

Repentance - Holiness and purity

Hebrews 12:14

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see God"

1 Peter 1: 13-16

"Therefore prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you once 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, (Lev 11:44,45; 19:2)

Titus 2: 11-15

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.

These then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you."

In these days of exciting worship teams, great name speakers, mega church ministries, creative programmes like "Messy" church, large crusades -there is one thing that gets little attention and little emphasis in most churches, and in fact gets buried in all the "stuff" of church, HOLINESS.

Having listened to the three Scriptures this morning it is perhaps a little understandable why preachers may be reluctant to teach on what can appear to be a pretty daunting subject.

Most people's concept of holiness is that it is some state of spiritual depth that makes them more spiritual than others, or that it is some negative, constrictive lifestyle that is boring and uninteresting.

The story is told of a missionary in India who needed help to transfer a critically ill man from his house to a nearby hospital. She asked for help from two "Holy men" who were sitting not far away intoning their devotions to God. She said she would never forget the look of resentment that blazed in their eyes as one of them responded, " We are holy men, we are devoted to God, we never do anything for anyone!"

Holiness is not just what we don't do; it is very much what we positively do.

Holiness in the Biblical sense is almost always connected with actual lifestyles, not just with some state of mind. It is powerful, practical and positive.

The basic concept is one of separation: separation from sin and separation to God.

In the Hebrews reading we are told that "without holiness, no man shall see God"

Holiness therefore, is an absolute necessity as a discipline for the believer.

Let's look at this concept of holiness being active not passive as we look at the passage from 1 Peter:

In verses 13,14 we are told to prepare our minds for action, King James says, "gird up the loins of your mind" a concept the Jews of the time would understand as they wore long flowing robes and if they wanted to be ready to act quickly they would gather the robe up and tie it around the loin area. Today we might say "roll up your sleeves" to indicate the same state of readiness.

The purpose of this preparation is to be ready for action. Holiness is not some ecstatic spiritual state it is a call to action.

Peter then follows up with "be self-controlled" quite a quote from a disciple who in his younger days as a Christian was renowned for putting his feet in first and thinking afterwards! He has obviously learnt from his experiences. If we have truly repented and turned to Christ then not only should we aspire to be self controlled- but demonstrate it daily in our life styles in all areas of our lives.

Peter then goes on that we should "set you hope fully on the grace to be given to you" referring here to our expectation of Christ's return and the fact that we should be living our lives as if we expect him to return at any moment and to live in that expectation. How would Jesus see your life so far if He returned today??

Purity of living without excesses of self indulgence or reckless living and even religious excesses is what Peter is after here.

If we recognise who God truly is in our lives, the wonder and awesomeness of him and his grace to us then we will want to live in a way that is pleasing to him, to honour him and to serve others.

In verses 15,16 Peter states simply if God is holy and we have God in us we will want to live holy lives. He doesn't mess about trying to justify "holiness" and why we should live that way but bluntly states that God is holy therefore we, if we have truly accepted Christ as our Lord and Saviour and repented of our previous life style and sinful lives, can do nothing other than live holy lives. We cannot embrace the God of the Bible and fail to embrace a holy lifestyle if we are children of God.

Holiness requires us to perform in a manner pleasing to god and because God is holy that manner will be a holy lifestyle.

In Titus 1: 11-13 the apostle Paul is emphasising the same things to the young pastor Titus as he writes to encourage him in his ministry:

Holiness is a real change in how we live and what we think! It is NOT just a religious concept, it is a concrete lifestyle.

It cANNOT be legislated by man's laws

We cannot make others do it

It is something that we must do in our own lives as we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour and repent of our old ways, and cast of our old lifestyle and live it out as an example to others.

We cannot legislate morality and holiness, we can only as Christians live out in our own lives morality and holiness as a model to the world around us. If the church and Christians do not live a holy life then our calls for the world to be more holy will only fall on deaf ears.

Paul tells Titus here that God's grace should do two things:

help us," say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions"

and " to live self-controlled, upright and Godly lives in this present age."

Note Paul's use of the present tense here so it is an ongoing responsibility not just a one off.

If we want the world to see us as different, and if they don't why should they bother finding out more? We need to demonstrate our commitment to living a holy lifestyle:

We act differently,

we talk differently,

our values are different,

our perspective is different - eternal v temporal

And finally we need to live it out in our daily lives so that it shows to those around us that we have something different, not to boast in it but to attract them to it.

In verses 14,15 Paul talks about God's purification of us. God's purpose in saving us is to purify us and to help us live holy lives.

Salvation is meant to make a difference to the way we live if it doesn't are we truly saved??

Jesus gave himself " to redeem us from all wickedness."

Revival is contingent on repentance from sin, a turning from sin and sinful passions to holy living not only for non Christians but Christians as well. The very effectiveness of the gospel being preached from this pulpit may hinge on the purity of our lives before the world, they need to see real holiness at work not just rhetoric

A surgeon who selects a scalpel in the operating room to heal his patient will just as readily reject a scalpel with a small amount of on it as one that was severely defiled. As an instrument used to bring healing he looks for purity or he endangers the healing process. How can God heal our land if we , his people, are not clean? How can we be His instruments of healing if we are defiled as His people? Holiness is living a life of purity, of self- control from worldly passions.

Paul also points out here that living a holy and pure lifestyle makes us "eager to do good" we don't need to work at it, do it reluctantly or grudgingly because of our lifestyle and knowledge of who God is we will be eager to please Him by doing good works.

Paul then tells Titus he is to "encourage" God's people to live holy lives. I hope I've done that this morning

Secondly to "rebuke" those who would ignore God's call to live a life of holiness using the authority God has given him in his own calling and to be confident in the truths which he is teaching. I hope I don't have to do that this morning.

Holiness is a simple concept, it means being set apart by God to reflect His will in this world. Since God is set apart from the evil of this world we must be also. We cannot expect God to bring revival until as individuals and a church we are reflecting God's will in this world through our lifestyles of true holiness.

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Bibliography: Matthew Henry's Commentary- Marshall Pickering

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