

THE MEANING OF HOLINESS

1 Peter 1:13-16

Intro: It seems that however far back you go in reading the history of the Church or of Israel, you always find those who lament that there is a lack of holiness among the people of God. The prophets of the Old Testament found it that way. This was the main problem that our Lord had with His disciples. There is no question but that the lack of holiness was the great problem in the early Church. You see it in all of the Epistles. Read the Reformers, the Puritans, men like Spurgeon and Ryle in the 19th century--every true man of God in between all of these, and afterwards, and this is the lamentation that we hear. And it seems that the more godly a person becomes, the more he sees a lack of holiness in his own life. So it is not a question of pointing our fingers at someone else; it is that we see that we are not spiritually what we ought to be.

Always in times of a spiritual awakening, the need for holiness of life has been keenly felt by the Lord's people, and steps have been taken to become more like God would have us to be.

I have become increasingly concerned about holiness as a result of our study of Hebrews on Tuesday. Turn, if you will, to two passages of Scripture in Hebrews 12--verses vv. 5-11, and then v. 14.

It is clear from these passages that:

- 1) Becoming holy is the object of all that God does in our lives by way of chastening us.
- 2) Verse 14 makes it clear that holiness is one outstanding mark of a true child of God. If a person is not to some degree holy, it is because he is not a child of God at all.

We might say that the lack of holiness to a great degree is due to people not being saved. If there is no evidence of a holy life, and no interest in it, that may very well be the problem. But that is certainly not the way that the writers of Scripture deal with the matter. In most cases in Scripture we see that the Lord's people are rebuked because they are not what they should be.

But, before we can seek to be holy, we need to know what we are talking about. What is the meaning of holiness?

There are many, many passages of Scripture which we could use, but I have chosen 1 Peter 1:13-16 as a starting point. Let us read it together. (Read.)

Let us call this:

I. PETER'S EXPLANATION OF HOLINESS (1 Pet. 1:13-16).

There are at least five things that Peter tells us here about holiness.

- A. First, it means a complete change from and break with the life we lived before we were saved.

We see this in v. 14.

In other words, in order to be holy we have to be different. There are things that we can no longer do.

Paul was in perfect agreement with Peter. See 2 Cor. 7:1--following his words at the end of 2 Cor. 6.

"The former lusts" can be quite respectable, or they can be positively disgraceful. But the point is that they all have to do with what we want, or what we want to do. The unregenerate life is a self-centered life, or at its very best, a man-centered life. It has no place for God. It is not concerned with His will. Therefore, the first step in holiness is to learn that God, His will, His glory, must replace us and every other person on the face of the earth.

- B. Secondly, holiness must affect every part of our lives.

We see this in the latter part of v. 15.

Holy is not something that we pretend to be when we are with the Lord's people, or when we are involved in some kind of Christian work, or an attitude that we assume when we go to church on Sundays. It is a mark that is upon us every day and in every hour of every day. It affects our behavior in every circumstance.

The person who pretends to be holy some times, but not at others, is a hypocrite! He may be saved, and has not really recognized what holiness is, but he is being hypocritical in his life.

- C. In the third place, (and this is related to the point that we have just been discussing), Peter tells us that holy is something that we are, not just the way we act.

See it in vv. 15 and 16--" . . . so be ye holy . . ."
And, "Be ye holy . . ."

We do not become holy by trying to do holy things. If this were the case, the hypocrite would be in good shape.

Look at the Pharisee that the Lord spoke about in Luke 18:9-14.

We need to remember what the Lord told Samuel when He sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king of Israel:

Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him (speaking of Eliab): for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

This is in 1 Sam. 16:7.

A holy person will do holy things, but that is not what makes him holy. He is holy when he is holy in his heart!

More about this later.

- D. Fourthly, let me take that same expression to point out another thing about holiness: To be holy there are certain things that we must do.

This is prominent in vv. 14-16 where Peter talks about:

- 1) Obedience.
- 2) Fashioning ourselves.
- 3) Be ye holy--two times. The first one (in v. 15) actually could be translated, become holy.

Anyone who is acquainted with the Bible knows that God uses means. We do not become holy just by wanting to be holy, or even because we pray a great deal. Read the works of holy men, and you will find that they all emphasize this very strongly. It is not that we are doing this by ourselves, but, by the grace of God, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, there are means which God has made available which will result in holiness. If we ignore the means, we will not be holy!

The last thing that I want you to see from Peter's words may be the most important of all.

- E. To be holy means to be like God.

See v. 16, and note that it is a quotation from Lev. 11:44.

Do you see what this means? It means that NT holiness is exactly the same as OT holiness. They were to be like God, and so are we! If we have any idea that we are capable of this by ourselves, such a statement should make us realize that we cannot do it alone.

These all give us Peter's teaching on holiness--not all of his teaching, but certainly the basic points.

But let me go on to point out some other general observations from this that we have seen in Peter's words about holiness.

For example,

II. THE PLACE OF HOLINESS IN THE GREATER SUBJECT OF SALVATION.

Our study of Romans should help us in this.

What are the three major divisions of salvation?

- 1) Justification.
- 2) Sanctification.
- 3) **Glorification.**

Where does holiness fit in?

Holiness is sanctification.

How can we distinguish between these three major divisions of salvation with respect to time?

Justification is past for any believer. Glorification is certainly future, we would all agree. That means that sanctification, holiness, is for the present. To show you how important this is, it is the one thing that needs to concern us from the moment we are saved until we are taken to be with the Lord!

That will become clearer when I make a few other observations.

III. BIBLICAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HOLINESS.

A. What holiness is not.

1. It is not perfection.

Holiness perfected is glorification. That will only be when we are with the Lord.

2. It is not mere morality.

That is one reason I dislike the term, Moral Majority. Just because you are interested in morality does not even mean that you are a Christian. It can cloud the issue for a lot of people as to what a Christian is.

Morality can be very self-righteous; even godless. But not so with holiness.

3. It is not sentimentalism.

~~There~~ are many well-meaning Christians who are like

a man I was speaking with this week at my sister's funeral. He said, "Take all denominations, and all doctrine, and stuff it in the can. Jesus is all we need!"

I agree that Jesus is all we need, but what about stuffing doctrine in the can. I did not have the opportunity to talk to the man, but I would have liked to have asked him, "Who is Jesus?" Everything he would have answered would have fallen into the category of doctrine. And yet he was a member of a holiness group.

Holiness, Biblical holiness, does not ignore doctrine; it is doctrine, and it is based upon the great doctrines of Scripture.

B. What holiness is.

1. Holiness is God-likeness--as we have seen.
2. Holiness is a life of separation from sin--sin, not as men define it, but sin as it is described in the Word of God.
3. Holiness is a life of obedience to God and to His Word.

To state it another way, holiness is a life of separation unto God. It is a life of submission to God. It is a life lived for the glory of God.

4. Holiness is a life of spiritual growth, where we never attain perfection, but press on toward the mark.

Cf. Phil. 3:12-14.

Concl: My purpose in bringing this series is first to teach us what holiness is, and how to be holy.

But in addition to that, my purpose is that we all may become more of a holy people.

Pray for me as I prepare these messages, and pray that all of us may become more holy in our lives as a result of the things that the Lord is going to teach us.