3 and this is just one of those places just one of them where paul tells us what we should be living like and this is what he says colossians chapter 3 verse 5 put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature or whatever is earthly worldly!

sexual immorality impurity lust evil desires and greed now two of those things are outward things the other three lust evil desires and greed they start in the heart Paul says get rid of all of them which is idolatry because of these the wrath of God is coming you used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived but now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these anger rage malice slander filthy language from our lips do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and you have put on the new self or you have taken off the old man you have taken off of who you used to be who you were an Adam your life condemned separated from God you have taken that life off with its practices and now you have put on the new man you put on Jesus Christ which is being renewed! in the knowledge in image of we put on the new man we are now living in a new redeemed humanity he says therefore as God's chosen people holy and dearly loved clothe yourselves with compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another forgive as the Lord forgave you and so on so holiness it's not just a heart thing holiness begins in the heart but it's lived out and we can't separate the two the problem comes when we separate the two the problem comes when we say I'm holy in my heart I love God but my life doesn't show it

I don't have any holiness in action there's no such thing holiness is one piece it's a shirt with an inside and an outside okay you can't put on the inside without putting on the outside and vice versa our problem comes when we say where I'm wearing the inside but I don't care about the outside or you just deal with the outside but you don't deal with the inside you have both or you don't have a shirt you have both or you don't have holiness and so what should we do then well we've seen something in Colossians 3 through 5 you put to death these things you don't let them live in your life they want to come up they want to come up into your garden your yard you put them to death and then instead you you do these other things so what should we do turn over to 2

[27:23] Peter chapter 1 2 Peter chapter 1 just notice how he grounds what he says first of all in the gospel the gospel this is but he goes on to say more than that his divine power this is 2 Peter 1 verse 3 his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness through these he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them we may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires others now that is very important what is

Peter doing he's grounding what he's about to say in the gospel and about what God has done for us God's promises to us he says God has given you everything you need for life and for godliness everything you need for life and godliness God has given me everything that you need personally for your particular life God has given you he's given you everything you need and so Christian did you hear that we feel so defeated and we live so far under our privileges but Peter is saying you have everything everything is yours you hear of that there's no room for doubt there's no room to pseudo piously say well my heart is so bad and meanwhile you don't do anything about it no we participate in the divine nature we have

God's power God's spirit working and living and moving in us we're not he's not turning us into God but we do participate in the divine nature we have his power and his grace available to us and we can escape the corruption that is in this world because of everything that he has freely given us God hasn't said pursue holiness and then tied up our hands and our feet we're not still enslaved to our sin it's not like we're inevitably going to fail no he's given us everything we can escape we are participating in the divine nature holiness is not a mirage holiness is not a mirage that you will chase and not get you can have it because of the gospel and that's where verse five comes in so in light of everything that God has done for us all the grace and his promises that are already ours what does Peter say verse five for this reason make every effort Hebrews 12:14 isn't it make every effort to be holy and he says here's something else that you make every effort for leave nothing on the table pursue it with all that you have to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge and to

knowledge self-control and to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love for if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our lord jesus christ here says god has given you all these promises we are now participating in the divine nature we have his grace now make every effort to add one thing to another the picture is sort of of you know girls dancing and one takes a hold of one hand and then another takes a hold of another hand until they're all together they're whirling around they're connected they're one that's what peter's idea is here you add one thing to another you take up one virtue and add another virtue add another add another and so what does it mean to be holy it means to live like God these are what God is like these things are what God is like and so your enemy is sin your enemy is vice put it to death your friend is righteousness your friend is obedience so you kill the one and then you do the other and we can't wait for it to happen there's not passiveness in pursuing holiness if somehow we get so confused that we think pursuing holiness means waiting on the Lord and him doing it all and me doing nothing we haven't just read the simple scripture that says make every effort we become wiser than the Bible but God says make every effort for it but just a couple of questions come up the first is but don't I need him doesn't he sanctify us how does his work and my work fit together well it's not one without the other and it's not one against the other it's both it's and so we don't wait for it to happen

[33:48] God works and we work they're not opposed to each other so what do I mean when I say make it happen make your holiness happen work it out make every effort I mean what Jonathan Edwards meant when he said we are not merely passive in it nor yet does God do some and we do the rest but God does all and we do all God produces all and we act all and then the other question is well isn't grace not working isn't grace coming up out of my sin and asking isn't grace helplessness or God helping me in my helplessness isn't grace against that against works how can we say make it happen well I think we need to hear what Dallas Willard says here this is what he said of course we must be concerned about works righteousness

I talk a lot about the value of spiritual disciplines but also the danger of using them as if they help us earn our salvation but it is crucial this is the most important point here it is crucial to realize that grace is not opposed to effort but to earning earning is an attitude effort is an action without effort we would be nowhere grace is not opposed to effort it's opposed to earning so if I if I'm thinking well I'm going to earn my holiness I'm going to win my holiness I'm going to win and earn God's favor then that's not living in grace that's the wrong attitude but grace isn't opposed to effort grace fuels effort grace produces effort grace doesn't save us so that we'll just be helpless wallflowers doing nothing grace makes us full human beings with potential and power and abilities by God's grace to do things that we used to not be able to do he writes that law in our hearts he makes us holy within and so now we start acting holy so Paul grace produces that effort Paul says I worked harder than the rest yet not I but the grace of God in me well who was acting God or Paul well it was both it was both it wasn't one without the other so brothers and sisters pursue holiness make every effort when we want something we plan we design we get after it we think about how we can accomplish it that's the idea when it says make every effort to be holy make every effort to add this to this and that to that we don't wait for it to happen we make it happen and we can because what God has done in us and what God is doing in us well our time is up and we're dismissed