

Holy, Happy and Useful

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“As obedient children, do not conform to the devil's desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 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’ ” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

When things get rough and it is hard to keep a smile on the face, it is good to focus our thoughts on the fact that God's plan for us is to be holy, happy and useful. That, indeed, is a fact – a Biblical exhortation which can become true in our lives, irrespective of the adverse circumstances we may be in, when we persevere by His Grace and act in the light of Biblical truths.

BE SEPERATED

First, we must be holy. That is a Biblical truth. The Greek word for holy is “hagios”, which means, “to be set apart from the common for sacred use.” The Hebrew word for it means “separated.” Thus to be holy means to be set apart and consecrated for service unto God.

The Bible says to be set apart for God's service, a believer has to be separated from three things which are not holy in God's sight.

1. Defilement

For consecration for His chosen people, God instructed Moses to share this with the Israelites: “You are to be my chosen people. So do not eat the meat of any animal torn by wild beast; throw it to the dogs” (Exodus 22:31). In those days, eating meat torn by wild beasts was an act of defilement. To be holy, we must abstain from things which can defile us and mar the image of God in us. We must strive to make every effort to maintain the holiness that God demands of us. He again reminds us in Lev 20:26 : “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.”

2. Immorality

Paul in his exhortation to the Corinthians against immoral living said: “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” (II Cor. 7:1) A proper reverence for the Lord motivates us to keep ourselves holy inwardly and outwardly. It is also our guard against immorality.

Samson is a good example of how immorality can bring about one's downfall. He disobeyed God and began to live an unholy and immoral life. Then, he fell into Delilah's trap and eventually died at the hands of his enemies. Sin will destroy him and it will do the same to us if we do not heed God's counsel.

3. False worship and heathen practices

In the book of Leviticus one of the rules set by the Lord for holy living reads as follows: “I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by the following them, and I will cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy” (Lev 20:6-8). The Lord demands absolute loyalty to Him. He likened the act of turning to mediums and spiritists to that of prostituting oneself. Those who are engaged in such activities will not be spared from the judgment of God.

Holiness must be characteristics of the Christian lifestyle. It is God's will that the Christian life is distinguished apart from the world. In that setting apart from the world, the Christian finds a way out of all the things of the world that entangle him or her. The worldly things that tempt and beset us grew strangely dim as we become more holy and increasingly distant from the clamour of the world. In that spiritual distance, we can become holy. When we are close to the world; we are vulnerable to earthly values and it becomes easy for Satan to prey on our weaknesses and very subtly lure us into making compromises.

On the other hand, when we turn our gaze upon Christ and obey His word, we have hope to believe and, so, receive abiding love, joy, peace, good success, victory and fulfillment which only God can give.

CALLED TO BE HOLY

The call to holiness is emphasized by Paul in exhortations to the Romans: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom 12:1). The way we live – our speech and conduct – is an act of worship to the Lord. The challenge to us is to live a holy life in the midst of ungodliness.

The apostle Peter in writing to some believers said: "As obedient children, do not conform to evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you; for it is written: 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:14-16). When we desire to please the Lord by living a godly life out of reverence for Him, He will definitely keep and sustain us. We are not left alone in our struggles that we are unable to attain holiness.

THE MEANING OF HOLINESS

We often associate with somberness and mournfulness. Our concept of holiness is marred by what we see in pictures of religious devout men and women in the Eastern world. We think that to be holy we must put on a solemn and mournful look. This is not so.

According to the Bible, life in the kingdom of God, of which holiness is a characteristic, is not joyless. Rom 14: 17 says; "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

To be holy, therefore, does not mean to be mournful. In not conforming to the ways of the world, we can still find happiness. Psalms 16:11 says: "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasure at your right hand."

Holiness can only lead to happiness.

CALLED TO BE JOYFUL AND USEFUL

According to the Bible, holiness is actually a state of joy that is imparted by the Holy Spirit. Fullness of joy comes when we are in God's presence. When we put our faith and trust in God, our lives take on a new meaning and in Him we can live a full life - one that is filled with the joy of the Lord. The joy that comes from God Himself abides in us at all times, even through trying circumstances. It does not depend on or is affected by the things that happen around us for joy is directly God-given. Therefore, "rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!" (Phil 4:4).

To maintain this joyful attitude, we need the help of the Holy Spirit: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." When we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit always, the joy of the Lord will overflow from our hearts and radiate out and touch those who are around us. Our holiness will be contagious and draw others to Him. We can therefore be holy, happy and useful in the Lord.

Take Mary, for example. In the Magnificat, she expressed her joy at being chosen and used by God. "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour'" (Luke 1:46-47). When Mary responded to God's call, she knew that by His call she was set apart, became holy and she was filled with joy. God was then able to use her. She became a vessel and an instrument of blessing in God's hand.

God wants us to be vehicles of blessing to others. He wants us to be holy and happy so that he can fulfill His plan for human kind through us. In holiness, God brings us into a new dimension of joy, contentment and fulfillment.

When we think that it is impossible to respond to God's call to be holy, consider what Paul told Timothy in 1 Tim 1:12-14: "I think Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he has considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted out of ignorance and unbelief. The grace of the Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." By God's grace, we can, like Paul, be holy.

The Bible shows us a way. From Rom 12:1, we know that whatever we give to God, He takes, and whatever He takes, He cleanses (Matt. 8:2,3), and whatever He cleanses, He fills (Acts 4:31), and whatever He fills, He uses (Acts 9:17, 20).

There are only two lifestyles. One seeks gratification of the sinful nature and the other expressions of the Holy Spirit. The Bible states: "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6). Let us then, live the spirit-filled lifestyle which is holy, happy and useful.
(All scriptures verses quoted are taken from the New International Version Bible).

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