

THE WAY OF
HOLINESS

sermon notes

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These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *The Way of Holiness: Experience God's Work in You* by Steve DeNeff (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010).

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About These Notes

The Way of Holiness by Steve DeNeff serves as the text for this sermon series. It also provides straightforward explanations of and practical guidance for Christians to grow beyond the point of receiving forgiveness for sin to experiencing the complete life change that God intends for them.

Trust the Lord to enrich your life and the lives of your congregation as you explore the way of holiness.



Only One Gospel: Accept No Substitutes

Introduction

Some substitutes pose a great danger. This was true in the province of Galatia, where false teachers had introduced a dangerous substitute gospel to the church. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatian church to issue a warning and to identify the true gospel clearly. He explained that there is only one gospel, and the Galatian believers must reject all substitutes.

Sermon Outline

I. The True Gospel Demands Exclusive Acceptance (Gal. 1:6–9)

A. A Tragic Desertion from the True Gospel

The Galatians had deserted God and the grace of Christ, and had accepted a “different” gospel. The word *different* means “of another kind.” This substitute gospel imposed Judaistic law-keeping on the Galatians, whereas the true gospel offers salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

B. The Character of the Substitute Gospel

The substitute gospel was a counterfeit. Paul said it was no gospel at all. It has produced confusion and was an attempt to pervert the true gospel. The substitute gospel must be avoided. Presenters of a substitute gospel may be friendly, suave, and persuasive, but their “gospel” is corrupt, and they are eternally condemned.

II. The True Gospel Carries Exclusive Authority (Gal. 1:10)

A. The Gospel Is God’s Message

It was prophesied in Scripture, it portrays God’s Son, and it presents God’s power for salvation (see Rom. 1:2–4, 16).

B. Our Responsibility Is to Proclaim the True Gospel

God doesn't change the message to accommodate the sinner; he changes the sinner (2 Cor. 5:17). In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff warns that we must not abandon the gospel for secondary causes, even good causes. We may be tempted to pick up what he calls "hot potatoes" (social and moral causes) but neglect the gospel (p. 11). It doesn't make an eternal difference whether a person responds appropriately to a message delivered by a professor, a politician, or a medical expert; what matters is how he or she responds to God's message, which has eternal consequences (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23).

Conclusion

We must remember the importance of staying loyal to the gospel. We must stay true to our Savior. What gospel do you believe in and live out?



A High View of God on High

Introduction

We live in an age of permissiveness, tolerance, and ignorance about the nature of God. The lower our view of God, the more permissive of sin and tolerant of deviant lifestyles we become. But a high view of God leads to a clear recognition of his absolute holiness, human sinfulness, and the need for cleansing. Isaiah’s experience in the temple makes these truths abundantly clear.

Isaiah lived in challenging times. Judah had descended to a spiritual and moral low point, and its long-reigning king, Uzziah, had died. Perhaps Isaiah was grief-stricken when he entered the temple. Regardless, in the temple Isaiah turned his eyes from Israel’s earthly king and focused them on its eternal King. We, too, should focus on our eternal King and gain an accurate concept of his holiness and our sinfulness.

Sermon Outline

I. God’s Holiness Confronted Isaiah (Isa. 6:1–4)

A. Separation Declared God’s Holiness

Isaiah saw God “seated on a throne, high and exalted” (v. 1).

B. Seraphs Declared God’s Holiness

The seraphs covered themselves and called to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty” (v. 3).

II. God’s Holiness Affected Isaiah (Isa. 6:5–9)

A. Convicted

The revelation of God’s holiness convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness. He had been pronouncing woes on others (5:8, 11, 20–22), but a glimpse of God’s holiness made him see how sinful he was. Job, Moses, Peter, and John also became convicted of their sinfulness when they caught sight of God’s holiness (Job 42:6; Ex. 3:4–6; Luke 5:8; Rev. 1:17). We, too, should feel convicted by the holiness of God.

B. Cleansed

Upon confessing his sinfulness in specific terms, Isaiah received cleansing. Isn't it a startling revelation of divine grace that God hears our contrite confession and cleanses us (see John 1:9)?

C. Commissioned

How can saved sinners serve God? Only by grace! God responded to Isaiah's desire to serve him by commissioning him to carry his message to Israelites. "Go and tell" is our commission too. How well are we obeying this commission?

Conclusion

A bumper sticker advises, "Jesus is coming. Look busy." Perhaps, instead of "Look busy," it should read, "Get busy." Apathetic Christians need to understand that God is holy and human beings are sinful. All of us need to get busy reconciling sinners to God. He alone can save the lost and make them holy.



*week 3 • Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:17–20;
Romans 8:7–8; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 2:3*

The Nature of the Sin Nature

Introduction

Why are many streets unsafe? Why does terrorism exist? Why are our jails overcrowded? Why do scandals mar politics, business, and religion? Why do married couples fight? Why do so many teenagers rebel? No doubt, you can add to this list of questions because you know human beings commit evil acts frequently and universally.

But what is the answer to all these whys? Should we blame poverty, lack of an adequate education, or unemployment? As we will see from God’s Word, the condition of fallen human beings is to blame.

Sermon Outline

I. The Character of the Sin Nature

Every human being—except Jesus—has inherited a sin nature from our first father, Adam. When Adam sinned, the human race sinned in him. We bear the image of fallen Adam with all its sinful tendencies, sinful desires, and sinful ambitions. We were conceived in sin (see Ps. 51:5).

A. Deceitful (Jer. 17:9)

The heart lies at the heart of humanity’s plight. Jeremiah 17:9 describes it as deceitful. In our fallen condition, we resemble the Devil, the Father of Lies. We see evidence of deceitful hearts in every walk of life, including politics, philosophy, business, and social relationships. We may call a dishonest statement “a little white lie” or “an honest mistake,” but in reality it is a lie sourced in a deceitful heart.

B. Desperately Wicked (Gen. 6:5)

Before the flood, God observed about humankind “that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (v. 5). Doesn’t it seem that this observation applies to our culture today too? How else can we explain beheadings by terrorists, muggings, robberies, murders, swindles, and a wide assortment of unconscionable acts?

II. The Conduct of the Sin Nature

A. Wars against God (Rom. 8:7)

Adam and Eve chose to obey their own will instead of God's will when they partook of the forbidden fruit. Consequently, the human race has been saying no to God's commands and yes to our own sinful desires. Isaiah said we have all gone astray like sheep and turned to our own way. Paul described our fallen condition this way: "All have turned away . . . there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:12). In Romans 8:7, he depicted the human race, dominated by the sin nature, as "hostile to God." A human being escapes the control of the sin nature and comes under the influence of the Holy Spirit only when he or she throws down the weapons of war and accepts the peace with God that Jesus procured on the cross (5:1; 8:1–4).

B. Commits Evil Works (Matt. 15:17–20; Gal. 5:19–21)

Jesus and Paul both described the evil works that come from the sin nature. The two lists read like rogue galleries. In our fallen state, as Steve DeNeff says in *The Way of Holiness*, "We fear and love the wrong things. We want and avoid that which is contrary to the will of God. Our desires are perverted; our passions are misdirected; our imaginations are unhinged. Dogs bark. Birds fly. Bees sting. Sinners sin. All for the same reason: It is their nature to do so" (p. 55). According to John Wesley, self-love is at the core of the sin nature (p. 56). He was right; evil works grow from the core.

III. The Consequences of the Sin Nature

A. Impossible to Please God (Rom. 8:8)

Can sinners compensate for their sin nature by doing good works that please God? Can sinners extricate themselves from the damaging effects of the sin nature? Paul's categorical statement in Romans 8:8 offers a resounding no to both questions: "Those who are in the realm of the [sinful nature] cannot please God." Until God saves a sinner, that person is helplessly and hopelessly lost and incapable of producing righteousness.

B. Incurs the Wrath of God (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 2:3)

God directs his wrath against those who live according to the desires and dictates of the sinful nature. They will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21), and are identified in Ephesians 2:3 as being "by nature deserving of wrath."

Conclusion

In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff reasons: "The surest definition of sin, the full ramifications of a decent conversion, and the trek toward personal holiness all begin with the discovery that evil lies in parts of our being we never knew existed. The journey begins with the passing from unconscious depravity to conscious depravity, or from sin to iniquity" (p. 60). Further, DeNeff points out that the treasure of genuine change is nearer than we think: "The secret password that will take us there is *repentance*" (p. 60).

If you have not trusted in Christ as your Savior, believe in him today. You will become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and by his Spirit, God will begin to restore the divine image in you (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

If you are a Christian, repent of thoughts and deeds that oppose God's will and be filled with the Spirit so you will not fulfill the lusts of the sin nature (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18).



About Face!

Introduction

Every soldier knows the meaning of the command, “About face!” When the order is given, the soldier immediately turns around, faces the opposite direction, and stands ready to march in that direction. The biblical command to repent is also an “about face” command. When we repent, we change our minds about the direction we are heading, turn around, and start going in the opposite direction. But first, it helps to know what is involved in true repentance.

Sermon Outline

I. The Character of True Repentance (Luke 15:17–21)

A. Conviction

In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff points out that true repentance is motivated by inner conviction. The Prodigal Son exhibited true repentance. He came to his senses and realized his actions had led to a desperate condition (v. 17).

B. Abhor Sin

DeNeff writes, “True repentance abhors sin” (p. 67). The Prodigal Son abhorred his sin. He did not say he had simply made a mistake. He called sin “sin,” and determined to tell his father he sinned against heaven and him (v. 18).

C. Change Behavior

“True repentance is changed behavior,” DeNeff states (p. 69). The prodigal refused to stay in the distant country and remain miserable. He chose to return home (v. 18).

D. Admitting Need

According to DeNeff, “True repentance begs forgiveness” (p. 70). Isn’t that what the Prodigal Son did? He threw himself on his father’s mercy by returning home, admitting his transgression, and admitting he was not worthy to be his father’s son (vv. 19–21).

E. Turning Around

Repentance for the Prodigal Son involved a complete about face. He changed directions. He turned his back on the distant country and the fleeting pleasures he had experienced there, and he set his face toward home and his father.

II. The Advantages of True Repentance (Luke 15:22–24)

The prodigal experienced a whole new life when he repented.

A. The Father Clothed Him

When a sinner truly repents by turning from his or her sin to the Savior, the Father removes the sinner's rags of sin and covers him or her with garments of salvation and a robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10; 64:6). He covers us with the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

B. The Father Celebrated His Return

Joy replaced despair as the father hosted a celebration to welcome the Prodigal Son home (v. 23). He announced that his son "was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (v. 24). Similarly, heaven rejoices over each sinner who repents (vv. 7, 10).

Conclusion

The Bible portrays lost sinners on a path that leads away from God. It may seem to be the right path for a while, but it ultimately leads to death—eternal death (Prov. 14:12). If you are pursuing that path, you need to repent, do an about face, and seek God's forgiveness. Will you do so now?



The Christian's Magnificent Privileges

Introduction

Living in North America has wonderful privileges, not the least of which is freedom. We are free to choose our spouses, residences, occupations, doctors, and even leaders. Of course, how we choose is extremely important. The cost might be considerable if we choose to marry the wrong people, live in dilapidated houses, pursue the wrong careers, select unqualified doctors, or elect self-serving leaders. But making good choices will almost certainly result in happy marriages, comfortable homes, fulfilling jobs, good doctor-patient relationships, and the benefits of living under wise leadership.

Fortunately, God did not leave the choice of salvation entirely to us. Paul offered praise to God for bestowing on us “every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). He explained the basis of this praise: God “chose us in him before the creation of the world” (v. 4). As a result of God’s choice, we have magnificent privileges.

Sermon Outline

I. The Privilege of Sanctification (Eph. 1:4)

A. Why He Chose Us

God chose us to be “holy and blameless in his sight” (v. 4). What a privilege! In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff wisely observes that “the whole doctrine of predestination has less to do with who goes to heaven than with the character of those who are going” (p. 84).

B. When He Chose Us

God chose us before the creation of the world. Long before we were born, even before God created Adam, he had us in mind and chose us to be “holy and blameless in his sight.” This pre-creation choice leaves no room for human pride. Choosing us was God’s plan. Choosing him was not our plan!

II. The Privilege of Adoption (Eph. 1:5–6)

A. As God’s Children

The biblical concept of adoption is more about the rights and privileges of being God’s children than it is about simply being in God’s family. In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff comments, “The idea of adoption, as it occurs in the Bible, is not so much lineage, but likeness. God is less interested in having us carry his name (say, as a “Christian”) and more interested in having us carry his DNA” (p. 90). The apostle John never lost the wonder of his position in God’s family as his child. He wrote, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). Paul left no doubt in our thinking about how we become God’s sons. He declared it is “through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5).

B. For the Praise of His Grace

We did not deserve to belong to God. The transaction is due entirely to his grace, and God deserves all the praise.

III. The Privilege of Redemption (Eph. 1:7–10)

Redemption refers to the purchase of slaves from the slave market and setting them free. That is exactly what God did for us. He purchased us from sin’s dominion over us, and he set us free.

A. Through Jesus’ Blood

The doctrine of redemption by Jesus’ blood does not appeal to many sinners who prefer to rely on their good works or religious affiliation for salvation. They insist that the doctrine is old-fashioned, but the Bible states clearly that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22).

B. According to the Riches of God’s Grace

Once again, Paul gave God the credit for our redemption. God forgave us not because we deserved forgiveness, but because he lavished the riches of his grace upon us.

Conclusion

In a popular folk legend, when Princesses Elizabeth and Ann were young girls, they were walking in the countryside not far from the royal residence in Scotland, when a heavy rainstorm caught them by surprise. They knocked at the nearest house and asked for shelter. A woman answered the door and asked, “Who are you?” Elizabeth answered, “We’re nobody, but our daddy is the king.”

We, too, are “nobody,” but our heavenly Father is the King above all kings, and by grace he has bestowed magnificent privileges on us. Because of that, we should praise him and lead holy lives that honor him.



Be Holy!

Introduction

God saves sinners to protect them from hell and give them a home in heaven. But he also saves them to make them holy. Often, believers appreciate the first reason, but ignore or reject the second one. Attaining holiness—personal purity or entire sanctification—may seem to many to be an impossible goal, so they don’t think about it. However, some accept this goal and attain it. Which group do you belong to?

Sermon Outline

I. Called to Be Holy

A. The Summons (1 Pet. 1:15)

The apostle Peter quoted Scripture to inform his readers that God had called them to be holy. God meets us where we are, but when he saves us, he doesn’t leave us where we were. He lifts us to a higher plain, and his Spirit helps us become what God wants us to be—holy.

B. The Standard (1 Pet. 1:16)

God’s holiness is the standard to which God has summoned us. The basic meaning of “holy” is separation. In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff points out that holy “has a moral overtone. It describes those things that are set apart and totally consecrated for spiritual purposes. They are pure, sacred, and dedicated to a single idea: pleasing and serving God and God alone” (p. 97). Our call to be holy mandates that we separate ourselves unto God and separate ourselves from what offends him.

II. The Confusion about Being Holy

A. Monasticism Does Not Make Us Holy (John 17)

In Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer, he identified believers as not of the world. He prayed that the Father would protect them from the Evil One. We are *in* the world but not *of* the world. Like a boat in water, we are safe and serve a purpose, but if water gets into a boat, the boat is in danger. Similarly, if the world’s philosophy and sinful ways penetrate our lives, we cannot serve God as we should. However, isolation from the world (monasticism) is not

conducive to holiness either. Paul made it clear that we should not forfeit all contact with sinners. To do so, we would have to leave this world (1 Cor. 5:10). The ideal is to be pure and holy in the world as we share the good news with sinners.

B. Legalism Does Not Make Us Holy (Gal. 5:1–6, 16–18, 22–23)

In his letter to the church of Galatia, Paul emphasized the folly of trying to please God by following rules and religious ceremonies. He pointed out that victory over the sinful nature is produced by the Holy Spirit as we cooperate with him.

III. The Conduct of Holy People

A. Love God and Others (Mark 12:30–31; 1 Cor. 13; Phil. 2:1–4)

B. Treat Others Respectfully (James 2:1–4, 8)

C. Fulfill the Moral Standards Written in the Ten Commandments (Rom. 8:1–4; James 2:10–12)

D. Obey God (Rom. 12:1–3; 1 John 2:15)

E. Pray (1 Tim. 2:8)

Conclusion

God does not command us to do what he does not enable us to do, neither does he command us to be what he does not enable us to be. He made it possible for us to be sanctified—holy and pure—by giving us his Word (John 17:17) and the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17–18; Gal. 5:22–23). Because God has enabled and called us to be holy, let us not evade holiness but embrace it.



Instructions and Encouragement for Pilgrims

Introduction

The Christian life is not a picnic, but a pilgrimage. We are on our way to heaven and pursuing holiness as we travel. As we seek to advance in holiness, we will likely encounter a few setbacks and the temptation to just settle into a comfort zone in which our pace is slow and our progress is minimal.

The Christians at Thessalonica had been saved from paganism and were making good progress in the Christian life. The apostle Paul commended them for this progress (1 Thess. 1:3, 7), but he knew obstacles lined their way. So he gave instructions and encouragement that would keep them moving forward in the pursuit of holiness.

Sermon Outline

I. Instructions (1 Thess. 5:12–22, 25–27)

A. General Instructions

1. Respect and love your spiritual leaders because of their ministry (vv. 12–13).
2. Get along with your fellow believers (v. 13).
3. Warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, and be patient with everybody (v. 14).
4. Don't take revenge; be kind (v. 15).
5. Pray for your missionaries (v. 25).
6. Greet fellow Christians warmly (v. 26).
7. Share Scripture with fellow believers (v. 27).

Christians who disregard these instructions fall short of holiness, but those who heed them develop and retain holiness.

B. Personal Instructions

1. Be joyful always. Holy men and women don't let circumstances get them down. Finding their joy in Jesus, they live above the circumstances (v. 16).
2. Give thanks in all circumstances. Holy men and women find there is something to thank God for in every circumstance (v. 18).
3. Do not extinguish the Spirit's fire (v. 19).
4. Do not despise preaching (v. 20).
5. Test doctrine to see whether it is correct, and retain what passes the test (v. 21).

6. Shun what is bad (v. 22).

If you discover you are not complying with even one of these personal instructions, confess and forsake the sin. Otherwise, you will stumble on your pilgrimage to holiness.

II. Encouragement (1 Thess. 5:23–24, 28)

God doesn't expect us to achieve holiness without his help.

A. God Sanctifies

Paul desired a thorough sanctification of the Thessalonian believers' "whole spirit, soul and body" (v. 23), and he offered this encouragement: "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (v. 24). The human spirit, made alive by the Holy Spirit, connects us to God. The soul is the seat of consciousness. The body connects us to our surroundings and is the part of us by which we express ourselves and enable others to recognize us. By mentioning these three components of the human being, Paul was instructing us to submit every area of life to God for his sanctifying work.

B. Grace Abides

Paul ended 1 Thessalonians with another word of encouragement. He prayed for God's grace to be with his readers. We could never be holy if it were not for God's grace. His grace not only saved us, but it also teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. It also teaches us to live a holy life (see Titus 2:11–12).

Conclusion

In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff describes the frustration and hope of progressive sanctification (holiness): "The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Christ is not merely the author of our faith, but the perfecter of it as well (Heb. 12:2). He, having already gone before us, is in the best position to move us up the incline and into the land over the top. As we progress, we will find . . . that the sins which weigh us down grow lighter as we make the climb, until finally and all at once, the last of them disappeared" (pp. 136–137).

Let's not grow weary on our journey!



The Sin of Living about Sin

Introduction

Do you think sin is not an issue in your life? Perhaps you believe you haven't sinned in a very long time. Or have you decided you cannot stop sinning because you keep on committing the same sin over and over again? Do you rationalize sinning, excusing sin by claiming you are only human? All of these responses to sin are lies.

In the first chapter of 1 John, the apostle John addressed the sin of lying about sin.

Sermon Outline

I. Lying about Sin Increases Guilt (1 John 1:5–8, 10)

A. The Guilt of a False Claim

Sin disrupts fellowship with God. If we walk in darkness yet claim to have fellowship, we lie. We fail to “live out the truth” (v. 6). We cannot clutch sin with one hand and God with the other. John referred to sin as “darkness.”

B. The Guilt of Self-Deception

Of course, if we walk in fellowship with God, we may think we are free from sin or even think we cannot sin. John considered such thinking self-deception. He wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (v. 8). In verse 10, he wrote that to claim we haven't sinned makes God a liar. The truth is we do sin. Paul wrote in Romans 7:15 that what he wanted to do he failed to do, and what he did he hated. His words emphasize the two kinds of sin: sins of commission, doing what goes against God's commands, and sins of omission, not doing what we know we ought to do (James 4:17). In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff mentions a woman who said she could not remember the last time she sinned. Another woman claimed she had not sinned in thirty years, while another insisted she had not sinned in a long time. DeNeff's response to those sins is poignant: “Really? Doesn't that depend on who's looking or to whom they compare themselves? I wonder what their neighbors would say if we asked them” (p. 139).

II. Confessing Sin Brings Innocence (1 John 1:9)

Fortunately, we don't have to retain our guilt about sinning. God has provided a way to erase the guilt and bring innocence to our souls. This removal of guilt occurs when we confess our sins, and our attitudes about sin agrees with God's attitude.

A. We Receive Forgiveness

God "is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins" (v. 9). God's forgiveness involves him removing them "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). As you know, east and west never meet, although north and south meet at their respective poles. We will never meet the sins God forgives.

B. We Receive Cleansing

But God does more than forgive the sins we confess. He purifies "us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff points out that the word *purify* is used in the Gospels to describe what Jesus did to lepers. He took their leprosy away and destroyed its power. DeNeff concludes, "When John [said] that our unrighteousness is cleansed, he [meant] that all of it is taken away. It is as gone as the leprosy that Jesus cured" (p. 143).

Conclusion

Love for God keeps sin at bay. If we love him, we will want to please him by obeying his Word and by hating sin. Jesus died for our sins. If we truly love him, we will not love what caused his atoning death.



*week 9 • Genesis 6:5; Romans 12:1–2;
Philippians 2:3–8; 2 Corinthians 10:5*

Mind over Matters

Introduction

If you own a computer and want to compose a short story, you will not be able to do so unless a word processing program has been loaded onto the computer. Even a very expensive computer cannot produce what it has not been programmed to do. Furthermore, if something undesirable has been programmed onto your computer, don't expect to get desirable results. Computer savvy operators understand the term GIGO, meaning, "Garbage in; garbage out." The mind is far more complex than a computer, but like a computer, it will produce what has been fed into it. Impure thoughts produce impure behavior, whereas pure thoughts produce pure (holy) behavior.

Sermon Outline

I. The Corruption of the Mind (Gen. 6:5–7; Eph. 2:3)

A. The Condition of the Mind

The fall in the garden of Eden affected the mind. Soon after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, evil thoughts erupted into wicked works. Cain killed his brother, and Lamech married two women and committed murder. Before the flood, the thoughts of the human heart had produced so much wickedness that the Lord was grieved that he had created humans (Gen. 6:5–7). So he judged the wickedness by sending a flood. The condition of the mind was still sinful after the flood, and wickedness continued and still continues today. Humans think evil thoughts, plan evil deeds, and perpetrate evil acts. Even a cursory reading of the daily news attests to the malevolent deeds that spring from corrupt minds.

B. Sinful Nature

In Ephesians 2:3, Paul wrote that before God saved us we followed the desires and thoughts of our sinful nature. Romans 8:7 states: "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God." Second Corinthians 4:5 indicts the Devil with the crime of blinding the minds of unbelievers. But there is good news. God can transform the mind.

II. The Transformation of the Mind (Rom. 12:1–2; Phil. 2:3–8; 2 Cor. 10:5)

A. Making the Mind Holy

Those who believe Christianity is a mindless religion are greatly mistaken. The mind plays an extremely important role in our relationship with God. Jesus said we are to love God with all our mind (Mark 12:30). How do we rid our minds of wrong thinking and fill them instead with love for God?

B. Dedicate Our Whole Beings to God

This act involves a refusal to let the world squeeze us into its way of thinking. The culture propagates a me-first, anti-God attitude. It values sinful pleasure rather than selfless service to God. We must say no to whatever wrong thinking the evil world system tries to slip into our minds.

C. Fill Our Minds with Scripture

When enough pure water is poured into a glass of dirty water, it displaces the dirty water and fills the glass with pure water. Similarly, we can displace bad thoughts by filling our minds with Scripture. The psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). Ephesians 5:26 also emphasizes the cleansing effect of God’s Word. As we become better acquainted with the teaching of God’s Word, we see life through the lens of Scripture instead of the lens of culture. We have a better understanding of God’s will and a greater desire to do it. We gain a holy, Christlike attitude. We think of ways we can serve God and others (Phil. 2:3–8).

D. Capture Thoughts

In order to transform our minds into holy minds, we must capture every thought that opposes God and truth and bring it into obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Having the Scriptures firmly lodged in our thinking enables us to detect false teaching and harmful philosophies and bring them into obedience to Christ.

Conclusion

The mind is a battleground. The Devil wages war there against the Holy Spirit. Evil thoughts multiply if we do not guard our minds against the Devil’s assaults. But right thoughts—holy thoughts—can occupy our minds if we submit them to the control of the Holy Spirit. The battle may rage on a daily basis, but “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).



*week 10 • Philippians 1:6; 2:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18;
John 17:17; Colossians 3:1–2, 16–17; 2 Timothy 4:11, 13*

Partners in Sanctification

Introduction

There is a catchy song that conveys a lighthearted message: “Don’t worry; be happy.” Of course, it isn’t always easy to be happy. It takes effort. It takes even greater effort—on God’s part and ours—to be holy, but it is God’s will that we should be sanctified (holy). Let’s see how God does his part to sanctify us and what we can do to cooperate with him in this very important aspect of the Christian life.

Sermon Outline

I. God’s Part

A. He Works in Us to Complete the Process (Phil. 1:6; 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:18)

God did not save us and then go off to care for the universe. He continues his work in our lives to accomplish his will (Phil. 2:13). We can be confident that “he . . . will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6). Some of us may have started projects but left them unfinished. Perhaps you started to build something but quit before completing it, or maybe you wrote a few chapters of a novel, but after several years those chapters have sat idle. It may be that a jigsaw puzzle lies on a table with a thousand pieces scattered everywhere. Fortunately, God will not leave the work of our sanctification unfinished.

B. The Holy Spirit Transforms Us into the Image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18)

The Holy Spirit gradually transforms us into the likeness of our Savior. Jesus had promised that the Spirit would bring glory to him (John 16:14), and he is doing so today in our lives.

II. Our Part

A. Study God’s Word (John 17:17; Col. 3:16–17)

Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify us by his Word (John 17:17). The Bible reveals God’s will and encourages us to do it. It also cleanses our lives (Ps. 119:9–11) and enables us to grow strong and knowledgeable (Col. 3:16–17).

B. Set Heavenly Priorities (Col. 3:1–2)

We will never attain the goal of sanctification if we set our hearts and minds on earthly things. It isn't wrong to have things, but it is wrong for things to have us. Love of the world wars against God's will for us (1 John 2:15–16), and the cares of the world crush us, keeping us from rising to the standard of holiness that God has set for us. We ought to set our hearts on things above, "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). We need to "set [our] minds on things above, not on earthly things" (v. 2).

C. Seek Helpful Fellowship (2 Tim. 4:11)

Bad company corrupts, but good company contributes to our sanctification. In his final days on earth, the apostle Paul urged Timothy to visit him in Rome, where he was in prison. He asked Timothy to bring Mark with him because he viewed Mark as helpful to him in his ministry. Are your friends helping you become holy? If not, try surrounding yourself with godly friends who will help you be what God wants you to be. Proverbs 27:17 states, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

D. Spend Time with God (Luke 10:38–42)

When Jesus visited Mary and Martha in their home, Martha was too busy to spend time with Jesus, but Mary sat at his feet and listened to what he said. Martha suggested that Jesus didn't care that she was busy and should have told Mary to help her. He replied that Martha was "worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (vv. 41–42). A reduced schedule might result in increased sanctification.

Conclusion

Do you recognize that God is calling you to be sanctified? Your response to his call may form a significant experience in your life, in which you offer yourself completely to him and desire to be holy more than you desire life itself. Is this the moment of opportunity for you to yield completely and unreservedly to God?



Traits of the Sanctified Life

Introduction

Suppose you lived in Florida and entertained a visitor who had never seen oranges. You might spend numerous words and much time describing oranges to him or her, or you could simply show that person an orange tree. It is more effective to show personal holiness than to just talk about it. Galatians 5:22–23 shows us what personal holiness is by presenting its fruit.

Sermon Outline

I. Cluster One: Love, Joy, and Peace (Gal. 5:22)

In sanctifying us, the Holy Spirit produces in us love, joy, and peace. Obviously, anyone can claim to be sanctified, but if he or she doesn't truly love God and others with a sacrificial love and exude joy and peace in walking with him regardless of outward circumstances, his or her claim is false.

II. Cluster Two: Forbearance, Kindness, and Goodness (Gal. 5:22)

Sanctified believers exhibit a second cluster of holy traits. The Holy Spirit produces forbearance (patience), kindness, and goodness in the sanctified. Generally the word *patience* refers to patience with people. The sanctified person tolerates difficult people and tries to help them develop pleasant dispositions. Holy people spread kindness and goodness in their interpersonal relationships. They stand out in a me-first culture by putting others' interests and needs ahead of their own.

III. Cluster Three: Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control (Gal 5:22–23)

Sanctified believers show a third cluster of holy traits produced by the Spirit. They are faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Faithfulness is fidelity or trustworthiness. We can depend on sanctified believers to be true to the Lord. They keep their word, and they perform hard tasks without throwing in the towel. They are gentle, submissive to God's will, teachable, and considerate of others. Like a well-disciplined athlete, sanctified believers exhibit self-control. They do not let anything interfere with their commitment to honor God, finish the Christian race, and receive the prize.

Conclusion

Christians who exhibit these three clusters of holy traits attract others to themselves, and, more importantly, they attract others to Christ. Let's trust the Holy Spirit to do a mighty work in our lives so his fruit will characterize our thoughts, words, and actions.