

GROWING IN HOLINESS

1 Thessalonians 3:13

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The title of this sermon is "Growing in Holiness."
2. Do you know what "holiness" means? Do you know what the Bible says about holiness? Do you know how to pursue holiness?
3. I want you to take a look at this list, and pick the one which best describes your personal attitude toward holiness at this point in your life:
 - i. I actively pursue personal sin.
 - ii. I don't think much about it; sin just happens.
 - iii. I try to avoid sin most of the time.
 - iv. I feel regret when I sin.
 - v. I become angry when I sin.
 - vi. I become deeply grieved when I sin.
 - vii. I hate and detest sin and turn from it.
4. Wherever you find yourself, I hope you will learn a lot today, I hope that this message will inspire you to grow in holiness.

II. TEXT

1. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** "May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen."

III. 6 ESSENTIALS TRUTHS ABOUT HOLINESS

1. God wants you to be holy.

- i. What is holiness?
 1. Holiness is God's most important character trait.
 - a. In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God in heaven. The angels were calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord (Is 6:1-2)."
 - b. It means that He is perfect in His morality. 100% pure. Without sin.
 - c. **1 John 1:5** "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him."
 - d. God calls us to be like Him.
 2. **Jerry Bridges** "Holiness is conformity to the moral character of God."
 3. The root concept of holiness is separation, set apart. To be holy is to be separate from something, and separate to something. We are to separate ourselves from sin; and to separate ourselves to God's character.
 4. Other Definitions:
 - a. **Lewis A. Drummond** "Living a holy life simply means developing a lifestyle that is yielded, pleasing to God, separated from sin, and totally Christlike."

b. **JC Ryle** "A holy person will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ."

ii. Holiness is God's will.

1. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** "May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen."
2. Paul is not praying for something that is against God's will. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He is praying God's will.
3. In other words, holiness is a command.
4. **Leviticus 19:2** "Speak to the entire Israelite community and tell them: Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."

iii. Holiness is God's will for you, not just the preacher.

1. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** "May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen."
2. This is Paul's prayer for every member of the Thessalonian church.

2. God wants you to be holy in your heart.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** "May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen."
- ii. The heart is the inner-self.
 1. Attitude.
 2. Desires.
 3. Motives.
 4. Thoughts.
- iii. God wants you to be holy in all your conduct. But here the "heart" is stressed to ensure that it is not neglected.
- iv. God does not just want outer holiness, but inner holiness. Not just holy actions, but attitudes, thoughts, desires, motives. God wants you to be blameless in holiness.
- v. Jesus spoke of this in the Sermon on the Mount (Beatitudes).
 1. **Matthew 5:8** "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

3. God wants you to be blameless in holiness.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** "May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen."
- ii. Another definition of holiness is moral blamelessness.
- iii. We are to have a zero tolerance policy toward sin.
- iv. Our goal must be total and complete holiness.
- v. Notice how the following verses stress total holiness:
 1. **2 Corinthians 7:1** "So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."
 - a. "Let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity"

- b. “Bring holiness to completion”
 - 2. **1 Peter 1:15-16** “15 But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.”
 - a. “In all your conduct.”
 - vi. Don’t let the world or uncommitted Christians convince you that you can be too serious about holiness; that you can be too radical; too holy. You can’t overdo holiness.
 - vii. Do not settle for partial holiness. Do not be satisfied with 75% holiness. Strive for moral blamelessness.
- 4. God is the definer of holiness.**
 - i. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** “May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.”
 - ii. Notice the phrase “before our God.” This has three implications:
 - 1. Holiness in God’s sight, not just man’s.
 - a. Not just holiness in what people can see, but also in what only God can see.
 - b. We are to be holy in those areas and times when only God sees us.
 - c. Who are you it’s only you and God?
 - 2. Holiness according to God’s rules.
 - a. Don’t make up rules.
 - b. Man-made holiness does not please God:
 - i. Long sleeves
 - ii. Dresses
 - iii. No makeup
 - iv. Long pants
 - v. No dancing
 - vi. No card-playing
 - vii. No tattoos
 - viii. No piercings
 - ix. No alcohol
 - x. No caffeine
 - xi. No meat
 - xii. These are all man-made rules that have nothing to do with true holiness.
 - 3. Holiness according to God’s character.
 - a. The goal is not to be holier than unbelievers.
 - b. The goal is not to be as holy as the other Christians in the church.
 - c. The goal is not to be as holy as the pastor.
 - d. The goal is the very holiness of God – moral blamelessness.
- 5. God will hold you accountable for holiness.**

- i. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** “May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.”
- ii. Notice the phrase “at the coming of our Lord Jesus.” Why does Paul pray for us to be holy at Christ’s coming? Because when Jesus comes back, He is going to judge everyone.
- iii. **Matthew 16:27** “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each according to what he has done.”
- iv. When Jesus comes back, he is going to sit on his throne and judge everyone. The unrighteous will be cast into the Lake of Fire, and Christians at that time will be given their rewards.
- v. If you are a true Christian, you do not have to worry about going to hell. You are saved from hell. But the size of your heavenly reward depends on how you live your life on earth. More holiness equals greater rewards. Less holiness equals less rewards.
- vi. Many Christians are mistaken in that they believe that now that they are saved and heaven-bound, they can just live however they want without any consequences. That’s not true. The size of your heavenly reward will differ from others, and it depends in part on your holiness on earth.

6. God will help you grow in holiness if you pray for it.

- i. So how do we grow in holiness? How do we become less sinful, and more like Jesus? This passage gives us an essential step in the pursuit of holiness: Prayer.
- ii. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** “May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.”
- iii. In this verse Paul is praying for the Thessalonians to grow in holiness. This has two implications:
 - 1. We need God’s help to grow in holiness. We can’t do it on our own. You cannot grow in holiness in your own strength; without depending on God.
 - 2. We receive God’s help through prayer. Every day when you pray you should pray for God to grow you in holiness.
- iv. Is prayer all we can and need to do to grow in holiness? No. But it is the first and most important thing we can do.
- v. What else must we do to grow in holiness?
 - 1. Make a commitment to God to pursue holiness.
 - a. **Romans 12:1** “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.”
 - b. This presentation is a personal commitment to God; a dedication of oneself to God.

- c. What is a commitment? It is a promise to do something, whatever it takes.
 - d. Have you made a commitment to God to pursue holiness?
 - 2. Study God's word to get a clear and accurate picture of the will and character of God.
 - a. **Romans 12:2** "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."
 - b. Holiness is conformity to God's will and character. You cannot conform to it if you don't know what it is. You can't hit a target if you can't see it. Daily Bible reading, and listening to preaching are essential for growth in holiness.
 - 3. Start by cleaning out the bad.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:22-24 (NLT)** "22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy."
 - b. In the pursuit of holiness, before pursuing Christlike qualities of self-control, patience, gentleness, faithfulness, and love, first clean out the bad.
 - c. You will notice this pattern all throughout the Bible. Throw off, then put on; leave behind, then chase after; lay aside, then run; put off, then put on.
 - d. **Bruce Wilkinson** "The order is essential. You must cleanse yourself first, before trying to grow in Christlike qualities like love, patience, kindness, etc... Any pursuit of holiness must begin by handling those areas of your life which you have permitted to remain beyond the will of God."
 - e. Start by cleaning out the most obvious sins in your life – drunkenness; pornography; premarital sex; physical abuse; dirty language; stealing, etc. Then ask God to reveal the less obvious sins, like pride, jealousy, and covetousness.
 - f. As you clean out the bad, it becomes must easier to put on the positive character of Christ.
 - vi. The pursuit of holiness needs to be a daily, constant pursuit. Daily ask the Lord to grow you in holiness. Daily ask the Lord to reveal any sin in your life, and repent. Daily ask the Lord how you need to become more Christlike, a pursue it.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. In the pursuit of holiness, there is a very dangerous mistake that we must avoid. We must not pursue holiness to earn our way to heaven.

2. Some people believe that God is keeping a list of all the good and bad we do, and in the end if our good outweighs our bad, then God will let us into heaven. So, they pursue holiness to work their way to heaven.
3. But the Bible teaches us that we cannot earn our way to heaven. Why not? Because no matter how holy we try to be, we are still sinners, and the just penalty for sin is hell. If God gave you what you deserved, it would be hell. It may be a less painful part of hell than others, but it would still be hell. You have sinned against an almighty, eternal, holy, perfect God, and that's what you deserve. We can't save ourselves by trying to be holy.
4. So, how do we get to heaven? God is so good, in that while we were still sinners, He sent His Son to pay for our sins by dying on the cross. And anyone who believes in Jesus will be saved.
5. What does it mean to believe in Jesus?
 - i. It means to turn from self-directed life to a God-directed life.
 - ii. It means to depend on Christ's sacrifice, not your own good works, to get you to heaven. It is to believe that you can't save yourself; that you deserve heaven; but that Christ died in your place to reconcile you to God.
6. So, if we don't earn our way to heaven by trying to be holy, then why do we pursue holiness? Out of gratitude. Out of love.
 - i. When you give your mother a gift for Mother's Day, it's not because you are trying to convince her to be your mother. She is already your mother. You give her a gift out of gratitude for being your mother.
 - ii. We don't give God the gift of our holiness to earn salvation; we are already saved by putting our faith in Jesus. Instead, we give our holiness to God out of gratitude for Him saving us.