

Holiness: You can change: part 2

I've had a few ask "are going to get back into John?" and the answer is yes, but we're taking a short break to make sure we don't neglect topics that don't show up in John (or at least not until later in the book) things like (marriage, parenting, sanctification, the local church, prayer. That's why we're in Ephesians. So our goal in Ephesians isn't teaching every verse, but the goal of this series is to really getting practical about Prayer & holiness.

- We already spent 6wks on **prayer**. (Ch.3)
- Now we'll spend the next month or so on holiness.

(And side note: for whatever it's worth... A study of holiness is a study on sanctification. Holiness & sanctification are the same word in the original language, we don't have a word in English called holification, or we'd use it, so we barrow from the Latin and create the word sanctification. So a study on holiness is a study on sanctification. And that's what the rest of Ephesians is about.

Now, the question we've been asking (last week & this week) is: How does a Christian change and grow in holiness? (Last week) I think (for some of us) the answer was shocking, Paul (knowing the complexity of sin, knowing all the 5 billion valuables and unique aspects to our complicated lives and nasty problems, doesn't give us this sophisticated 4 step process to run all our many complicated problems through, he gives us a one-size fits all approach, he gives us ONE, (only one solution) for all change & all growth in holiness –**Christ!** ...to learn Christ, to know Christ. --- (Last week) we saw... Learning Christ is the key to Holiness.

- Knowing Christ isn't **a** step in the process of holiness
- Knowing Christ is **the** process of holiness.
- That all holy living flows out of knowing Christ. (Not just knowing about Him) ---but knowing Him
- That to be a person who truly knows Jesus is a person who lives like him, whose life resembles his.

Kevin Deyoung's book called "Hole in our Holiness" says, "the pursuit of holiness is a pursuit of Christ. We aren't just trying to be good people, Holiness isn't about just living up to a moral standard. It's about living in Christ." ---That was the sermon from last week. (v.20) Learning Christ & the truth that is in him, is to put off the old self, and put on the new self." Those that truly know him are those who put off and put on. (In other words) Those who know Jesus actually have lives that resemble Jesus. And if our lives don't resemble his, we -don't -yet -know -him. ---B/c when you know him, you are becoming like Him. We've got to understand...

- Becoming more holy isn't just learning a set of moral teachings
- Becoming more holy is learning a Person.

That was last week. ---So let's look again at this same passage and dig deeper, and come at it from a different angle. (1st, I want to get more **theological** & dig into the passage, then 2nd get **practical**)---How do we grow in Holiness?

1. You grow in Holiness knowing... "I am Holy"

Christians don't have to work hard to **become** holy, we **are** holy. (v.24) we've been 'created in the likeness of God in true righteousness & holiness' This is often called "Positional Holiness", so let me say this: you really can't make progress in holiness until you realize, you-are-holy.

- (1 Peter) "You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation" -that's who you are. (Not in yourself, but in Christ)
- (Eph 1) says, "In Christ, he chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy & blameless before him"

So once we're in Christ, we **are** holy & blameless before him. This is a legal declaration. We have been declared righteousness in Christ. Jesus blood has cleansed us from all our sin, and we are spotless & blameless in him.

Many Christians like to talk about Christianity like "Yeah, me and Jesus." But Christianity isn't so much (me and Jesu ...Christianity is (me in Jesus). ----And if you are "in Jesus" than... you are holy.

When someone is saved... They don't just become the new & improved version of their old self ... (just)...

- little friendlier.... little nicer... little more patient

No! (The Bible says emphatically)...the **old** you died & the **new** you is resurrected in Christ. “*The old is gone, the new has come*” (v.24) The day you were saved, you were “*re-created in true righteousness & holiness.*” ---So (In Christ)

- I’m NO **less** loved... (on my **worst** day)
- I’m NO **more** loved... (on my **best** day)

In Christ... there’s NO... **1st, 2nd, 3rd class Christians.** (Positionally) **you are holy** (in Him). Our passage “*we’ve been created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*” --(That’s positional holiness.) ---So i

- (In one sense) we are holy
- (In another sense) we must continue to progress in holiness (in our day-to-day lives).

But the question is... How? How do we learn to live holy?

2. You grow in holiness by keeping with repentance & faith

John the Baptist said “*bear fruit in keeping with repentance*” --The evidence you’ve been saved, you’ve learned Christ, the evidence you are positionally holy, is that you keep w/ repentance. --and this is one of the great tragedies in the modern church, so often in churches we...

- **Do** tell someone “*the only way to be saved by Jesus is repent & believe*” --Amen, that’s true, but...
- **Don’t** tell them “*the evidence you’ve truly repented & believed in a saving way is that you keep repenting & believing*” ----and...
- **Don’t** tell them, (what Paul is saying here) “*the way you grow in holiness is to keep w/ repentance & faith*”

It’s NOT hard to spot a Christian, (we’ll it is if we’re not seeing much of each-others lives, but if we could see each-others lives week in & week out it would be easy to tell if some was a Christian or not). If you were to follow a true Christian around for a couple months, you wouldn’t see a perfect person, you’d certainly see sin, but you’d see someone who hates their sin, someone who is seeking to “*put off the old self*” someone committed to “*putting on the new self*”

Q) Why? --B/c (v.24) says, they’ve been (supernaturally) “*re-created in righteousness & holiness*”

So don’t get me wrong... (I’m not saying it’s easy for us to put off the old self, but I am saying it’s natural)

- **Martin Luther** (taught the same thing about 500yrs ago). In fact, he was so sure of it, he wrote it on his famous 95 Theses and nailed it to the church door in Wittenberg, saying “*When Jesus Christ said “Repent,” he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.*” --
- **John Calvin** said, “*repentance & faith aren’t something that just happens (at the beginning) to make us Christians, but they carry us all the way to glory.*”

You cannot make it to glory but through repentance & faith!

- We **repent** our way into heaven!!
- We **believe** our way into heaven!! —it’s the only way to get there!!

Jesus said it (like this) “*deny yourself, take up your cross and following Me*”

- “*Deny yourself*” --(is a call to **repentance!**)
- “*Take up your cross and follow Me*” --(is a call to **faith!**)

Tim Chester wrote a great book called, “You can Change” (says) “*the central message of my book “You Can Change” is that you can’t change (at least not by yourself). He says, “You are changed by God through faith.”* He says, “*We can only change (meaning...grow in holiness) through ongoing daily faith and daily repentance.*” He says, “*ongoing faith, and ongoing repentance should be normal for all Christians.*”

Q) What kind of Faith is it? ----It’s faith aimed in two directions:

- Faith in the Promises of God --(for the **past**)
- Faith in the Promises of God --(for the **future**)
- **Faith** *isn’t* just looking back at what Jesus did on the cross
- **Faith** *is* also looking forward at who Jesus *is for us & will be for us* (in the future).

But NOT just (back & forward) ---right now... “**The Now-ism of the Gospel.**” When we’re trusting **all of who Christ is for us** (right now) in that moment ...sin has NO power over you.

Listen guys... if you've learned Christ, this is true of you...

1. **You are NOT the old self (v.17-19** --“you’re not alienated from God, your not futile in your thinking, you haven’t given yourself over to impurity) that’s not you anymore, (v.22) he says, “put off the old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.”
2. **You are the new self.** --Meaning you are someone who “has been created in righteousness & holiness” therefore, it’s natural for you keep repenting & believing, keep putting off & putting on.

Look at **the contrast** he's making...

- **Old self** is a lifestyle characterized by wrong thinking & wrong desires.
- **New self** is a lifestyle characterized by right thinking & right desires. ---that leads to (the rest of Ch.4)
- They put off lying, ...put on **speak the truth**
- They put off anger ...put on **gentleness**
- They put off stealing or stinginess, ...put on **generosity**
- They put off laziness ...put on **hard work**
- They put off rudeness ...put on **kindness & compassion**
- They put off bitterness put on **forgiveness** (for those who sin against them) ---that's the rest of (Ch.4)

Q) What are those things in your life you struggle to put off? --- (And notice I said “struggle to put off” which implies you’re trying.)

- Non-Christians don’t struggle, they just live in sinful patterns, they don't put it off.
- Christians put off some sin, (pretty easily) and struggle to get other sins off.

And... it really doesn't matter if it's (lying, lust, anger, anxiety (yes anxiety & worry are sins) substance abuse, cheating, stealing, over-eating) name the struggle or sin, and the solution (at its core is the same)

- The Bible doesn't give us 1,000 sophisticated ways to get rid of 1,000 different sins & problems
- The Bible gives us one method, one strategy, a one-size fits all approach, to deal with all problems & sins.

And we might be tempted to think “that's oversimplifying” but it's NOT, b/c ALL sins & problems stem from two sources, **the heart & the mind**. ----- (That's what this says)

And... I don't know how to teach this exactly? ---But I can tell you (from this passage) The battle we fight everyday against sin is a battle in two places: **The Mind & The heart**. --- (This passage says) our progress in holiness is very much dependent on...

- 1) What things we're desiring (in our **hearts**)
- 2) What truths we're believing (in our **minds**)

That right there is where the battle is won or lost for daily holiness. (In the **mind & heart**). (v.22) “put off the old self which is corrupt through deceitful desires” ---so repent of “put off” what? ----“Deceitful desires”

1. Deceit happens (in the **mind**) ---when you believe lies
2. Desires happens (in the **heart**) ---when you want sinful things

That's how we're being attacked, with “deceitful desires” (lies that appeal to our desires, lies that appeal to what we want deep down inside us) ---Q) What's the solution? He tells us (v.23) “To be renewed in the spirit of your minds” ---that's literally what it says, (v.22) “put off the old self which is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds”

- We're commanded to **Put OFF** ---wrong thinking & wrong desires
- We're commanded to **Put ON** ----right thinking & right desires

Q) How do we change our hearts? ---That's really the most important question we can ask. B/c Jesus said “all sin comes from our hearts” he said “from the heart come evil thoughts and sexual immorality, theft, murder, coveting, pride... all these evils come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:18-23) we must understand that all the choices we make, all the things we do, we do because we wanted to, because it was our desire --So if someone's **heart** (and desires) are changed, they're **behavior** will be changed.

Q) How do we change our hearts?

- Puritan **John Flavel** “*We can’t. We’re more able to stop the sun or make rivers run uphill than by our own skill and power rule and change our hearts.*” God changes our hearts, (we don’t change our hearts) God does, but he uses means... The Means by which God changes our **hearts** by revealing himself to our **minds**.
- **Jonathan Edwards** “*All truth that is given is revealed truth...and it must be received by reason. Reason is the God-given means for discovering the truth that God discloses ...while God wants to reach the heart with truth, he does not bypass the mind”—(He knows the Mind is the way to the heart. And if you change the heart you change the behavior)*

So the battle to live holy is a battle of...

1. Rejecting “*deceitful desires*”
2. Being “*renewed in the Spirit of my minds*”

- If you only **thought right thoughts** (and rejected all wrong thoughts) ...you wouldn't sin
- If you only **treasured & desired Jesus** (more than anything else) ...you wouldn't sin
- Q) How do we think right thoughts about Jesus?
- Q) How do we find our deepest satisfaction in Christ? -----The renewal of the mind

Ex: I asked our CG (on Wednesday) “How do we renew our mind?”---Here’s some things that are group mentioned, “The Bible as the greatest and primary way we renew our mind, but also reading good books, memorizing scripture, listening to the Bible on audio, coming to corporate worship services, fellowshiping with the church, and being with other believers, Lord’s Supper, prayer, The preaching of the Word.” (And I don't know about you, but sometimes I’m just too weak to do any of that other stuff and I just need to turn a sermon on and have someone preach to me. Or I’m discouraged then I show up at CG or Sunday service, and my heart is revived and my mind is renewed.)

But... there’s many things that we can do to **hinder the renewal of our mind**, (obviously neglecting any of the things that I just mentioned) NOT read your Bible, NOT coming to church, NOT praying, NOT listen to good music. –Listen... I’m sure there are **TV shows** some of you are watching that are just destroying your mind, they’re working against whatever efforts you’re making at renewing your mind. ----Sometimes Christians wonder “Why am I not growing in holiness? I’m reading my Bible everyday” –that’s good, but (if you’re reading your Bible for 5mins a day and watching TV 5hrs) which one is going to take control of your thoughts/ desires?

Martin Lloyd Jones said, “the key to putting off & putting on is the renewed mind”

Summary: We’re answering the question... How do we live holy?

1. **Know that you are holy** (positional holiness)
2. **Keep with repentance & faith** ---and repentance & faith happens more & more when our minds are renewed so we desire what God desires & think what God thinks.

Now, I want to get practical and ask this question:

Q) How is holiness hindered? How do you slow down the process of holiness?

A) You stop repenting & believing

So I’ve been making the case that... we grow in holiness through on-going repentance & faith, so the way to stop (or slow down) someone’s growth in holiness is to get them to stop repenting & believing.

-----So (last night) I sat down at about 8pm (and wrote out) 5 ways we can hinder holiness in our lives.

1) **Holiness is hindered by...** “Let Go & Let God approaches”

Some people think God is going to do everything for them, “let go and let God, God will put off my sin if he wants it off” –that’s just flat-out laziness, and really bad theology. (Col 1:29) “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” –God’s power is at work in our effort.

- Our **Salvation** is something *God does by himself* ---but...
- Our **Sanctification** (growing in Holiness) something ***we do with God*** (God does it. We do it.)

(Phil 2:11-13) "work out your own salvation (Sanctification) with fear & trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Growing in holiness is something ***we do & God does***. ----So we don't just sit around praying for holiness, we "Discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness"

---Now, obviously **we pray** for *personal revival & fillings with the Spirit & supernatural help*, but we do **NOT only pray**. We can't say, "We'll, I prayed for purity and the Lord didn't give me" b/c (Ps 119) says, "How does a young man keeps his way pure? by guarding it according to the word, and hiding scripture in his heart" --- (not just through prayer alone). ----we must *work*, we must *strive*... and we must *humble ourselves*...

- (Hebrews) says, "sometimes God sovereignly intervenes in our lives and disciplines his children that he loves that we might share in his holiness"
- (Other times) The Lord will send a brother or sister into our lives to **rebuke** us or **call us to repentance**.

Ex: I've seen many of you receive correction & rebukes over the years and you humbled yourself and learned from it, and God brought more holiness in your life. --- (None of us like *The Lord's Disciple*, or *being rebuked by a brother or sister in Christ*, but if ***we humble ourselves***, **God will use these things to make us more holy**).

2) Holiness is hindered by... Deliverance ministries

Deliverance Ministries are popular in charismatic circles (many 3rd world countries). They don't see **sin** as the biggest problem in someone's life, but **the demonic**. So the solution is to have somebody come around and lay hands on you & deliver you from whatever thing is making you do bad stuff. **Ex:** (In many parts of **Africa**) this is a big problem b/c *they have different demons for every type of sin* so you can just blame the demons, blame Satan, then you don't have to take personal responsibility for your sinful choices. But (**James 4**) says, "*we can resist the devil and he will flee from us*". According to the Bible, Christians are victims of the devil, Christians have power to "resist (NOT just demons) but the Devil himself, and God promises he will flee from you." --But (for many) it's easier to say "The devil made me do it." ----Then I don't have to repent for my sin.

3) Holiness is hindered by... Self-improvement techniques

Now, listen... self-improvement techniques really do work.

- **Ex:** I watched a **documentary** about *Tony Robbins* (very popular motivational speaker guru) and they follow him around at the 6 day seminar that he charges people \$5000 for the six days, but at the end of the 6 days many of these people are really changing behavioral patterns, they're really getting over addictions and anxieties, they've had for years ...but none of them are becoming more holy.

There are so many ways to change behaviors that actually work.

- **Ex:** That show *The Biggest Loser* helps people lose weight fast many people do end up changing their lifestyle & eating patterns.

Almost all these self-improvement formulas do work (at some level) but they don't produce holiness, nobody's becoming more like Jesus through these things.

Guys... it's very concerning how many churches & Faith-based ministries, that are seeing people change their lives, stopping bad habits, cleaning up their lives in some areas, without the gospel. And without the gospel, w/out repentance & faith. There's NO power in it, it's just teaching people to push around idols, to trade rebellion for religion & self-righteousness.

Joel Osteens preaching & books really do help people change, why do you think he's so popular? They work! people change! But they don't become more holy. ----**Q) How do I know that?** ---B/c

- He doesn't point people to **Jesus** ----(Jesus changes people)
- He doesn't lead people to turn from sin & turn to Jesus (That changes people)

4. Holiness is hindered through... Moralism & Religion

- **Every false-religion & cult** can show you all types of people that have changed, but they just haven't changed to look like Jesus.
- **Religion** is very good at changing people's *external behavior*, but it has no power to *change the heart*. Only the Gospel changes the heart. So if you leave the gospel out of your message if Jesus is absent from your ministry, there's NO power to help someone's heart change, and you will see no real growth in holiness.

5. Holiness is hindered by... denying, blame-shifting & making excuses (for sin)

Let's talk about this... b/c this a big one, this might be one of the biggest hindrances to holiness in the church today. It probably is. ---Now, There are two responses to our sin

1. We basically push it away (deny it, blame-shift, make excuses & try to justify ourselves, downplay it, basically push the sin away from ourselves. ---Or...
 2. We take ownership of it, (we *admit* our sin, we *confess* our sin, we *repent & put it off*)
- (1 John 1) *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins & cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* ---Only through confession of sin, can we become more holy. ---But there's a lot of Christians out there (unknowingly influenced by modern psychology) pointing people away from *confession & repentance*, and therefore away from change.

I submit to you that (ALL secular, and almost all Christian Counseling) is actually working against helping people change. I know they mean well and want to help people change, but if their advice is NOT rooted in the gospel of Jesus, and not calling people to put off sin & trust Christ, they can't actually help people really change at the heart level, only behaviors. ---How can I say that? ---b/c they are teaching people that their biggest problems are always *outside* of them. ---It's NOT helping people see their sin, confess it, and repent and believe the gospel, and rely on the Lord, it's teaching them their biggest problems are *outside* themselves, blame someone or something other than myself.

1. **Blame it on Other people.** It's always someone else's fault. You have a marriage problem *"my spouse is the problem, it's their fault, I do this behavior only because they do this behavior. They neglect to me, they are on organized, we have nothing in common, they aren't the same person I married, we feel out of love, I think I married the wrong person."* Usually people who put the blame on someone else can give amazing details about all the problems of the other person, they can articulate with much clarity the solutions to that other person's problems. But ask now what do you need to be doing differently and there's no in-depth answers here it's very simplistic not thought through or just completely denied all together. And does this not reminders of Adam in the garden, blame shifting, *"the woman made me do it, I sinned because she made me, she gave me the fruit, she's the real problem."*
2. **Blame it on the past** *"I act this way because I grew up in a dysfunctional family"* my parents were this way, they were too strict, they gave me too much freedom, they were too perfect and I can never live up to their expectations and godliness. So a man has an anger problem, but he seeks to justify himself saying, *"I'm not as bad as my dad was, compared to my dad, I'm calm."* Or *"I am in angry person because I grew up in a home with angry people."*
3. **Blame it on circumstance.** *"I had a bad day, work is stressful right now, The family has been sick lately, I didn't get much sleep."* Now, obviously all these things affect us, but external circumstances don't create problems (in our hearts) they simply expose the problems that were (already inside of us) Lack of sleep, stress at work, sickness in the family only manifest the sin that's already in our hearts.
4. **Blame it on your body or biology.** This last one is extremely popular in our day. We think science is the solution to all problems. In most cases it's the end-all of the discussion you bring up something biological or medical and it can't be questioned, even if they haven't run tests, even if their medical findings and scientific data or based off of simplistic questionnaires that are very general. But if the word "science" is used --we can't question it, it's fact. ---**Ex:** I was diagnosed with ADD multiple times in my life, but (at this point) I'm convinced my only problem was laziness & lack of motivation and once I became a Christian, I repented of my laziness and got some motivation and learned to focus.

I'm NOT trying to deny some people have medical issues, sometimes there are predispositions toward certain sinful tendencies, and even if science could prove a certain psychological predisposition to **anger** it doesn't justify *outbursts of anger*, (at the end of the day) the Bible says, "*put off anger*" God never allows us to blame our sin on a medical problem or biological pre-dispositions.

Ex: I'm thoroughly convinced that I have a tendency to get addicted to substances, (Before I was a Christian, I was addicted to steroids, other illegal substances, (after I became a Christian) I still struggled with addictive tendencies to Aderol, energy drinks. Priscila does not have the same tendencies, I do, but I can't use that to make excuses, I must put off whatever sins or addictions are in my life. So I think at best science can help us understand why some people struggle with some sins and others people with other sins, (but at the end of the day) all our sin must be put off and repented of.

- If my real problem is **other people**, what is the solution? --Change those people, not necessarily myself.
- If the real problem is **my biological make up**, What's the solution? --medicine.
- If my real problem is **my job or the stress in my marriage** what is the solution? --get a new marriage, get a new job.
- If the real problem is **my experiences as a child**, what is the solution? ---go back into my past and relive those events.
- If my real problem is **suffering**, what's the solution? ---avoid all suffering & pursue comfort.

Ex: There's a very **popular radio show** with "Christian counseling" that I've listen to it over the last 10 years or so, when I'm in the car around lunch and so I've heard probably 60-70 different people call into the show and ask this panel of PhD psychologist and Christian counselors for answers to their problems, and not one time have I ever heard them point to Christ as the solution. Never have I heard them tell someone that "*you're the problem and Christ is the solution*". Never once have I heard them open up the Bible to a passage like (Ephesians 4) and walk someone through it and help them learn how to think differently.

Ex: Pastor Cody is a certified Biblical Counselor, (he's full time on staff and would be happy to meet w/ any of you). He's been meeting with one sister (in the church) who had been going to a Christian counseling center (in the city) for four years without seeing real change or growth, after meeting with Cody for a few months she began to immediately see change & growth in holiness. Cody simply helped her to learn to put off the old self & put on the new self. ----Learn to think differently.

Ex: I was pastor recently who told me about a man in his church who apparently had a long history of sexual sin, and the wife said "*either get counseling or this marriage is over*", so he started meeting with this pastor I was talking to, and they met a few times, and the wife said, "*I want you to also go see a professional counselor*" so he went to a local Christian counseling ministry (and a few weeks later the man comes up to the pastor all excited "*I finally found out what wrong with me*" the pastor (very curious what he was talking about) said, "*What's wrong with you?*" --He said, "*Well, this counselor finally helped me see that many of the things that happened to me in the past really messed me up, then I have all these different stresses at work, and on top of that my wife is neglecting me, all these things are really what's causing me to act like I am*". The pastor (very wisely said) "*You are going to need to make a chose that counselor or me*" The man kinda shocked said, "What do you mean?" He said, "*This counselor is telling you the problem is everything outside of you and I'm telling you the problem is you*"

1. **Modern Psychology** put the blame on someone or something else outside me.
2. **The Bible** says...
 - The problem *isn't* something outside you, ----it's **you**.
 - The solution *is* repentance toward God & faith in Jesus.

And the first step of repentance is --**Confession**. That's where all change starts---"*I'm guilty, I sinned. It's my fault*" You can't be change & become holy, when you still pointing the finger at someone else or blame-shifting.

Repentance starts with confession.

Paul Tripp (in my opinion one of the greatest practical Bible teachers alive today) was speaking at Desiring God conference, his topic was, How does someone change?” He said 3 things: ---(they really sum up our text)

1. **Confession** (which is agreeing with God about your sin)
2. **Repentance** (Paul Tripp says is “*a change of heart*” John Calvin says “*repentance is a change of mind.*” The Bible says? *both*. –(Repentance is a *change of heart & mind* ...leading to a *change of behavior*)
3. **Faith** (which is recognizing that the big problems are *inside* of me (not *outside* of me) and knowing the only real solution is –Christ. ---It’s finding Jesus enough to help me in my time of need.

And that’s a good intro into The Lord’s Supper today. ---(I went long so I’ll just lead us into it) As you come get the Supper. -----(Confess. Repentance. Faith) ---that’s the right way to come to this table.

