

Lesson 2: Holiness does not come from righteous actions

Review: Last week we discussed Holiness and discovered a Holy life is far beyond attaining simple morality. We concluded Holiness is not morality. One can be a very moral man/woman and not have faith in God or a relationship with him.

Morality is a list of dos and don'ts, helping people fit into a society. The organized "church" has its own culture and morality. Many people believe the role of the "average Christian" is to attend church and simply strive to follow the rules and fit in. Even if they would never admit this is true, many rule followers feel justified based on their performance instead of justified by faith in Christ alone. This message is an absolute lie! Attending church and following their moral rules does nothing to save or secure the believer, worse it creates a lifetime struggle to be good without relying on the source of goodness... Holiness with God.

Martin Luther knew the struggle and discovered neither morality nor righteous actions could free us from our accusers. Works drew him no closer to God; it seemed they pulled him away. His labors for personal holiness brought him to a place of great depression and despair. Perhaps you've been there too. Luther wrote in his journal:

"When I was a monk I depended on such willing and exertion, but the longer [I worked at it] the farther away I got. I was very pious in the monastery, yet I was sad because I thought God was not gracious to me...I was a good monk and kept my rule so strictly that I could say that if ever a monk could get into heaven through monastic discipline, I was that monk. And yet my conscience would not give me any certainty... **Although I lived a blameless life, as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I pleased him with my works...** I was in desperation...I kept my vows devotedly, day and night, and yet I felt no repose in maintaining my duty so purely..."

The Solution: Martin Luther read "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*" (Romans 1:16–17). God opened Luther's heart so that he could realize, the power of the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God, for faith and faithful living. The power of God changes people and "The just will live by faith." Faith in God's power and righteousness became the source of Luther's lifestyle. Trusting that God would change him as he sought God produced an end of striving for holiness. He recognized holiness was secured by intimacy with God. Holy works were replaced by personal delight. As his personal love towards God grew, out of God's love for him, he found joy and purity and expressed it by righteous living.

That, my friends, is a secret worth sharing! There are so many miserable "holy rollers". We must understand and share, True morality starts with Holiness. Holiness is living a life of intimacy, set aside by and unto God. This love-life changes the man or woman as godly intimacy replaces institutional rules and carnal behaviors. Instead of living to be moral, a man or woman lives in harmony and intimacy with God. Holy living flows from the love relationship God established with believers. As Jesus taught, *if you love God, you will obey him. John 14:15.*

Today we will look at **Teaching Point #2. Holiness is not righteous actions;** it results in righteous actions. The story is much the same, but even more urgent, for many people think, if they just do enough, they will tip the scales of God's favor. It's a horrible trap of lies.

Many "believers" subscribe to a false belief they must "do righteous things" to become Holy. Like so many teachings of satan, **it's the inverse of that statement which is true.** Right outward actions flow from being in right standing with Holy God. Satan convinces men and women that all they must do is follow certain rules, do good deeds and avoid certain things to become holy to God. We are repeatedly warned to avoid these deadly lies.

Matthew 7:15 *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*

1 Timothy 4:1–5 *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, **2** through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, **3** who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. **4** For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, **5** for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

Acts 11:9... the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common {unholy}.'

Colossians 2:16–23 *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. **17** These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. **18** Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, **19** and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, **grows with a growth that is from God**. **20** If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— **21** "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" **22** (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? **23** These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

Let's admit, "People are attracted rules and actions they can perform without changing inside."

When I was a boy my family went to Old Tucson. Walking down the street where many movies were filmed was quite a treat. I walked on plank sidewalks past many buildings with simple names like "Bank, Saloon, Sheriff, Livery", etc. Imagine my surprise when I peeked through the glass windows and saw there was nothing inside. It was a façade, just a big empty space that appeared useful. There was no activity in the bank. No kids being educated in the school. The city was dead but very much looked alive. Activities were going on, but they accomplished nothing for the town. Living for the appearance of righteousness and morality is a lot like those buildings. Jesus called it white washing the tomb. Inside is death, outside is pretty paint.

A fake walk or an intimate relationship: As Christians we are invited to have intimacy with God. We will discuss more on this next week, but for now, I'd like you to consider that intimacy produces a higher morality and dedication to the works of God. Why? Because intimacy changed the heart. This change makes me want to avoid sin, not just because sin is wrong, but because it hurts my father. The focus of intimacy is closeness with God this causes a revulsion to sin. Desiring nothing but an uninterrupted relationship with God, produces right inward morals leading to right outward actions. Serving God this way is not "work" to avoid sin, but "delight" to honor our loving Father.

Living for "the rules" and not "for God" takes away the intimacy of faith. It also replaces our search for the deeper things of God with a checklist of required attitudes and activities. **Sadly, people can do the list and never know God or hear his voice; the highest honor in creation is replaced by rules and activity.**

People can work for God and never know him. Many who are devoted to works will die in their sins for they never "knew" Christ. Jesus said: **Matthew 7:21–23** *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

Notice the people Jesus talked of were especially active in the church but were lawless inside. They were prophets, people who said, "Thus says the Lord", people like pastors and teachers. They believed they casted out demons and performed mighty works in the name of Christ. The problem: They felt justified because of what they did for God, without knowing God. They were not in a relationship with Jesus. They were fake temples and workers, deceiving themselves!

Yes, faith at work produces works. Christians are absolutely called to be moral and righteous, but it starts with intimacy with God. In John 6:28-29 the crowds asked Jesus "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" This seems to be a reasonable request; one many Christians say daily! "God! What do you want me to do for your today?" Take a look at Jesus response, *"Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"* God's work, we must do, is to believe in Christ and be changed by him. Then He will lead you to righteous living.

The righteous life starts by knowing and believing in Christ. Our relationship with Christ is the only thing we can boast of. **Jeremiah 9:23–24** *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."*

Warning: There are many who know of him, but do not know him. They know, understand, and perhaps can even teach the attributes and words of God, but they are not in a daily intimate relationship with God. This is the danger of preaching Holiness by morality and

righteous actions. It creates a façade of attitudes and behaviors based on instructions instead of a relationship with the instructor.

Application: Walking in daily intimacy with God leads us to a new morality, filled with righteous deeds based on God’s character of Holiness and love. God did not call us to live in unrighteousness but with a new and higher righteousness that comes from intimacy with God’s Spirit. As we grow, we understand what interrupts our spiritual walk and seek to remove it; even better, God’s Spirit inside us leads us away from sin.

Romans 8:3–4 *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

We must notice first, God hates sin, all sin. God condemns sin. There is no room in the believer’s life for the littlest of sins. God demands we be Holy as He is Holy. Sadly, we could not live sin free on our own; we needed and still need a savior. In love God sent Jesus, not only to pay for our sin, but to prepare us for life in the Spirit. Now, because of this life **we can** live free of sin. This life is found by turning from the flesh to the Spirit. We desire to be further clothed in Holiness because of our intimacy with God. We see God who is absolutely Holy, and His Spirit pulls us to in that direction.

2 Corinthians 5:4–5 (ESV) — 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that **what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.** **5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.**

As we have seen, the position of Holiness is not without effect. It produces a yearning to be further clothed in the holiness of God and in the righteousness of his conduct.

Next week we will look at perils and pearls of Holiness. Practicing holiness does involve effort on our part. Though there is a holiness we are given (positional holiness) there is one we strive for (practical holiness). The path is long and sometimes painful, and yet it is also wonderful and sweet. We trust in God who works in us as we agree to submit to his individual will for our lives.

Let’s end with this.

1. Have you placed your faith in the Holiness you have attained by deeds and morals?
2. Do you long to be intimately united with God? —this person trusts God and his plan.
3. How can you cultivate private time alone with God this week?
4. What does God call you, in love, to let go of—is He asking you to make changes based on the Holiness you are already granted in him?

Are you afraid you will somehow miss out on what God has for you? If so, spend a few minutes this week contemplating Martin Luther’s story. Perhaps yours is much the same.