

## **WHY CHRISTIANS MUST PURSUE HOLINESS**

**Galatians 5:16-26**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. In Galatians 5:1-15, Paul wrote about two mistakes every Christian must avoid.
  - i. Legalism: Relying upon good works for salvation.
    1. False teachers (Judaizers) were teaching that faith in Christ was not enough for salvation; you also had to become Jewish, and follow all the Jewish laws.
    2. In response, Paul wrote that we are justified, or saved, by faith, and not by works.
    3. **Galatians 3:11** “Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith.”
  - ii. Libertinism: Using grace as an excuse to sin.
    1. Some in the church concluded that it was okay to live in sin. They reasoned that since the law does not get us to heaven, it must be obsolete, insignificant, irrelevant to the Christian.
    2. In response, Paul wrote that freedom from the law doesn’t mean freedom to sin; it means freedom to serve one another in love. And you can’t serve one another in love unless you keep God’s moral law. You cannot serve one another in love unless you start with the Ten Commandments, and move from there.
2. In the next section, Galatians 5:16-26, Paul is going to give four arguments against libertinism. To put it positively, these are four reasons Christians must pursue holiness.
3. What is holiness?
  - i. Holiness, like the fear of God, or loving God, is a mega-theme in Scripture. The word “holy” in its various forms occurs more than 600 times in the Bible. An entire book in the Bible is devoted to the subject (Leviticus).
  - ii. **Jerry Bridges**, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, “Holiness is... conformity to the character of God and obedience to the will of God.”
  - iii. **Jerry Bridges**, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, “To be holy is to be morally blameless. It is to be separated from sin and, therefore, consecrated to God. The word signifies separation to God, and the conduct befitting those so separated.”
  - iv. So, when we talk about holiness, we are talking about living a life separated from sin. In other words, the opposite of libertinism.
4. In the next few verses, Paul is going to give us four reason to pursue holiness rather than succumb to libertinism.

### **II. 4 REASONS TO PURSUE HOLINESS**

1. **God does not lead us to sin.**

- i. **Galatians 5:16-18** “16 I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don’t do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”
- ii. “16 I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.”
  - 1. Let’s define some terms:
    - a. Walk by the Spirit: To live in obedience to God’s Spirit.
    - b. Carry out the desires of the flesh: To sin.
  - 2. In other words, if you live in obedience to God’s Spirit, you will not live in sin.
  - 3. To put it differently, if you let God be in charge of your life, He won’t lead you to sin. He does not want you to sin. God doesn’t lead us to a life of libertinism, but to holiness.
  - 4. **1 Thessalonians 4:3-5** “3 For this is God’s will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, 4 that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don’t know God.”
- iii. “17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don’t do what you want.”
  - 1. There’s another term in this passage we need to define: Flesh.
  - 2. Used five times in this passage.
  - 3. It is your natural tendency to sin.
  - 4. Your natural disposition, or inclination to sin, or desire to sin. It is your unredeemed humanity. It is that part of you that still desires to find happiness apart from God. You might call it indwelling sin. It is natural sinful impulses. It is the old man of sin and corruption.
  - 5. Every human being is a descendant of Adam, and after he sinned, all of us were born with the natural tendency to sin. When you become a Christian, God give you a new nature, a new heart with the desire and please God. But the flesh, the natural tendency to sin, is still there. And it will be there until you die. There will always be an internal battle in your soul. Your deepest desire will be for God, but you will always carry the flesh, which is the natural desire to sin.
  - 6. John MacArthur explained the flesh with the story of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Lazarus had died and was buried. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, he had been dead four days. Jesus said, “Lazarus, come out!” When he came out, he was bound hand and foot with linen strips, and with his face still wrapped. Jesus

commanded them to unwrap him and let him go. Lazarus was alive with new life, but he couldn't fully express his new life until they unwrapped him. He stunk, and couldn't walk and talk freely because he was wrapped in the grave clothes. When you get saved, God gives you a new heart that loves Him and wants to please Him. This is the new ruling disposition of your life. But like Lazarus, you are still covered in the grave clothes of your sinful flesh. The difference is that Lazarus was freed of his grave clothes instantly, but you will carry the flesh with you until you die and go to heaven. Then at the final judgment Christ will give you a brand new body completely free from sin. This doesn't mean that you are doomed to sin, and you'll never be able to overcome sin. That's not true. It means the desire to sin, and the struggle with sin will always be with, even as you grow in holiness.

7. Paul's point in verse 17 is that your desire to sin comes from your flesh, and not from God's Spirit.
  8. So, the first reason to pursue holiness is that God does not lead us to sin. You can never blame your sin on God. You can never sin and then say that God told you to do it. God wants us to be holy.
  9. **1 Peter 1:14-16** "14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. 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."
- iv. "18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."
1. Before Paul moves on, He reminds the Galatians that just as the Holy Spirit doesn't lead us to libertinism, He also doesn't lead us to legalism. He doesn't lead us to holy living for the sake of earning heaven. Our motive for holiness is love and gratitude for God; to please and serve Him who has done so much for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

## **2. Those who practice sin will not go to heaven.**

- i. **Galatians 5:19-21** "19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
- ii. Paul writes that sin – those actions and attitudes which are against God's will – are obvious. Then he gives a list of fifteen sins, or vices. William Hendricksen divides them into four categories:
  1. 1-3: Sexual sin. "Sexual immorality, moral impurity, and promiscuity."

- a. The Greek word for sexual immorality is *porneia*, from which we get the English word “pornography.” But the Greek concept involves more than porn. John MacArthur says “it refers to all illicit sexual activity, including (but not limited to) adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, and prostitution.” It would also include consuming or producing pornography. The Bible’s standard for sex is clear. Sex is only for the context of marriage between one man and one woman. That means never before marriage, never outside of marriage, and never with the same sex.
- 2. 4-5: False gods. “Idolatry, sorcery.”
  - a. Idolatry is not just the worship of a false god, although that is part of it. It also involves worshiping a false concept of the true God, as well as putting anything before God.
  - b. Sorcery is the use of magic, the occult, witchcraft, tarot cards, horoscopes, psychics, Ouija boards, voodoo, etc.
- 3. 6-13: Strife.
  - a. Hatred: Extreme dislike or disgust (Merriam-Webster).
  - b. Strife: bitter, sometimes violent conflict or dissension (Merriam-Webster). Angry arguments.
  - c. Jealousy: Unhappy because someone has something that you would like or can do something that you would like to do (Macmillan)
  - d. Outbursts of anger: MacArthur “sudden, unrestrained expressions of hostility.”
  - e. Selfish ambitions: Pursuing what you want regardless of how it affects others.
  - f. Dissensions: Arguments and disagreement, especially in an organization (Cambridge).
  - g. Factions: A small group of people within a larger one, whose members have some different aims and beliefs to those of the larger group (Oxford Learner’s).
  - h. Envy: The feeling of happiness when someone else struggles, or sadness when someone else prospers.
- 4. 14-15: Alcohol. “Drunkenness and carousing.”
  - a. The Bible doesn’t condemn drinking, but it does condemn getting drunk. So this would include using drugs which prevent you from being in full control of your mind and body.
- iii. Paul says that sin is obvious, if you are willing to face up the truth. And this is not an exhaustive list. There are many more types of sins.

- iv. And he gives them a warning that those who practice these sins will not go to heaven.
- v. “Practice” is the key word. It means “habitually practice,” referring to one whose life is consumed by such evil. To practice in an unbroken pattern. It is someone who is not trying to repent.
- vi. What is Paul’s point?
  - 1. The reason we must pursue holiness is that those who abandon holiness for libertinism will not go to heaven.
  - 2. In other words, don’t think that you can live in sin and still go to heaven just because you believe in Jesus. That’s not true Christianity. That’s not true salvation. If that’s your attitude, then you aren’t truly saved. You aren’t truly heaven-bound.
  - 3. And there are many people like this. People who call themselves “Christians” but they are living together before marriage. They are practicing homosexuals. They get drunk every weekend. Paul’s point is that these kinds of people are not real Christians. They are not going to heaven.
  - 4. True Christians pursue holiness.

### **3. The evidence of salvation is Christlike virtue.**

- i. **Galatians 5:22-23** “22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.”
- ii. Next Paul gives us a list of virtues. Nine virtues. But this is not an exhaustive list of virtues. There are many more in the NT that are not listed here.
- iii. J.I. Packer calls the fruit of the Spirit “a nine-point profile of Christlikeness.” It is “Christlikeness of attitude and disposition.”
- iv. Over the next three Sundays, we are going to dive deeper into the fruit of the Spirit to learn how to grow in Christ.
- v. But Paul’s point is this: The reason why you should pursue holiness is that it is the evidence of authentic salvation.
- vi. When you get saved, God places the Holy Spirit in you.
- vii. How can you tell if God has placed the Holy Spirit in you? When He takes up residence in a person, He immediately goes to work to make you more holy; more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, etc. The indwelling Holy Spirit pushes Christians to grow in the fruit of the Spirit.
- viii. So, what is coming out of your life? Sin, or the fruit of the Spirit? Sin, or holiness? True Christians produce Christlike fruit.
- ix. Notice how Paul ends verse 23. “The law is not against such things.” In other words, true Christians don’t live contrary to the law.

### **4. True Christians have decided to turn away from sin.**

- i. **Galatians 5:24** “24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
- ii. Now Paul makes a very clear, very strong statement.
  - 1. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus.” Christians.
  - 2. “Have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” They have decided to repent of sin.
- iii. The word “crucify” is a strong word. It means to kill. We are commanded to kill sin.
- iv. **Colossians 3:5** “Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.”
- v. Paul is saying that all true Christians have decided to turn away from sin. All true Christians have decided to make a clean break from anything which is against God’s will. With anything that is displeasing to God. With anything that is unbiblical.
- vi. In other words, you can’t tolerate sin in your life and call yourself a Christian.
- vii. True Christians pursue holiness. True Christians turn from sin and pursue Christlike virtue.

### III. CONCLUSION

- 1. After giving four reasons why Christians must pursue holiness and reject libertinism, he closes with a command.
- 2. **Galatians 5:25-26** “25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”
- 3. “If we live by the Spirit.” The Spirit is the one who gives us eternal life, new life, a new heart. So, if you are a Christian...
- 4. “Let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” Live under the Spirit’s control. Let the Spirit direct your steps. Walk behind the Spirit as your leader.
- 5. If you are a Christian, then be obedient to the Spirit.
- 6. What is the Spirit trying to do? He is not leading us to sin. He is leading us to produce Christlike virtue. He is leading us to holiness.
- 7. If you are a Christian, then be obedient to the Spirit and pursue holiness.

### IV. INVITATION

- 1. This passage is a call for Christians to devote their lives to holiness.
- 2. Is there a sinful behavior or habit that you need to turn from?
- 3. Have you ever made a commitment to pursue holiness, to become more and more like Christ in your character, conduct, and convictions?
- 4. Would you make a decision today?