

SECRET SINS: CONFRONTING THE SINS WE TEND TO MINIMIZE

INTRODUCTION

- The pursuit of holiness seems to have fallen on hard times within the church today
- There is an apparent lack of concern for holiness, godliness, purity and fleeing sin
- True, Christians in general tend to be good at avoiding major sins...sins like murder, adultery, etc.
- But, Christians in general don't seem to do as well with the more subtle, refined, or secret sins...the sins of the heart that are not as noticeable and may not carry as many external consequences, but are still sinful nonetheless
- These "acceptable sins" are subtle in the sense that they deceive us into thinking they are not so bad
- Yet, the pursuit of holiness must involve not only the avoidance of major sins but also the mortification of the more "tolerated sin" which germinate in the heart of believers

- A number of books have stirred my thinking on this issue:
 - *The Pursuit of Holiness* – Jerry Bridges
 - *Respectable Sins* – Jerry Bridges
 - *The Hole in Our Holiness* – Kevin DeYoung
 - *Holiness* – J.C. Ryle
 - *The Mortification of Sin* – John Owen
 - *The Enemy Within* – Kris Lundgaard
 - *The Holiness of God* – R.C. Sproul

REASONS WE MUST CONSIDER THIS TOPIC

The Concept of Holiness Seems Archaic to Many

- To many in our current generation, the idea of pursuing holiness is not cool
- It brings to mind images of long skirts, bunned hair, and a "holier-than-thou" attitude
- It smells of some kind of relic from a bygone era and seems to be a hangover from fundamentalism
- Pursuing holiness can often be reduced to being legalistic, prudish, narrow-minded, and old-fashioned
- The current hip culture often pushes the envelope of language, entertainment, alcohol, fashion, etc.

For starters, it was too common in the past to equate holiness with abstaining from a few taboo practices such as drinking, smoking, and dancing. Godliness meant you avoided the no-no list. Younger generations have little patience for these sorts of rules.

Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness*, 17.

- Because holiness is often associated with a particular style of dress and mannerisms or with abstaining from a few taboo practices such as drinking, smoking, and dancing, many balk at the concept of holiness as outdated and antiquated

We Do Not Take Sin in General Seriously

- There is a tendency today to minimize sin, to downplay its seriousness, and to soft pedal it
- This is often evident in redefining sin as “faults, failures, brokenness” rather seeing it for what it really is – people no longer commit adultery, they have affairs; people do not steal, they commit fraud
- Sin is often put into categories of “big” or “little” – yes, we must avoid the “big” sins, but the “little” sins are often dismissed as inconsequential
- This is evident from the scandals involving church leaders and regular pastoral meltdowns that continue to plague the church regularly

But what about our conservative, evangelical churches? Has the idea of sin all but disappeared from us also? No, it has not disappeared, but it has, in many instances, been *deflected* to those outside our circles who commit flagrant sins such as abortion, homosexuality, and murder, or the notorious white-collar crimes of high-level executives. It’s easy for us to condemn those obvious sins while virtually ignoring our own sins of gossip, pride, envy, bitterness, and lust, or even our lack of gracious qualities that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23).

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 19.

Yes, the whole idea of sin may have disappeared from our culture. It may have been softened in many of our churches so as not to make the audiences uncomfortable. And, sad to say, the concept of sin among many conservative Christians has been essentially redefined to cover only the obviously gross sins of our society. The result, then is that for many morally upright believers, the awareness of personal sin has effectively disappeared from their consciences. But it has not disappeared from the sight of God

Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, 21-22.

- All sin, even sin that seems minor and inconsequential, is serious in God’s eyes:

1 John 3:4 ~ all sin is lawlessness

- All sin without distinction is an offense to God and to break a portion of God’s law is to break it in its entirety

James 2:10 ~ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

We Tend to Neglect God’s Holiness

- Christians are called to be holy because God is holy

Leviticus 19:2 ~ Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16 ~ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

- We are not called to adopt a “cultural holiness” (conforming to behavior that our society deems acceptable), but rather we are to conform to the very character of God
- Holiness is one of God’s attributes...it is an essential part of His nature

Isaiah 6:3 ~ And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”

Exodus 15:11 ~ Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?

Habakkuk 1:13 ~ *Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness *with favor*.

James 1:13 ~ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

Revelation 4:8 ~ And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

- God's holiness is perfect freedom from all that is evil and involves all that is morally pure
- Because God is holy, He hates sin...God hates every lustful thought, every act of pride, every outburst of temper, every jealous desire
- We may minimize our sins but God hates them as an expression of His holy nature

We Forget What We Have Been Saved to

- We talk a lot about what God has saved us from, but little about what has saved us to

Romans 8:29 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren

Ephesians 1:4 ~ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him

1 Thessalonians 4:7 ~ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

2 Timothy 1:9 ~ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity

Hebrews 12:10 ~ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness.

1 Peter 1:2 ~ according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure

- God saved us so that we might be holy!

<p>In reality, holiness is the goal of our redemption. As Christ died in order that we may be justified, so we are justified in order that we may be sanctified and made holy.</p>
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J.I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 33.

- God justified us in order that He might sanctify us!

Titus 2:11-12 ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age

- Those who are justified will be sanctified!...In fact, any gospel which claims to save people without really transforming them and making more like Christ, is easy-believism
- God selected us in eternity past, saved us in the present, and sealed us for eternity future so that we might be holy!

We Lose Sight of Heaven Being a Holy Place

- Heaven is an entirely holy place...the Lord of heaven is holy...the angels that worship Him around His throne are holy...the inhabitants of heaven are holy
- Holiness permeates everything in heaven
- The new Jerusalem is a glorious place which shines with the radiance of God's glory
- There is no suffering, no chaotic sea, no more closed gates to keep out enemies, no tears, mourning, or crying, no death, and no nighttime
- The new heavens and new earth will be free from every stain of sin
- Because of that, nothing unholy can enter into this heaven

Revelation 21:8 ~ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Revelation 21:27 ~ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

[I]t's hard to imagine how we could enjoy heaven without holiness...Even if you could enter heaven without holiness, what would you do? What joy would you feel there? What holy man or woman of God would you sit down with for fellowship? Their pleasures are not your pleasures. Their character is not your character. What they love, you do not love. If you dislike a holy God now, why would you want to be with him forever? If worship does not capture your attention at present, what makes you think it will thrill you in some heavenly future? If ungodliness is your delight here on earth, what will please you in heaven, where all is clean and pure? You would not be happy there if you are not holy here.

Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 14-15.

We Misunderstand the Complete Aim of the Great Commission

- Typically, we assume the Great Commission is a charge to take the Gospel to those who do not know it, to see them come to Christ
- We think of it as primarily an evangelistic text, a mandate to preach the Gospel and make disciples by going to the nations
- While the Great Commission is all of those things, it is more than that

Matthew 28:19-20 ~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

- The Great Commission is about holiness!
- It is a mandate to proclaim Christ to the lost and to instruct them to obey Jesus
- Jesus expects obedience and holiness from his disciples; thus, the Great Commission is not complete until believers keep Christ's commands

The Gospel-Centered Movement Has Confused Some

- Among evangelical Christians who have adopted a Gospel-centered theology there is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are really centered on the Gospel, we won't talk about rules or commands or putting forth effort in our pursuit of holiness
- Words like "diligence," "effort," and "duty" seem to produce legalism

- So there is an emphasis on getting gripped with the Gospel, assuming that knowing the truths of the Gospel will automatically promote sanctification and holiness
- But when it comes to growing in godliness, the imperatives of Scripture are as crucial as the indicatives
- Trusting in Christ and the Gospel does not in any way nullify the need to put forth spiritual effort in our pursuit of holiness

Holiness is Hard Work

- Mortifying sin is painful and pursuing holiness is not without its difficulty
- Sometimes we would rather stay in our sin than fight it
- Also frequent failures in the pursuit of holiness become discouraging and lead to the desire to simply quit

1 Timothy 4:7-8 ~ On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.

No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given us the responsibility of doing the walking.

Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 10-11.

Philippians 2:12-13 ~ So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

1 Corinthians 15:10 ~ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

BIBLICAL EXHORTATIONS TO HOLINESS

- Holiness is one of the central themes of the Bible – the word “holy” occurs over 600 times in the Bible...more than 700 times when words like “holiness, sanctify, sanctification” are included
- The entire book of Leviticus is devoted to this subject
- The whole system of Israel’s worship is centered around holiness including a holy land (Canaan), a holy place (tabernacle/temple), holy utensils, holy objects, holy days, holy law, to be a holy people
- It is a theme that is woven through the very fabric of Scripture
- At its most fundamental understanding, holiness means “separation” – when something or someone is holy, it is set apart
- To be holy is to be morally blameless
- It means to be separated from sin and consecrated to God

- USAFA – cadets endure the rigors because they are set apart for becoming an Air Force officer
- Gettysburg – Because of the momentous events that took place there, Abraham Lincoln declared that place to be “hallowed ground,” a place that would be forever set apart with special significance

- In a similar way, because God is holy, He has called us to be holy...He has set us apart as Christians to live in a way that reflects His holiness

On the One Hand, Holiness is Spirit-Powered

- Our pursuit of holiness is not something we do entirely in our own effort
- The Spirit of God aids us in this pursuit by working in us so that we can be obedient to Christ
- We are given a new position through the Spirit and granted new power to defeat sin through the Spirit

Romans 8:9-13 ~ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; **but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

1 Peter 1:2 ~ according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure

- This takes place when the Spirit convicts us of sin, illuminates the Word of God, and drives us to Christ

John 16:8 ~ And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment

1 Corinthians 2:12 ~ Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God

2 Corinthians 3:18 ~ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

On the Other Hand, Holiness Involves Our Effort

- Growth in godliness requires exertion and spiritual sweat on the part of the Christian

Ephesians 4:22-24 ~ that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth

Philippians 3:12-14 ~ Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:5 ~ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 ~ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification

2 Peter 1:5, 10 ~ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge...Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

- The pursuit of holiness is not a “let go and let God” approach...it involves a divinely enabled toil and effort
- And this requires us to root out not just the obvious, external sins, but also the secret sins of the heart, the ones we tend to tolerate thinking they are less serious