

Sanctification

What does being holy mean? Can we expect from ourselves and from others to live a holy life? Can we become free from sins? What does the Bible say to us about this?

But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour; because it is written,
"You shall be holy, for I am holy."
(1 Peter 1:15-16)

In the New Testament, Paul sometimes addresses the Christians as 'Holy and beloved' (i.e. Colossians 3:12). To our ears however, the words 'holy' or 'saints' sound unusual, old-fashioned, distant from everyday life, unreachable and tailored only to very special people.

Is this true or does the Bible rather say that a holy life is inseparable from our relationship with God?

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

Indeed, God's command for holiness serves to prepare us for eternity. Without this, we would not be able to have fellowship with him who is absolutely holy – neither now, nor in eternity. Holiness is not an entrance exam which secures a place in heaven, which God could change if he wanted; rather it arises out of God's very being as well as our own.

The passages mentioned above emphasise the absolute holiness of God and the necessity which arises from allowing our WHOLE life to be assessed and purified by God. They also emphasise the necessity of giving up every sin. The attitude of wanting to be holy as God is holy is the hallmark of a Christian.

Many religious people do not really strive for this aim. However, belief in salvation and forgiveness enables Christians to take up the fight against sin with hope.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Through scripture and especially through the words of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus and his disciples we can understand what sin is.

The fight against sin as a prerequisite for a holy life

Man was made in the image of God. When man sinned, his being was distorted along with his relationship with God and fellow man. Sin separates people from God and leads them to a life of egotism and isolation.

That is why Jesus describes in such radical pictures, how strongly we should abhor and reject sin.

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell. (Mark

9:43,47)

This is not an empty threat made by Jesus in order to instil fear. Jesus describes a spiritual reality. Sins change people, deceive them, harden them and take away their longing for God and for what is good; sin separates people from God. This is what Paul describes in 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.

Sin begins in our attitudes and thoughts. That is where the roots lie for the resulting actions.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Sins of omission/neglect are often not assessed by people as strongly as they are in scripture. Time and time again we come across people who see sins such as not endeavouring for brothers and sisters in faith or not reading the Bible as insignificant. These sins show a lack of relationship with God very clearly.

There is no excuse for sin.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Even in the Old Testament victory over sin was commanded and seen as possible.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:6-7)

God's love and mercy towards every person who struggles to distance themselves from sin and entrust their life to him is very great. The wrath of God is great however upon those who do not call their sins by their name (Matthew 3:7-8) and excuse themselves with their own weakness, because:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

We know that God loves every person and accepts everyone who wants to come to him, irrespective of how strongly he is loaded down with sin. We know God's faithfulness in that he never rejects anyone who wants to turn to him. We should be aware though, that sin separates us from him. No

one should be indifferent about this or play with sin.

Forgiveness of sins is a great gift. It is important to be conscious of the value of this. We cannot treat it like a cheap bargain. Jesus gave his life in order to save us from our sins. That is why we should live as those who are saved from sin, and not as those who cling to sin.

Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

How can we become free from sin?

In Psalms 32:3-5 and Proverbs 28:13 it is written that confession of sins is the only way to find forgiveness and freedom.

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. (Proverbs 28:13)

It is important and good to confess our sins to God, but it is a sign of true regret to bring them to the light before people. Living in the truth also means walking in the truth before our brothers and sisters.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

This is not only important on the day of conversion - to leave behind us everything that tied us to the world and to lay our sins open. As Christians we should confess our sins and pray for one another so that we can be made holy, as James writes in his letter in chapter 5:16. It is not the task of specially trained ministers/counsellors to bear the responsibility of the confessions of the congregation - ministers who are then sworn to secrecy. No base for such practice can be found in the Bible. On the contrary, there should be a wish for deep trust in all fellow believers - for standing before others as I truly am before God and being a testimony of God's acting in the Church. Only by this is it possible for brothers and sisters to really help one another - in laying our sins open before one another, receiving forgiveness, being carried in their prayers but also in encouragements and admonitions, and thereby being supported in sanctification.

Jesus washed his disciple's feet as an example of how we should serve one another (John 13:2-17). He humbled himself before people who were themselves imprisoned in sin and by doing so demonstrated his love. We should learn from him to become small before one another - to bear one another in love and thereby to become able to grow in sanctification ourselves and help others in it. Serving one another cannot be separated from caring for the salvation of others - taking care that they grow in faith and mature and that no sin hinders them from being close to God.

God made each Christian able to support others so that the whole body can be built into a holy temple (Ephesians 2:21). He lays the responsibility for the whole Church on each member. Therefore:

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.
(Hebrews 12:14)

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