



Be Ye Holy

Leviticus 19:2

1. God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2c).

2. You Need to be Holy (Leviticus 19:2b).

As a freshman in college, I remember taking a philosophy class, where we read portions of Plato's Republic. And I remember spending quite a bit of time discussing Plato's allegory of the cave (which is found at the beginning of book 7). In this allegory, Plato tells of a cave in which are seated some prisoners, whose legs and necks are chained in such a way that they can never leave the cave. Furthermore, they can only look into the cave. These prisoners have been living in the cave in this manner from their youth and they know no other experience. Behind these prisoners burns a fire, big and bright. Between the fire and these prisoners is a low wall upon which marionette players are able to use puppets to cast shadows upon a wall in front of the prisoners that they can see. In these shadows, these puppets can be seen to be holding images of men and animals, wood and stone. At times these puppets will speak to each other. As they do, their speech echoes off this wall in front of the prisoners, which gives the impression that the voices are actually coming from the shadows themselves.

It's really a strange sort of story. But, it is an allegory that Plato used it to speak about ultimate reality and what merely may appear to be reality. The point of the allegory is to cause us to think about how these prisoners would perceive reality. Think a bit about these prisoners. As they spoke with one another and talked about their existence, they would certainly be convinced that the shadows upon the wall were indeed the reality of life. As they see a shadow and hear the voice of a puppet named Boris, they would naturally come to think that the shadow is the reality! Should these puppets have a ball in their hand which they freely pass from one to another, the prisoners would come to identify the shadow of the ball with the ball itself. And in the minds of the prisoners, the shadows would indeed become the reality. But, now suppose that the prisoners were released from the chains on their necks and legs, and were able to turn and walk back, toward the entrance to the cave. They would see the fire and see the low wall, which acts as a stage, and see the puppets, which cast their shadows upon the wall. After a bit of thought and contemplation, they would be able to come to understand what is reality and what is merely shadow.

This morning, we have the opportunity to enter into another shadowland: the book of Leviticus. If you have read the book of Leviticus, you know that it contains many things, which are a bit foreign to us to us. Leviticus talks about sacrifices, priests, foods that are clean, food which are not. Leviticus talks about dealing with leprosy and impurities from bodily discharges. Leviticus talks about festival days, feasts, Sabbath days, articles of the tabernacle, and much more.

But, the crucial thing for us to know this morning, even from the start, is that all of these things are merely shadows of a greater reality. Oh, they may look like sacrifices and priests and ceremonial days. And indeed they are. But, the apostle Paul tells us that they are shadows. Please consider Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

By these words, Paul is simply saying that the things in the Levitical law, (like food and drink and feasts and festivals and Sabbath days), are simply shadows upon the wall of a cave, which are being cast from the original form of Jesus, Himself. And as we look at them dance and prance about the wall of the cave, we ought always to bear in mind the reality behind these things. In other words, Jesus is the reality, while food and feasts and festivals and Sabbath days are merely shadows, which give testimony to the reality.

On several other occasions, the New Testament uses this same language. It's not merely Paul in Colossians. It's also the writer to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 8:4-5, we read, "... there are those who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things." As the priests offered up their sacrifices upon the altar, they were serving a shadow of the things in heaven. Later on in the book of the Hebrews, we read that the law "... has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things" (Hebrews 10:1).

When you put these passages together, you begin to see that the book of Leviticus has an ultimate reality, which is not contained in the book of Leviticus. The reality behind the book of Leviticus is Jesus Christ. These things in Leviticus are shadows of Jesus. They are not shadows in the sense that there is a physical resemblance between Jesus and these things, nor in the sense that everything in the book of Leviticus has an exact one-to-one correspondence with Jesus. But rather, these things are shadows in the sense that they give a veiled testimony in the generalities to who Jesus was and the work that Jesus would do.

As we look at these shadows this morning, they will help us to see the reality of Jesus. There are many ways in which Leviticus anticipates the life of Jesus. All of the priests of the Old Testament were shadows of Christ, Who has become our great high priest. All of the sacrifices of the Old Testament were shadows of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The day of Atonement, the one day in the year in which the Israelites were promised to be clean from all their sins (Lev. 16:30), was a shadow of the forgiveness that Jesus would obtain for us upon the cross. This day taught that one sacrifice had the ability to atone for the sins of many people. The repeated regulations for the need of the people to be holy when approaching the LORD was a shadow of how Christ would make this possible for those who believe in Him.

And this is the great burden of my message this morning. I want for you to see Jesus more clearly than ever before. I want for you to see His role. I want for you to see what He came to earth to accomplish. I want for you to see Him as more precious than ever.

Before we actually spend our time this morning in the text of Leviticus, I want for you to think about what came first, Jesus or Leviticus. You have heard the infamous question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Here is my question, "Which came first, Jesus or the book of Leviticus?" In one sense, you might say that the book of Leviticus came first, in that it was written by Moses in 1400 B. C. and Jesus didn't come until 1400 years later. And yet, the correct answer is that Jesus was first and the book of Leviticus came later. The importance of making such an observation is simply this: Leviticus was written to anticipate what Jesus would be and what Jesus would do for His people. It wasn't that God had first established the Levitical system, and then thought about how Jesus might fit into it. "Oh, I suppose that Jesus could be a sacrifice, like I have demanded of the Jews. Jesus could also a priest, just like I have told the people to have." Rather, the reverse is true. God knew what Jesus would come and do. But, in order to prepare the people to understand His coming, God established some systems to ingrain in their minds the way that God works.

For instance, God first established a sacrificial category in the minds of the Israelites, so that they might clearly understand that every sin needs a sacrifice. "According to the law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). God placed this deep into the minds and the hearts of the people. Day after day, year after year, they would see these animals being slaughtered and would know very well that it was because of their sin that these animals were being put to death.

Regarding the establishment of the priesthood, God certainly wanted to ingrain into the minds of the people how much they needed a priest to go to God on their behalf. It wasn't the people who offered up the sacrifices. It was the priests who did it on their behalf. God initiated these things in Leviticus so that the people of Israel would clearly understand the role of and their need for a priest, which Jesus would become.

When God established the Day of Atonement, He wanted the Jewish people to understand that a single sacrifice can atone for a multitude of sins. It was on that day that the high priest went into the holy of holies and offered up two sacrifices. The first sacrifice was a bull was for himself and for his own household (Lev. 16:11). The second sacrifice was a goat, which was "the sine offering ... for the people" (Lev. 16:15). This day was intended for the Israelites to reflect upon how Jesus could offer up a once-for-all sacrifice.

The things in Leviticus were preparatory. They were establishing categories of thought in the minds of the people, so that they could understand fully the role of Jesus. The book of Leviticus was anticipating the day in which Jesus would fulfill the law as our great high priest by offering up His own personal sacrifice, so as to present us to God completely blameless in His sight. I would even argue that Leviticus is one of the most important books of the Old Testament to teach us of the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, which is the heart and center of our faith.

So, with that lengthy introduction, let's open up the text of Leviticus by focusing upon one verse: Leviticus 19:2. I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to this single verse. We are focusing our attention upon this verse, because many consider this to be the key verse in this entire book. To catch the context, I will begin in verse 1.

Leviticus 19:1-2

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "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.'"

I want to focus our attention this morning upon the last phrase of verse 2, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." My outline this morning has two points. (1) God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2c); and (2) You Need to be Holy (Leviticus 19:2b). "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." In my message, I'm simply dealing with the last half of this phrase first. And then, we will deal with the first half of this phrase. Point #1, ...

1. God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2c).

We see this fact affirmed in our text, "I, the LORD your God, am holy." There are several other verses in the book of Leviticus that say exactly the same thing. "I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). "I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). "You are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy" (Lev. 20:26). "I, the LORD, who sanctifies you, am holy" (Lev. 21:8).

This is repeated throughout the Scripture. All throughout Biblical history, men and women alike affirmed that the LORD was holy. From Job (Job 6:10) to Joshua (Joshua 24:19) to Jeremiah (Jer. 50:29); from Hanna, the mother of Samuel, (1 Samuel 2:2) to the whole city of Bethshemesh (1 Sam. 6:20); from King David (Psalm 22:3) to the Psalmist Asaph (Psalm 78:41) to the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:4); they all made explicit statements, affirming the holiness of God. God's holiness is also proclaimed in heaven. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" is what the angelic beings never cease to say (Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8).

And so, naturally, it begs the question, "What does it mean that God is holy?"

The word we translate, "holy," in the Hebrew text is the word, "Qadosh." Depending upon the exact form of the word (i.e. noun or verb), it might also be pronounced, "Qadesh" or "Qadash". In my study this week, I counted 90 times when the word, "holy" was used in the book of Leviticus. This is more than in any other book of the Bible.

At its root, it has the idea of being separated or apart or sacred or consecrated. Something is considered to be holy that is set apart and dedicated to be used in the service of the LORD. Throughout the book of Leviticus, there were many things that were described as being "holy." The priests were a group of people, who were "set apart" to serve the LORD in the temple. (They were to be holy to the LORD). The garments of the priests were "set apart" for only the priests to wear. They wore "holy crowns" (Lev. 8:9), "holy tunics" (Lev. 16:4), and "holy garments" (Lev. 16:4). The sacrifices that were offered were called "holy sacrifices" (Lev. 7:1). Sometimes people presented "holy gifts" (Lev. 22:3) to the LORD to be "set apart" for the service of the priests. There were certain places in the temple that were designated as "holy places" (Lev. 6:26; 16:2). What made them holy is that they were "set apart" for specific duties that the priests would perform. The days of

celebration were days that were "set apart" for the LORD. These were called "holy convocations" (Lev. 23:2). The behavior of the Israelites was to be different from the other nations, because the nation of Israel was to be "set apart" and "different" from the other nations. These things might help to give you an idea of what "holy" means.

But, when you apply the word "holy" to God, it takes the word to a whole new level. Because, we aren't talking about things being "set apart" for the use in the service of God. But rather, we are talking about God, Himself, being set apart from us. The character of God is so high above us and so beyond us that we can't quite fully grasp it. I know that I'm not capable of fully describing this in my own words or with my own thoughts, and so, I'll quote from a few of my friends.

First, listen to what A. W. Tozer says about the holiness of God. He writes, "Quite literally a new channel must be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth that will heal our great sickness to flow in. We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. ... Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is the standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is" [\[1\]](#)

R. C. Sproul said it well. He said, "When the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute [of God]. The word is used as a synonym for his deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is." [\[2\]](#) In other words, God's holiness is His essence. God is entirely different than we are, especially in His purity. Whenever there are encounters between a man and God, we find the man on his face, bowing to the holy Lord, entirely aware of his own sin. This was the case with Isaiah, the prophet, a righteous man. When he saw the throne of God, he said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Is. 6:5). You need to realize that Isaiah was the most righteous person in the land of Israel. He spoke for God! And yet, when comparing himself to God, he was completely undone in his own sinfulness.

But, God's holiness is far more than purity. It goes beyond this. When the Seraphim are around the throne crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts," they are saying more than "purity, purity, purity is the LORD of hosts." They are saying that God is different and high and exalted. They are saying that God is glorious and powerful and righteous. You might say that God is "transcendent." In other words, God is beyond us. God is above us. God is lofty and exalted. There is infinite distance between God and us. So glorious, and different, and majestic is God that He told Moses that no one can see His face and live (Ex. 33:20). Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:16 that God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see." The idea is that God's essence is so pure that He radiates blinding purity to fall who would attempt to gaze upon Him! It is a little bit like looking at the sun! If you try to look at the sun, it's simply too bright to see anything. In fact, it's so bright that it makes your eyes hurt. Your squint and your eyes water and you can't quite fully see what the sun looks like. This is the holiness of God. He has transcendent purity. Nothing that is unholy can even enter His presence. [\[3\]](#)

There is a great illustration of this in chapter 10. In the first three verses of this chapter, we read about two men, who were just ordained to the priesthood. They were Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu. Consider the text:

Leviticus 10:1-3

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

Two chapters earlier in Leviticus (chapter 8), you can read about the first priests being set apart for the work of the ministry. Through an elaborate ceremony, Aaron and his sons were washed with water (Lev. 8:6), clothed with the priestly garments (Lev. 8:7-9, 13), anointed with oil poured upon their heads (Lev. 8:12), ordained with blood placed upon their right ears and thumbs and big toes (Lev. 8:23-24), and sprinkled with oil and blood upon their garments (Lev. 8:30).

Having been ordained for the ministry, Aaron immediately begins to offer sacrifices up to the LORD in chapter 9. Aaron's sons were all right beside him, helping him with these sacrifices, acting according to the strict commands of God. They saw Aaron lift up his hands and bless the people (verse 22). They saw the glory of the LORD appear to all the people (verse 23). They saw the fire come from heaven and consume the burnt offering upon the altar (verse 24).

As best as we can tell, the events of chapter 10 take place immediately after these things took place. This was their first day on the job as priests. And we see them ignoring the clear commandment of God. Leviticus 10:1 says that Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the LORD." There are many different guesses as to what they did wrong. Some say that Nadab and Abihu came into the holy of holies when they shouldn't have come. (Leviticus 16:1-2 appears to make this connection). Some say that Nadab and Abihu were irreverent when they came into God's presence. (Leviticus 10:3 appears to make this point when it says, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy.") Some say that Nadab and Abihu were drunk, for the prohibition from God to Aaron immediately after this took place is found in verse 9, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die." Some say that they offered an incense that was not according to God's specific instructions (Lev. 16:12-13). Debate rages on as to why the LORD destroyed these two priests as He did.

We don't know exactly why. But, what we do know is that "fire came from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD" (verse 2).

In some way, and in some measure, Nadab and Abihu were irreverent in their behavior before the LORD. And God killed them for it. In so

doing, God was demonstrating His holiness. "Strange fire" (whatever it was) was not to come before the LORD. The lesson for all to learn is found in verse 3. "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy. And before all the people I will be honored." By these words, God is saying that His presence demands respect. We can't come to the LORD with a cavalier attitude. Church family, let's be done away with the notion that the LORD of hosts is like a giant grandpa in the sky, ready to tolerate all sorts of behavior, without confrontation and without concern. The lesson of Nadab and Abihu is a lesson for us as well. It is "before all the people" that God is to be honored. That includes us.

Consider a few verses from Psalm 99, ...

The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He ... Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool. Holy is He. ... Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill. For holy is the LORD our God.

This is what it means when we say that (1) God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2c). It means that he is so different than we are that we must approach Him as His holiness deserves. We need to tremble before the enthroned one! (Psalm 99:1). It means that we are to exalt Him as great and exalted in Zion (Psalm 99:2). We need to worship at His footstool (Psalm 99:3). It's at the feet of God that we belong, bowed prostrate before Him, knowing our sinfulness and knowing His holiness. Nadab and Abihu learned the lesson the hard way. They died before the presence of the LORD, because they weren't approaching Him as His holiness deserves. May we learn from their example.

Which brings me to my second point this morning, ...

2. You Need to be Holy (Leviticus 19:2b).

This is the direct command from Leviticus 19. "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."

This is what the book of Leviticus is all about. If you learn anything from the book of Leviticus, you learn that **nothing unclean can enter the presence of God**. The first 10 chapters of the book of Leviticus gives highly detailed instructions regarding the sacrifices that were to be offered up to the LORD. The sacrifices had to be done exactly as the LORD had commanded. The priests had to do exactly as the LORD had commanded. The reason for doing so was to obtain forgiveness from the LORD for sins that were committed. Only when the people obtained forgiveness were they acceptable before the LORD.

Chapters 11-15 concern themselves with what makes people unclean. If you ate the wrong food, you would be unclean (chapter 11). If you touch a carcass of an unclean animal, you become unclean (chapter 11). After giving birth, a woman is unclean for a month or two, depending upon whether she had a boy or a girl (chapter 12). If you have leprosy, you are unclean (chapters 13-14). If certain body fluids come out of your body, you are unclean (chapter 15).

Chapter 16 is an immensely important chapter in the book of Leviticus. This chapter describes what ought to take place on the day of atonement. God told the people to celebrate the day on the 10th day of the 7th month. On that day, only one priest was allowed to enter into God's presence. He came with two sacrifices to be offered. The first was for himself. The second was for the people. The reason this sacrifice was offered was to atone for the sins of the people each year.

This is what the book of Leviticus is all about. It's all about how we (as sinful men) can approach a holy God. We need to be cleaned from all our impurities. We need to be forgiven of all our sin. We need to be freed from all our guilt. To come to God, we need to be clean in His sight. In one case, it might mean giving your sacrifice to the priest, so that you might be cleansed (Leviticus 12:4), as is the case of a woman after childbirth. In another case, it may mean allowing a priest to declare your skin clean (Lev. 13:17), as is the case of a man with a blemish on his skin. In yet another case, it may mean that you wash your clothes, bathe in water, and wait until evening (Leviticus 15:8), as is the case of a man, who had a discharge from his body.

If you sinned, you needed to bring a sacrifice to forgive the guilt of your sin (Lev. 6:2-7). Even if you sinned unintentionally, you needed to offer up a sacrifice. "If a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment. He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know it" (Leviticus 5:17-18).

This is not only true of each individual, but it was true for the whole congregation as well. "If the whole congregation of Israel commits error and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they commit any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and they become guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting" (Lev. 4:13-14).

Every year, on the Day of Atonement, God prescribed a way in which the sin of the nation would be forgiven through the sacrifice of a goat (Lev. 16). The book of Leviticus is filled with these types of regulations to purify the worshiper. We could go on and on with example after example of what God required. But, the point is clear: you need to be perfectly holy to approach the LORD. For every sin that you commit, you need a sacrifice. For every sin that you commit, you need to have a priest to make that sacrifice for you. Furthermore, he needed to be a qualified priest. Not everybody could be a priest. Leviticus 21-22 speaks about the rules and regulations for being a priest. Should a man be blind or lame or have a disfigured face or a deformed limb, or a broken foot or a broken hand, or be a hunchback or a dwarf or have any defect in his eyes or on his skin, he wasn't allowed to be a priest (Lev. 21:18-20).

To come to God, you need a worthy priest to offer up for you a worthy sacrifice, such that all of your sins might be forgiven, that you might be holy before God. It's at this point, that Jesus comes into focus very clearly! Jesus is a worthy priest who offered up a worthy sacrifice to present us holy before the LORD. Nowhere does this become as clear in the New Testament as it does in Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:1-4

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Try as you might to keep the Levitical law, you will never be made perfect. The number of sacrifices offered every year is staggering. Over the course of a year with several million people in the nation, you could easily have millions of animals sacrificed, with millions more that really should be sacrificed according to a strict interpretation of the law. But, even if nobody brought any sacrifices for specific sins that were committed, sacrifices would continue on. Every day, a lamb was sacrificed in the morning and a lamb was sacrificed in the evening. Every Sabbath Day, two lambs were offered up to the LORD in smoke. Every month at the New Moon celebration, another 11 animals lost their lives. Then, during the various feasts, each year, several hundred more animals were sacrificed.

These sacrifices continued to be offered year after year after year after year. The Hebrew people certainly were able to see what a futile exercise it was. They never made worshipers perfect (Heb. 10:1). They only made them clean enough to offer up their worship to God temporarily. But, next time they came, it would be at the expense of a few more animals. It's a bit like eating. I trust that many of you had breakfast this morning become coming to church. The breakfast will sustain you for a few hours. But, soon, you will be hungry again and so, will enjoy lunch. A few hours later, you will need dinner. Tomorrow will be the same! The food we eat will never satisfy us forever. They simply give reminder of how dependent we are upon our daily food! The same with sacrifices. The very fact that they needed to be repeated again and again and again was a reminder of sins year after year (Heb. 10:3). Because, the truth is this, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

Sacrifices can cover sins. They can bring the forgiveness of God (see Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18). But, they can never fully deal with the problem. These sacrifices can never take those sins and cast them away!

Whenever I discipline my children, I use the terminology of Hebrews 10:4 with them. After my discipline, I always seat them on my lap, kiss them, and have a discussion with them. I say, "Does daddy forgive your sins?" My son or daughter says, "Yes." I say, "Can daddy take away your sins?" My son or daughter says, "No." I say, "Who can take away your sins?" My son or daughter says, "Only Jesus."

That's the point of Leviticus. The continual sacrifices are offered again and again and again and again. But, they will never fully resolve the issue. It is only the sacrifice of Jesus that fully resolved the issue. It is only through faith in Him, that your sins will be taken away from you and nailed to the cross of Christ. (1) God is Holy (Leviticus 19:2c) and (2) You Need to be Holy (Leviticus 19:2b).

The path to ultimate holiness isn't through the Levitical legislation. Rather, the path to ultimate holiness is through faith in Jesus Christ. "God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust to bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). These verses are all talking about a positional holiness before the LORD. But, there is also a practical holiness that we need to have as well. When your sins are wiped away, your life will change. God will transform you to walk in a holy manner. You don't change so that your sins can be wiped away. Your sins are first wiped away, and God then works in us to bring about a practical holiness that pleases Him.

Lest you think that this command to be holy is only an Old Testament injunction that has no direct application to us today, think again. Peter quotes this very verse in 1 Peters 1:15-16. He writes, "As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 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.'" He is quoting from Leviticus 19:2 (or any of the other verses in Leviticus that say the same thing).

You need to be holy. I need to be holy. The writer to the Hebrews says it as clear as day, "Pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

As children of God, we have a responsibility to be like our holy Father. Our behavior is to be like the Holy One who called us. We are to "be holy" in all our behavior. In these things, don't be deceived that it doesn't apply to you. There are certain behaviors that will disqualify you for the kingdom of God. Paul wrote, ...

1 Cor. 6:9-10

Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

This verse clearly states some behavior that will disqualify you from the kingdom of God. Should you prove to be a fornicator or idolater or adulterer, you will not inherit the kingdom. We aren't talking about earning anything. We aren't talking about meriting the kingdom. We are talking about sons and daughters submitting themselves to the will of their father. The good news is that there are many who used to be like this, who have been transformed by the power of the gospel to inherit the kingdom. We know this because of the very next verse that Paul writes. "Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). When we come to faith in Christ, God will transform us and change us.

I remember reading a short story one time that helped to show how we need to be holy to please the Lord. It's called, "My Heart Christ's Home," written by Robert Munger. In this story, he imagines his heart to be like a home, in which Jesus is coming to visit.

Jesus first enters the **library**, where Robert Munger was delighted to show him all of the things that his mind was reading and thinking about. As Jesus walked through it and looked at the books and the magazines, he wasn't impressed. For, there were many things in his mind that weren't pleasing to God. And so, Jesus told him, "take all the things that you are reading and looking at which are not helpful, pure, good and true, and throw them out! Now put on the empty shelves the books of the Bible. Fill the library with Scriptures and meditate on them day and night."

Next, they entered the **dining room**, the room of "appetites and desires." Mr. Munger served Jesus some of his favorite dishes: money, academic degrees and stocks, with newspaper articles of fame and fortune as side dishes. To his great concern, Jesus wasn't eating any of these things. Jesus told him, "If you want food that really satisfies you, seek the will of the Father, not your own pleasures, not your own desires, and not your own satisfaction. Seek to please Me and that food will satisfy you." Jesus then gave him a taste of doing God's will and Mr. Munger replied, "What a flavor! There is no food like it in all the world. It alone satisfies. Everything else is dissatisfying in the end."

Next, they moved into the **living room**, which was a comfortable, quiet room, filled with overstuffed chairs and a sofa. Jesus promised to meet him in this room every day. At first, Mr. Munger met faithfully with him at the beginning of every day. But, due to the business of life, he began to neglect their early morning meeting together. Convicted, he said in his heart, "[Jesus] was my guest. ... And yet here I am neglecting Him." When he came to Jesus and confessed his sin, Jesus readily forgave him and reminded him of the importance of fellowship with God.

From the living room, they went to the **work room**, where he had a workbench and some equipment. Mr. Munger confessed that once in a while he would play around with a few little gadgets, but wasn't producing anything substantial or worthwhile. It was only when he relaxed his hands in the hands of Jesus and let the Spirit of Jesus work through him that he began to make some really nice things.

They began to go into the **Rec room**, but Mr. Munger didn't want Jesus to see the "associations and friendships, activities and amusements" that he was involved with. And so, he made up some excuse why they couldn't go into the Rec room.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Munger found Jesus in the hallway. Jesus said to him, "There is a peculiar odor in the house. There is something dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it is in the hall closet." Mr. Munger gave the following testimony, "I knew what He was talking about. Yes, there was a **small closet** up there on the landing, just a few feet square, and in that closet, behind lock and key, I had one or two little personal things that I did not want anyone to know about and certainly I did not want Christ to see them."

(Talking about messy closets, my wife and I have a messy closet in the basement of our home. It has been quite messy for months. In recent days, I told my wife of how much I had corrupted her in our marriage, being a naturally messy person, myself. I asked her whether or not she was going to clean the closet. Her reply to me was that she hadn't quite remembered when I had volunteered to help clean it up. Anyway, ...)

Regarding this allegorical closet of Mr. Munger's, he said, "I knew they were dead and rotting things left over from the old life. And yet I loved them, and I wanted them so for myself that I was afraid to admit they were there." After a bit of reluctance, he gave the key to Jesus, but confessed that he didn't have the strength to clean the closet himself. Jesus said, "Just give me the key. Just authorize me to take care of that closet and I will." Jesus then "walked over to the door, opened it, entered it, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting there, and threw it away. The He cleaned the closet and painted it, fixed it up, doing it all in a moment's time." It was a relief to Mr. Munger, who said, "Oh, what victory and release to have that dead thing out of my life!"

As life continued on, Mr. Munger said to himself, "I have been trying to keep this heart of mine clear for Christ. I start on one room and no sooner have I cleaned that then another room is dirty. I begin on the second room and the first room becomes dusty again. I am so tired and weary trying to maintain a clean heart and an obedient life. I am just not up to it!" Then, he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, is there any chance that You would take over the responsibility of the whole house and operate it for me and with me just as You did that closet? Would You take the responsibility to keep my heart what it ought to be and my life where it ought to be?" Jesus replied to him, ... "Certainly, that is what I came to do. You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. That is impossible. Let me do it through you and for you. That is the way." It was then that Mr. Munger transferred the title deed of his house over to Jesus, and deemed Jesus no longer to be merely a guest in the house, but to be the Lord and owner of the house. ^[4]

This story is a great picture of the effect of indwelling sin in us and the absolute need that we have of Jesus to help us in all things. Are you holy?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 5, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] A. W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, pp. 104-105.

[2] R. C. Sproul, The Holiness of God, p. 57, emphasis his.

[3] For many of the thoughts in this chapter, I am deeply indebted to R. C. Sproul and his comments in chapter 3 of his excellent book, The Holiness of God.

[4] This short story can be found all over the internet. A search on Google for "My Heart, Christ's Home" will lead to several sites that have this entire story posted.

