

## A Refresher on Holiness #1 and #2

*A Refresher on Holiness*

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For the topic that we have for tonight, next week and maybe a third week, we'll see how far I get, I'm giving myself some flexibility on what I want to say and the time that I take to say it, as we're going to consider a refresher on holiness. This is a topical study. We just completed a verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Ruth and I want to take a time now to give you some things to deepen and to shape and to solidify your affections for Christ. When we talk about a refresher on holiness, the last thing that I'm going to do here this evening is to give you a list of rules and do's and don'ts, that's not what we're after at all is those kinds of external things, what we want to do is to have a heart that is holy; a spirit of mind, a condition of affection that is set apart for Christ; that the affections and the priorities and the convictions of our heart would be what they ought to be. And what we are going to do over the next two or three weeks is this, is we're going to pull together a number of familiar themes that perhaps you wouldn't join together in your mind in one particular place and basically the question that we want to answer is how is it that we can live more pure lives as Christians? How is it that we can become more like Christ as we go through life? And for most of you, that is the supreme desire of your life because you have been born again and God has placed within your heart a new principle of life that is like his own nature that aspires after holiness and aspires after eternal things and Scripture calls us as Christians to grow in that condition of mind; for that way of thinking, that way of desire to more and more permeate our character so that we increasingly leave the world behind and are set even more apart for Christ.

The Apostle John wanted that for Christians. Look at 1 John 2. We'll look at a couple of passages here by way of introduction. 1 John 2, we taught through 1 John in 2012 and in 2013 as our church was being formed and so we go back to some material that we've looked at in the past. 1 John 2:1, John says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." One of the primary purposes that John wrote this letter was so that believers would be able to separate themselves from sin. That's a pretty basic premise. That's a pretty general outlook on Christian living. John says, "I'm giving you these things so that you can live a life where you're not sinning in the same way that you were before." It assumes that there will be a growth in our spiritual lives where we move away from our prior love for sin and we would increasingly be separated from it. John also said that he wrote so that our joy would be full, so that we would know that we have

eternal life. He kind of lays out three distinct purposes for this letter, but he especially highlights, "I don't want you to sin." This is God's will for us.

And let's think about it this way, there's just so many things on my mind, it seems like that's always the way it is; so many things trying to get out at the same time. I would want you to think about this idea of holiness from two general perspectives. We tend to think about it in the negative, "Stop doing these bad things or stop thinking these bad thoughts or stop saying those bad words," and there is an aspect of that that you do separate yourself from that but, beloved, for us here gathered together largely as members of Truth Community Church and our families, I want you to think about it this way, I want you to think about it more in a positive aspiration. This is kind of where we're going in terms of not simply avoiding the negative but in a positive sense seeing our lives in a sphere of relationships both vertically and horizontally that we want to honor; that we want to obey; that we want to contribute and have that influence so that it's not that we are simply avoiding something and then left with a vacuum, instead that these are the things that we love the most and it shapes the way that we want to live and what our convictions are, and so there's a positive and a negative dimension to it.

Now, as part of John's emphasis on holiness, he calls us to separate ourselves from the ungodly desires and ambitions of the world. Look at verse 15 of chapter 2, 1 John 2:15. I'm calling this "A Refresher on Holiness," it could be called "The Foundation of Practical Christian Living." 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." And look at what he says in verse 17, he says, "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." Now, verse 17 there, "the world is passing away, and also its lusts," that is designed to reinforce and to give you the strength that you need to obey verses 15 and 16: don't love the world, don't love the things that are in the world, the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life. Then he says the world is passing away. What is he doing there? Do you know what he's doing? It's something really basic and sometimes the most basic observations are the most important ones that you can make. Watch this: what he is doing is he is addressing your mind to comprehend a truth that will motivate you to obey the injunctions that he had just laid upon us in the prior two verses. Stay with me here because this is really important. The key to your ongoing spiritual transformation, your sanctification, the key to your spiritual growth is found in the battle for your mind, not in your emotions, not that you would live at a supercharged emotional level where you're just feeling really great and excited all the time about Jesus, no, that's not it. None of us can sustain that emotional high. The foundation that he goes for is in appealing to your understanding and what he says is that those carnal desires belong to a world that is passing away; that is destined for destruction; that will not last. And so he says, "Think about where that realm of desire belongs. It belongs to something that is going to pass away. Now, why would you give yourself over to that? Why would you give yourself over to that which is destined to die? "Instead," he's saying, "set your affections, set your desires, set your priorities, set your love on the things that belong to

eternal life and holiness." And so you are just meant to think through these things in a way that will change you.

Look at Romans 12, if you would, Romans 12:2. I want to show you a couple of passages to just re-emphasize for you the priority of the mind, the priority of thinking, and the priority of the mind as that which provides the foundation for change in you. In Romans 12:2, Paul says, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by," here's the means that leads to transformation, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Refresh your thinking with biblical truth that will result in a change in your desires and therefore a change in your life. The way that you think is central to the way that you live and the way that you think must be informed by biblical affections that will anchor you in truth, will anchor you in holiness, will anchor you in the right direction regardless of the storm waves that pound against you as you go through life. Emotion cannot keep you anchored because emotions are passing and changing and fickle. They depend on whether you liked your supper or not, at least my emotions often do as my wife could testify. Emotions are too fickle. You can't rely on them and so what you do is you feed your mind with truth that will establish roots that go down deep. You give spiritual nutrients to the soil of your mind and you think over these things and you mull on them again and repeatedly and you'll go back and you'll say, "Yeah, that's right. That's what's important to me. That's what I want to honor with my existence." So you're transformed by the renewing of your mind.

In a similar manner, Paul said in Philippians 4, look over there. I told you this would be a topical message rather than verse-by-verse. Philippians 4:8, another familiar passage. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." Ponder on them. Let your mind rehearse these things over and over again. Not hypotheticals about what might or might not happen in the future, you look at truth, you think on it, and you rehearse it in your mind repeatedly because that is what will feed the peace of God that surpasses comprehension in your life.

So, beloved, on a very simple basis, recognize this, especially you young people; what an opportunity there is for you at the front end of life as things are being shaped and developed in your mind to train your mind on these things. Here's a really key point for you young people to realize: what you think about over time is what will shape your character for life, and what you choose to think about, what you dwell on is what your life will be conformed to, and if you are thinking on truth, and this is true for you older people as well, those of you that are older than I am which aren't nearly as many as it used to be when I would speak but that's okay, what we think on over time is what shapes our character. It's like the lodestar that you move toward if you were out on the sea and you're aiming toward the North Star, that's what orients everything else. What you're thinking about is what shapes your life, beloved, you will progress in holiness if you fight and win the battle for your mind. Proverbs 4 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flow the springs of life." Proverbs 27 says, "As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man."

So this refresher on holiness is deeper than overcoming bad habits. It will help you overcome bad habits but it's so much more than behavior modification. We're not trying to modify your behavior directly, what we're trying to modify is the priorities and affections of your heart and behavior follows from that. What we are going to look at tonight and in the next week or two to come, covers all of life. It covers the cornerstone of everything that is important to you, and it will condition your heart to submit to Christ and to pursue obedience with your life; obedience in avoiding sin and on a positive manner, loving Christ with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. It presupposes that you've turned from sin and given your life to Christ for salvation; given yourself to Christ as your only righteousness before God, and it flows from that. And beloved, I'm about done with my introduction here, I don't hesitate to say that this expansive list that I'm going to give you over the next two or three nights will feed your heart for a lifetime. These are truths that do not get old. This is an ever continually flowing, bubbling fountain of clear pure truth, of clear pure glory from God's word that you can drink from repeatedly. Now, think about it from an aspect of human bodily thirst. You don't drink, you don't get thirsty and you take one drink and then you're done and you never get thirsty again. You go back to the same water again and again and you drink from it so that it is continually refreshing your body. Well, in the same way, these kinds of truths that we're looking at here tonight are the things that you would go back to and drink from again and again. You don't need new revelation beyond the Scriptures. You don't need God to speak to you personally as so many teachers love to claim that he does and none of those claims are ever true. What we do is we go back to certain key principles again and again and we say, "Do you know what? I love that more today than I did yesterday." And as you do that, it shapes you.

So here's the question: why is it that you and I should pursue holiness in our Christian lives? Why would that be important to us that we would not sin against Christ, that we would not drift into spiritual mediocrity, that we would not be content to be indifferent but rather we would be anchored, we would be motivated, we would love Christ and love truth so much that we would never abandon pursuing Christ as long as he gives us breath here on earth? Why would we be like that? What's so important that that would determine the way that we live? I'm going to give you 11 points, but not all tonight so relax. "Oh man, you usually take 70 minutes to give us three, well, you do the math on that and we're going to be here until midnight." No. No, it's not going to be like that. We'll start tonight, we'll go as far as we can and then we'll pick it up next week but overall there are going to be 11. I actually have about 19 points for this message but that gets a little tedious so I've cut it down to 11.

So 1, why should you resist sin? Why should you pursue holiness? Why should you be godly in this life and not give yourself over to the passing lusts of this world? Here's what you need to consider in your heart and, by the way, I think I said this but I'm going to say it again: there is no way that you could hear this once and absorb it all and all of the implications and then move on to something else. That's not it. I'm just going to lay this out tonight with the intention and the expectation that you would think through this and

meditate on it repeatedly in the days to come and that's the means by which you'll benefit from this, not simply by being here for the 55 minutes of this message.

So where do we start? What should we consider? Why do we pursue holiness? What is it that will make us holy? Well, 1, you consider 1: the person who saved you. We're speaking to Christians now. What do you think about? What do you consider? What do you love from your heart? You remember the person who saved you. What do I mean by that? Well, beloved, at the foundation of your life, at the cornerstone of your heart, there should be a settled recognition, a deep affection, an unlimited, unqualified devotion to your Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at 1 John 4, if you would. I go often to this verse and there's a reason that I do. This verse in chapter 4, verse 10, was a real pivot point at a desperate time in my life. I was reading this verse on the second floor of a Wendy's restaurant in downtown Chicago at one of the lowest points of my Christian existence and this verse reverberated in my mind in a way that really rescued me from the spiritual dungeon in which I was in as a young Christian. Let's start actually in verse 9 where John says, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." God loved us despite our sin and in order to address the separation and judgment that sin had brought upon us; he sent our Lord Jesus Christ into the world in order to offer himself as a sacrifice that would turn away God's righteous judgment against all of our iniquities; that Christ would give himself so that his blood would wash away all of our sins; that we would be forgiven completely of every transgression that we would ever commit against a holy God. And Christ did this not because we deserved that, he did that as an act of self-sacrifice, an act of self-giving, an act of selfless love for the good of your soul.

Now, think about that. God has loved you, Christ has saved you at the cost of his own life. His life, his sacrifice on the cross was that which turned away the wrath of God from your sins and he was under no obligation to save you. There was no higher law above God that compelled him to do that. This came from the inner resources of the love which is intrinsic to the very character of God. So what did Christ do? He left the glories of heaven for you. What did he do? He came to earth and lived a perfectly sinless life for 30 some years in obedience to God under the law, having set aside for a time the glories and prerogatives that were his as deity in heaven. He left all of that behind in order to walk as, in one sense, an ordinary man on the face of the earth knowing that he was ultimately going to the cross of Calvary. What did Christ do? What was this person who saved you? He endured the sorrows of Gethsemane as he interceded for sinners with such intensity, interceding and praying that it was though he were sweating drops of blood, so intense was his suffering in the garden. What did he do? He went to the cross. He endured the shame, the separation from his Father on the cross. He hung in agony, exposed to the world, unjustly being murdered by his crucifiers in fulfillment of the plan of God in order that your sins might be forgiven. Yes, he bore the wrath of God on your behalf and on mine. That's what Jesus did. That's what Jesus is like. Then what's more, what's more he was buried, he was raised from the dead and what has he done in the interim? What has

he done in the interim? He's gone away temporarily to prepare a place for you with the specific stated intention that he will come again and receive you to himself; that he might, as it were, bear you, carry you into heaven where you could be with him and share in his glory for all of eternity, you who did not deserve that at all.

Now, let's step back from that and just recognize and just honor our Lord Jesus and say that is unspeakably, incalculably great love that Christ has given to you, right? Okay, two amens out of about 80, that's great. All right, a few more. That is unspeakably great love that he has set upon you never to take away, never to be lost. Jesus said, "Nothing will take them out of my hand." Not only are you in that love, he has clasped you, as it were, in his omnipotent hand in a way that no one can pluck you out. This belongs to you forever. Eternal life is your present possession never to be lost. Wow, that's pretty great. That's pretty awesome. That's what Jesus Christ did for you.

Now, how does that affect you in your pursuit of holiness today? How does that affect your pursuit of holiness in life? Beloved, isn't it obvious that if Christ died for your sins, he died to remove the judgment of sin off of your shoulders, in fact, took that judgment on his own shoulders and bore our sins in his body on the cross, and if he died to deliver you from sin and he did that in love, then isn't it obvious that the very idea of sin in your life should just be unthinkable to you? You respect and you honor and you appreciate the love of Christ which has done so much for you and you say, "This makes my sin utterly ugly and evil and wicked and I don't want any part of it because not just because I don't want to do what's bad, it's because," get this, oh beloved, get this, grasp this and you have grasped the central nervous system of holiness in the Christian life, you say, "I want with my life no matter what else anyone else does, I want to honor that love of Christ with a proper loving holy response while he gives me breath here on earth. I want to honor that love." It's not about the rules at that point, it's about saying, "He has loved me like this and his motivation was to deliver me from sin, how is it that I could receive that love and at the same time still want and pursue that which he delivered me from? It violates the love of Christ to think that way." And so the love of Christ motivates you in a powerful way to holiness, not simply, it includes this, doing away with the bad things, but having an attitude of love and adoration and worship and sanctification that says, "Lord Jesus, you are the most important priority in my life. I honor you with my mind, with my will, with my desires. Everything is set apart to you in response to that comprehensive love that you have set upon me."

You see, you'll advance in holiness when you understand that sin is not first and foremost about breaking a rule. That's a pretty low level to live on, it will only motivate you so far. When you see that in sin you and I betray the person who saved us, oh, that changes everything. Now it's a violation of a relationship. It's a strike of retaliation against redeeming love. It's cosmic treason to embrace sin, to be willingly pursuing sin as a redeemed man or woman or young person. No, that's unthinkable, isn't it, when you put it all together? This great love, your response should be, "May I never sin against that again," as the fundamental conviction of your life. David in Psalm 51 said as he was confessing his sin with Bathsheba, understood this principle when he said, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." He said, "Here I am, the

anointed, appointed king. God, you have saved me. You chose me and what did I do? Oh God, oh God, I went out and I sinned against you after all that you had done against me. That is the worst stroke that my conscience could ever bear. Far worse than sinning against this woman, as sinning against the people, God, I sinned against you and that breaks my heart."

So when you see the love of Christ, when you remember the person who saved you, then, beloved, fidelity, loyalty to that love draws you to holiness and away from sin because you say, "It's just unthinkable for me to embrace that for which Christ died. I don't want to do that. The person who saved me draws me to holiness." That's point 1. That would be enough and, by the way, as we go through these different 11 point, as we go through these, I'm just giving you sample Scriptures. I know for certain that all of you could draw upon other Scriptures to reinforce these themes. I'm not trying to be exhaustive in the Scriptures that would point us in this direction, just to stimulate your thinking trusting the Holy Spirit to bring to your own minds Scriptures that have meant something to you that are in the same categories of thought. So you remember the person who saved you, your Lord Jesus Christ, and that makes sin seem dark and ugly and unattractive. When you remember Christ, it rips off the mask of a sinful mind and exposes it for the Satanic thing that is behind it and you say, "I don't want that. I hate that because I love Christ too much to want a life of sin or an act of sin."

What else can we say? All of these points begin with the letter "P," by the way. When I originally did this, I didn't intend it that way, it just felt out of my pen that way. Point 2, what would you remember? You remember the person who saved you, well, secondly, you remember the purpose of your salvation. Remember the purpose of your salvation. Why was it that God saved you? What was he after? What did he intend for you? Why did God save you? Look, I'm trusting that you all understand that he didn't save you because you achieved some personal level of righteousness and he said, "That's it. You triggered my blessing with your good conduct." That's not it. It was despite your demerit, not because of your merit that he saved you. And why was it that he did that? What was his purpose in that? Well, look over at 2 Peter 1, if you will. Why did God save you? What was the purpose of your salvation? 2 Peter 1:2 says, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." Verse 4, "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that," here's the purpose, "so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." Jesus Christ saved you, my Christian brother, our Lord redeemed you, my Christian sister, for the purpose of delivering you out of the corruption of the world. His purpose was to, as it were, pluck you out of the fire of the evil system of this world, of the evil that was within your own heart, the evil that surrounded you in the Satanic realm, and to graciously bring his loving hand and rescue you from that, to pull you out of that and set you apart so that that corruption would no longer be a mark of your own character.

So how do you respond when temptation or sin begins to entangle you? When the world beckons you into an ungodly frame of mind, into ungodly thoughts, desires and behaviors? What do you do? Your strength is found in a godly mind, in a biblical perspective, in remembering the fact that you are a Christian. What does it mean to be a Christian? You have been saved in order to be delivered out of that lust which is tempting you at the moment and you come back to the purpose of your salvation, "I was saved to be out of that and therefore I will resist rather than indulge. I will think godly rather than embracing the thinking of the world," you say to yourself. "The time for sensuality and ungodliness in my life is over. That's in the past. That is gone. The time for that ceased when I came to Christ because he saved me for the purpose to deliver me from the very thing that is tempting me here in what I'm facing."

Look over at 1 Peter 4:1. Remember the purpose of your salvation. The whole reason that you're a Christian is to be separated from sin. You have to, beloved, you have to know why you exist. You have to know why the Holy Spirit dwells within you. Why is that? Well, one of the preeminent reasons is that you would be holy; you would be set apart; you would be pure; you would belong to God and not to the world. He saved you for himself, to belong to him, to be like him. That's why Peter could say in 1 Peter 4:1, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose," there you go, the purpose of your salvation, "because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh," in other words, understand that the remainder of your earthly existence, your earthly life, is not "for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." You have a purpose established in your salvation and that is not to belong to the world and it's frame of thinking, it's frame of desires, but to be set apart for what God has for you.

And look at what Peter says in verse 3, "For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries." Do you know what? I can say this as your pastor because I know so many of you, I know your life story so well, I know that what I just read there in verse 3, for many of you, that was your biography, wasn't it? It kind of stings a little bit to remember that sensuality and drunkenness and lust and carousing and all of those things is what you used to belong to, well, understand that Christ has saved you from that. He delivered you from that. He rescued you from that. He forgave you of that. He has cleansed all of that. He said, "I'll take all of that guilt onto my shoulders. I'll bear the wrath of God so that you can be perfectly reconciled to God and those sins will never be brought up by God against you in a hostile way ever again." Wow, that's pretty precious, isn't it? To realize that that's what Christ did for us?

Here's the thing: remember that the purpose of your salvation was to deliver you from that. Most of you in this room, many of you listening on the live stream, you're glad to be delivered from that when you're thinking in your right mind, when you're not under the influence of temptation. Well, now arm yourself with that. Say, "God saved me from this, oh, and I'm so glad that he did." Praise God for that and now to realize that your purpose in existence, the purpose of your salvation was that you would be ever more separated

from that, delivered from that, distinct from that, and to realize that the purpose of your salvation is such that the time for sin is over. It's done. And that as Scripture informs your mind, you say, "No, no, that's not why I exist. That's not why God saved me." And so sin no longer becomes the attraction that it once was. You look through the temptation and you say, "That is contrary to the purpose of my salvation."

One thing that I would say here, just speaking generally as you remember the purpose of your salvation to be separated from sin, this has helped me over the years to realize this, I've said this in other settings as well: beloved, especially for some of you young men that are either here listening, will hear it in another media later on, don't think, don't let yourself be deceived into thinking that giving in to sin will make the pressure of temptation go away. What actually happens, the truth is just the opposite. Sinning once makes it easier to sin again. You say, "Well, I've already sacrificed, I've already compromised, why not, you know, there's not so much to lose." For those of you especially that are growing in your salvation, those of you that are growing in spiritual life, you're in the word, truth is becoming alive to you, you're loving Christ and you're seeing change in your life, well, beloved, let's ask a question then if that's you and I know that that's many of you in here: why? Why would you throw away your progress in Christ for the sake of a passing temptation that is in front of you? Why would you step back into the muck when you have already been washed and cleansed and are moving in a different direction? Why would you redirect yourself to the lust, to the drinking, to the other things that would call you back and would tempt you back as if it were some lover that you had rejected and she's calling and saying, "Come back to me." Don't pick up the phone. Say, "No! No! No! I've come too far to step back into that." Why cultivate sin when Christ is sanctifying you away from it? Remember the purpose of your salvation. Don't give new life, don't give new energy to those things that have been put away. If you have buried them, keep them buried. Don't resurrect that which cannot resurrect itself on its own power. Remember the purpose of your salvation.

So you remember the person who saved you; you remember the purpose of your salvation; thirdly, and this one is one that has helped me immensely. They have all helped me, point 3, consider this, consider the purity of your conscience. The purity of your conscience. Scripture speaks of this. I have often been strengthened to pursue holiness because I did not, this doesn't sound like a very high motivation the way I am framing it here, because I did not want to deal later on with the burden of an accusing conscience. Paul speaks about keeping a pure conscience, well, when you sin and you know that you're moving into sin and you do it anyway, when you're left with dealing with an accusing, bruised conscience on the other side, why would you do that? Why? Think about it in a physical realm. Why would you pick up a ball bat and deliberately hit yourself on the head with it and inflict that pain on yourself in a physical way? You would look at that, you would look at somebody doing that and say, "That is insane! What's wrong with you? Why are you doing that to yourself?" Well, in a spiritual way it's the same thing. Your pursuit of holiness is strengthened when you realize that you want to maintain a pure conscience.

Look at 1 Timothy which is back to the left of 1 Peter where you're probably at. Go back to the left, past Hebrews, past 2 Timothy and you find 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Verses 18 and 19, "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." You see, beloved, Scripture places a premium on keeping a clear conscience. Your clear conscience, oh watch this, your clear conscience is a source of power, discernment, and peace. When you realize that you have dealt with sin in your life, that you are not harboring unconfessed sin, that you're not trying to justify a misguided, sinful, unbiblical approach to life, then you have a clarity of mind and a peace of conscience about you that enables you to pursue holiness with a sense of purpose and direction and confidence. And when issues come up in life, you're dealing with people, maybe you're dealing with somebody who doesn't know Christ or a Christian who is kind of a little bit stubborn in their own sin, well, when you've got a clear conscience, you know what you're able to do? You're able to speak with conviction into that situation. You're able to say, "No, that's wrong. You can't do that," as opposed to being restrained and having to hold back because your own conscious is testifying against your own life. Why would you want that? Recognizing the priority of a pure conscience will help you avoid that which would wound your conscience in the first place and so when temptation comes, temptation is there and you're on the front end of it, you just say, "Do you know what? This isn't even appealing to me." Why is it not appealing? "Because I don't want to deal with the sense of conviction that comes on the other side of it. I want my conscience to be pure. I want to be strong in a clear conscience. That's a priority in my life," you say to yourself, and that strengthens you to pursue holiness rather than drifting back into sin and indifference.

You know what's nice about these things, one of the things that's nice about it is that I don't have to specify for you, I don't have to detail particular sins. You all have your own, you know, everyone has their own things that they deal with and struggle with. Well, these things apply across the board. These things strengthen everyone in their personal battles with sin regardless of what that might be. And what is more, beloved, again trying to keep the balance here going not just from that negative sense but in a positive sense saying and recognizing, "God has set me apart for this kind of life. This is why Christ saved me is for me to be like this, to make these matters of spiritual and eternal priority the things that define everything I want in life." And you say, "Okay, that's why I exist. This is the purpose for which I have been created. This is why God redeemed me was so that I would be a person like this who loves Christ supremely, who understands the purpose of my salvation, that lives with a pure conscience before God and before men. This is why I exist," you say to yourself. And informed by Scripture and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, you kind of set your feet and say, "You know, my foot is put down. I have put my foot down here on the principle of holiness and devotion to Christ and I shall not be moved from it." These things feed that.

Well, let me do one more for tonight and we'll save the rest for next week. It's not because I don't want to keep preaching. I do. I really do. I want to go another hour but

that wouldn't be wise and here's why: it's because you need time to process these things. It's better for you to have a few things to take out and think through rather than overload you with too much in one setting and so I'm going to stop with number 4 here. This is one you wouldn't think of right off the top. Why should you pursue a righteous life? Why should you avoid sin? Well, you remember the person who saved you; you remember the purpose of your salvation; you remember the purity of your conscience; fourthly and finally for tonight: you remember the prayers of the righteous. The prayers of the righteous. What do you mean by that? I'll tell you. Look over at Matthew 6. Matthew 6, and as you consider these things, here's what happens. This is like the cumulative impact, I love that phrase, I use it all the time, the cumulative impact of these things that we are talking about are like a rising tide that pull you out into the sea of holiness. It is a force beyond you. It is a current that carries you, the spiritual force in your heart carries you into ways that your own weak will could not do on its own. It ennoble you. It emboldens you. You have understanding and you say, "There can be no other response to me to these great biblical truths than that I would pursue a righteous life. There is no alternative." It's undeniable really. And see, I'm going to get to my fourth point in a minute but here's what you should do: you should walk out of here tonight with a singular clear conviction in your mind and that is this, that I am refocused, I am reoriented toward holiness and that is the life that I want, a life of singular, undivided loyalty to Christ that expresses itself in the moment by moment way that I think and the decisions that I make. I am set apart for Christ because these things have such power in my heart.

Fourthly, the prayers of the righteous. Matthew 6:13. Jesus teaches us, he commands you to pray in a particular way. He says this is one of the priorities for your ongoing prayer life and what does he say in chapter 6, verse 13? He says, "Pray this way, Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." That's the context, and then in verse 13, we'll slow down here. Jesus says, "And you pray this way, Father do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Do you pray that? Is it a proactive aspect of your prayer life? "Oh God, keep me from temptation because I know that I am prone to ignorance and foolishness and lust and so, God, before it ever comes, I pray that you would lead me so that I will wouldn't be entering into that. Deliver me from that kind of evil instead." Well, do you know what? Here's the thing, this is undeniable, Jesus commands you, your Lord says, "You pray this way. I mean it." And you're meant to pray that with a sincere heart that says, "Not only am I mouthing the words but this is the direction of my heart. This is what I want. Follow me." Can you pray that with one breath and with your next breath say, "Now I'm going to pursue sin. Now I will devote myself to the passing thinking, the passing fashions, the passing lusts of this world. Father, lead me not into temptation. Ah, there's temptation. I'll go for it." You can't do that, can you? That violates the whole spirit of prayer. You see what you do, beloved, is you recognize the awful duplicity that is intrinsic in that and you separate yourself from it. You say, "I cannot pray like Jesus taught me to pray and be earnest about it and then willingly embrace and pursue the passing lusts of this world."

Let me add another aspect to it. You're mindful of whose here around you, the fellow Christians you are with and your elders are all with you here. Do you know what? Do you realize that your friends and your elders are consistently praying for your spiritual growth? That they are asking Christ to advance his grace in your life, to sanctify you in truth? Are you mindful of the fact that there are earnest sincere Christians who love you that are praying, "Father, lead them not into temptation but deliver them from evil"? Are you mindful of the fact that there are Christians within this body that are just begging God to bless you so that you would enter gloriously into heaven, triumphantly riding in on a wave of a godly life into the applause of heaven itself? That's what's happening in your life. People are praying for you like that.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, would you set yourself against those kinds of loving prayers by pursuing a life of sin, anger, whatever your particular manifestation of your sinful life is? Would you swim against the current of the prayers of the righteous on your behalf? That's unthinkable, isn't it? That's an intolerable thought. Well, let the current of that say, "Well, if Christ commands me to pray this way and I do pray this way and I'm in a body that prays for me in this direction, why don't I go with the current instead of against it? The prayers of the righteous are carrying me in the direction of holiness, of devotion and faithfulness to Christ."

So to sum it up one more time, what is it that anchors you in a settled commitment to a holy character of life? It's the person who saved you, it's the purpose of your salvation, it's the purity of conscience, it's the prayers of the righteous all coming together to, as it were, corral you into a particular direction that you would live the kind of life that Christ has called you to until he calls you home.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we pray that you would take these things and apply them deeply to our hearts that they would shape our affections and priorities and convictions, that we would love not just the concepts of truth but that we would love Christ who is truth himself, and that there would be a purity, a singleness of unity in our desires that is undivided, set for loving Christ, and pursuing holiness as the only thing that we truly want in life. Help us to that end and help us, our God, to proclaim Christ who do not know him, help us to be faithful to proclaim the Gospel while you give us breath as we are pursuing this holy manner of life that you have so graciously called us to. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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