

THE MEANING OF HOLINESS (PART 1) – SEPARATION FROM SIN

God expects us to be holy, doesn't He? These verses are not in your outline, but are in the bulletin.

Leviticus 11:45 "For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: **ye shall therefore be holy**, for I am holy." That was God's Word through Moses to the *nation of Israel*.

But God had Peter repeat those words—in the *form of a command*—to us as believers!

I Peter 1:15-16 "But as He which hath called you is holy, so **be ye holy** in all manner of conversation;

¹⁶ Because it is written, **Be ye holy**; for I am holy."

Three weeks ago, we looked at the *depth* of the command to be holy.

How holy does God command us to be? As holy *as He is*!

How holy *is God*? In a word...*perfect*!

Jesus says as much in **Mt 5:48** "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Two weeks ago, we looked at the *breadth* of the command to be holy. I mentioned during that sermon that I had somewhat of a weird "goal"—to *overwhelm you* with the amount of times God tells us to be holy! Not sure if I succeeded or not, but we did go through roughly **30 verses** to demonstrate God's desire for us to be holy! God's desire that we be holy is certainly not an isolated statement, though—it is a thread woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

So what does it *mean* to be holy? The *working definition* that I've given you before is simply this: to be "set apart" *from sin*—and to be "set apart" *for God*. Others refer to it as "separation from sin"—and "separation unto God;" or "separation from sin"—and "consecration to God."

Even though we've touched on it somewhat, this morning I want to expand on the first part—being *separate from sin*. **I John 2:1**—one of the many verses we looked at two weeks ago—starts out like this: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye **sin not**."

Pretty straightforward, isn't it? God's goal for us—*all of us* that belong to Him—is that we *not sin*!

But what *is* sin? That is what we are going to look at this morning.

Notice on your outline a quote from **J.C. Ryle**: "He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness, must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of *sin*." Two things I appreciate about that quote.

1) To have the right view of holiness, we need to begin by examining sin—to which I say, "Amen!"

2) Sin is a "vast and solemn" subject!

In fact, this subject of sin is so large that while "wrestling" with how to narrow it down, I told my wife that I feel like I'm trying to eat an elephant—all by myself—one bite at a time!

1. What is sin?

So how do we define sin? That is a broad subject in itself! One theologian pointed out that Paul used **10 different Greek words** for sin—just in the book of Romans! In addition to the different words Paul used, God also inspired him to write several *lists of sins*.

--Please turn to Romans 1:29-31. Here—in just 3 verses—Paul lists 21 different sins!

--In Romans 3:10-18, Paul gives 14 characteristics of unsaved individuals

--In I Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul lists 11 sins committed by some of the Corinthians b/4 they were saved

--In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul provides a list of the works of the flesh—17 of them!

--And in II Timothy 3:2-5, Paul lists 19 sins that will be seen in the last days—meaning now!

Some of these list's overlap, of course, but the point is this—God has *a lot* to say about sin!

So how would we define sin? **Ryrie** took the words Paul used for sin—plus some others found in both the OT and NT—and gave this **accurate—but rather lengthy**—definition of sin:

“Sin is missing the mark, badness, rebellion, iniquity, going astray, wickedness, wandering, ungodliness, crime, lawlessness, transgression, ignorance, and falling away.”

J.C. Ryle: “Doing, saying, thinking, or imagining, anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God.”

A.H. Strong: “Sin is lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state.”

Here’s one “**yours truly**” came up with while in Seminary: “Anything we do (I John 3:4), fail to do (Jas 4:17), say (Mt 12:36), or think (Mt 15:19) that is contrary to the character of God (Hab 1:13), the will of God (Eph 5:10, 17), or the Word of God (Jas 2:10).”

What I want to do now is take the definition I just gave you and break it down into its parts. In doing so, we will be looking at... **2. Ways we sin**

Let’s not forget the “Big Picture” and **why** we are looking at sin. God’s goal for us is to be holy—and part of being holy is to be separate **from sin**. But in order to be separate from sin, we need to **know what sin is!**

Notice again **our definition** “Anything **we do**...that is contrary to the character of God, the will of God, or the Word of God.” I’m calling that... **A. Sins of commission—the wrong that we do**

I John 3:4 “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression** of the law.”

The word “transgress” and “transgression” in this verse come from the Greek word “an-om-ee’-ah” which literally means “without law; lawlessness.”

Ryrie wrote: “It concerns **breaking the law** in the broadest sense.”

What law are we talking about? **God’s law**, right? God sets the standards—and His standards do not change!

There are **no new “councils”** that change God’s law—and there are **no new “decrees”** from some denominational hierarchy that “**change the rules**” after “x” number of years. God has not changed—and neither has His Word! **God’s Word** is the law—and any deviation from that law is sin!

I mentioned earlier that there are multiple “lists of sins” in God’s Word that we could turn to. One list that I didn’t mention is found in Colossians 3. Let’s turn there.

--vs 5 “mortify”—render inactive—your members (body parts)—so that you don’t do these things: “fornication [sexual immorality], uncleanness [impurity], inordinate affection [lust], evil concupiscence [evil desires], and covetousness [greed]”

--vs 8 “also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication”

--vs 9 “Lie not one to another”

Obviously just scratching the surface here....

But sin is not just doing things we shouldn’t do—it is also **failing to do** what we should do!

We call that... **B. Sins of omission—the right we fail to do**

That is the second part of the definition I gave you. “Anything **we fail to do** that is contrary to God’s Word.”

James 4:17 “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

We looked at some of those last week.

--We are to esteem other better than ourselves (Phil 2:3)—but often don’t.

--We are to meet one another’s needs (James 2:15-16; I John 3:17)—but often don’t.

--We are to bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2)—but often don’t.

--And we are to pray for one another (James 5:16)—but we often don’t.

Colossians 3 gives us some more things God wants us to do, starting in vs 12.

--vs 12 “Put on” bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering

--In vs 13, we are to forbear and forgive one another

--In vs 14, we are to put on charity—love
--In vs 15, the peace of God is to rule in our hearts—not worry
--In vs 16, the word of Christ is to dwell in us richly. We are also to teach and admonish one another
--In vs 17, everything we do is to be in the name of—for the glory of—the Lord Jesus
--In vs 18, wives are to submit to their husbands --In vs 19, husbands are to love their wives
--And in vs 20, children are to obey their parents Quite a list, isn't it?
And if God tells us to do these things—and we **fail to do them**—we are sinning against Him!

Back to our definition. What is sin? “Anything we do, fail to do, or **say**...that is contrary to the Word of God.

C. Sins in our speech

Mt 12:36 “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Eph 4:29a “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth...”

Col 3:8 says we should “put off” filthy communication—language

James 1:26 says that if our “religion” doesn’t “bridle our tongue,” our religion is vain, meaning worthless!

James 3 has much to say about the power of the tongue. For the sake of time we won’t turn there, but look at the verses on your outline.

James 3:2,10 “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect [mature] man, and able also to bridle the whole body. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, **these things ought not so to be.**”

There are I’m sure many more, but we must move on....

Back to our definition one more time. Sin is “Anything we do (I John 3:4), fail to do (Jas 4:17), say (Mt 12:36), **or think** (Mt 15:19) that is contrary to the character of God (Hab 1:13), the will of God (Eph 5:10, 17), or the Word of God (Jas 2:10).”

D. Sins in our thought life

God isn’t just concerned with what we do on the outside—He is concerned about **what we are** on the inside. And what we are on the inside is primarily influenced by our thought life.

Many of us are familiar with Jesus’ words regarding adultery.

Matthew 5:27-28 “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: ²⁸ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her **already in his heart.**” Jesus makes a similar statement about “thou shalt not kill” in Mt 5 as well.

What Jesus is saying, of course, is that sin is not just about what you **do**—it is also about what you **think!** Let’s turn to Mt 23 where we again see Jesus making a distinction between inward and outward sins. Notice verses 25-28. Self-explanatory, right? We can **look good** on the outside...on Sunday—and many of us do—but inside we can be full of “extortion and excess” ...and “uncleanness” ...and “hypocrisy and iniquity.”

So far, we’ve looked at **what** is sin...and **ways** in which we commit sin. What I want to consider next is...

3. Why we sin

Why do we sin? We sin because we are born with a sin **nature**.

We aren’t **born sinless**...then commit a sin...and consequently **become a sinner**.

We are **born sinful**—and it is just a matter of time before that sinfulness comes out!

Maybe I’m being a bit too simplistic, but I believe the sin nature is dominated by two attitudes.

A. I want to be the Ruler

God describes this attitude in the fallen angel Lucifer—aka Satan—in the following words:

Isaiah 14:13-14 “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”

Five “I wills”—uttered by Satan himself—with the last being “I will be like God!”

And if we are honest, that attitude exists within us. We are the most important person in our universe—**we think**—and will not be rescued from this attitude until God gives us a **new heart**.

Even then, it is still there—but it does not have to dominate our life like it once did.

The second attitude is similar to the first—and I suppose you could argue that it is the **other side** of the same coin. What is it? B. I don't want to be ruled

We don't see those words ascribed to Satan, but similar words are used to describe the attitudes of others.

Psalm 2:2-3 “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, ³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

The picture here is kings and rulers believing they can plot against God—and Jesus Christ—and “break” God's rulership over them. In their mind, they believe they can rebel against God—and “win,” so to speak!

Those of you familiar with Ps 2 know what God's response is. Ps 2:4 says, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh...” I can't help but picture a 2-year-old trying to “beat up” his Dad...and his Dad just laughing!

Lastly, let's consider... **4. How to defeat sin**

God commands us to be holy—part of which means He does **not want us to sin!** But we are born with a sin nature that is like a **fountain—or a factory**—that is continually producing the desire within us to be our own God—and to not have God rule over us!

Sounds hopeless, doesn't it? No wonder Paul—after describing the spiritual battle within him—cried out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24).

So what's the remedy? How are we to defeat sin when it is **impossible for us** to do so?

That's the key—realizing it is **impossible for us** to defeat sin!

But what is impossible for us is not impossible with God!

First... A. We need a new nature

Turning over a new leaf, trying harder, promising to do better...none of those things will conquer your sin nature. The only thing that can conquer your sin nature is a **new nature**. And the only One who can give you a **new nature** is God. And **God Himself**—in the person of the Holy Spirit—is the new nature! He is the One who will take up His residence in you.

On one hand, I hate to bring this verse up because I don't have time to adequately explain it. On the other hand, it is so pertinent to this discussion that I have to!

I John 3:9 “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

“Whosoever is born of God.” That phrase is used twice and means “born again.” Pretty straightforward

“Doth not commit sin” and “he cannot sin” is where the difficulty comes in. I John 1:10 says that if we say we have **not sinned**, we are a liar. We **know** we sin after we are born again, so we seem to have a contradiction. There is no contradiction, though, and the key to understanding this is in the tense of the Grk.

The idea simply is this: He that is born of God does not **continually, habitually** live a life of sin.

Why? Because His seed—meaning **God's seed**, the Holy Spirit—is in him—and remains in Him! And the HS makes a true child of God not want to continue in sin!

Step 1, then, is we **need a new nature**—and God automatically does that when we are born again!

But to defeat sin—and be holy—B. We need to nurture our new nature

That may not be the best way to state it because technically **God does not need our help**—but we certainly need His! Growth in Christlikeness—in holiness—is a **cooperative effort** between us and God. As we hunger and thirst after righteousness, **He produces** within us the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc.

Romans 8:29 refers to it as being conformed to the image of His Son.

II Cor 3:18 probably explains it the best: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

--We see the glory of the Lord in His Word. And as we **see who He is**—and ask God to help us be **like Him**—**God changes us** to be like Him from one degree of glory to another—by the HS working within us.

The nurturing of our new nature, then, is **not what we do**—it is **what God does** in response to our desire and neediness. If you are truly a child of God, God's Spirit is in you and wants to make you like Jesus!

Do you want that? Are you telling God you want that? He resists the proud—but gives grace to the humble!

So, what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, you need to be honest about your **view of sin**.

--How do you decide if something is sinful or not? You should want to know what God says—but do you? Stated another way, who decides what is sinful in your life: you—or God?

2. Second, you need to be honest about your **attitude towards sin** in your life.

--Does it bother you when you sin?

--Do you desire to be sin-free—to not sin—or doesn't it matter?

If you are truly a child of God, the Holy Spirit is in you. The Holy Spirit is Holy—and desires you to be holy! If you are not bothered by sin—and do not desire to be sin-free—you are not a child of God!

--That is not **my opinion**—that is what God says!

3. Third, you need to be honest about your **attitude toward God**.

--Your nature is such that **you want to be God**—and **don't want to be ruled by God**.

--But if you are His child, He has given you a new nature.

In just a moment, we are going to sing "I Gave My Life for Thee."

--Jesus did that, didn't He? He gave His life to pay the penalty of your sins.

But that **does not apply to you** until you receive Jesus for yourself. Have you done that?

--He is the Savior—is He your Savior?