

Can I Be Holy?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that God sent his son to be a sacrifice to cleanse us from our sins, all of them, if we will accept, trust and obey him as our savior. Each of us who are adults is guilty of sin. We live in a sin polluted world and we are not able to clean ourselves. We need someone to wash away our sin, so God sent Jesus.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

Once we believe in God and in Jesus Christ His son, repent of our sins and are baptized, baptism washes away our sins and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us.

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16 Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Through his sacrificial death on our behalf, Christ has enabled us to be reconciled to God and to be holy, if we will accept and follow him.

Colossians 1:21-23 You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and blameless before him, if it is so that you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard, --- .

Christ's sacrifice has enabled us to become God's children through our faith in Him.

Galatians 3:26-27 For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

God wants us to be holy because he is holy. Like any good parent, He wants his children to be like him. But God is so holy that He cannot stand wickedness, in order to be in fellowship with God we have to be holy. Christ's sacrifice enables us to become God's children, to become holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16 but just as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy; for I am holy.'

Problem, How Do We Stay Holy?

Once we have been cleansed and made holy, how do we stay holy and yet live in a polluted world? Isaiah describes our problem in the following verse.

Isaiah 6:5 Then I said, 'Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.'

We have to really desire to seek God in order go to the effort to be holy. Being holy doesn't just happen, it isn't easy, it requires discipline and self control to be in this world and yet not give in to its temptations.

1 John 2:15-17 Don't love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love isn't in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, isn't the Father's, but is the world's. The world is passing away with its lusts, but he who does God's will remains forever.

One solution to our remaining holy would be to isolate ourselves from the world. But in his prayer to the Father for his disciples, Jesus does not ask for his disciples to be taken out of the world, but rather that they be protected from evil. In what we call the Great Commission Christ tells his disciples to go into the world and teach the Gospel to every living creature. We are not supposed to go out of the world, we are supposed to go into the world and be salt and light and glorify God.

John 17:15 I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one.

Matthew 5:13-16 You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 28:18-19 Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

We need to find a way to follow Jesus, stay in this world and yet stay holy. How can we do this?

We Must Remain In Christ. He is the Source of our Power

It is possible to live in this sin polluted world and yet remain faithful to Christ. We can keep from straying. The key is to put on Christ and to remain in him, in other words to keep his spirit in our hearts and to seek to live by his commandments.

John 15:4-5 Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Once we decide to follow Christ we need to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and to run with patience never giving up. We cannot do this with our own strength, we need his on-going help.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who has endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that you don't grow weary, fainting in your souls.

As I walk the path of life through its pitfalls and temptations, I may slip and fall, but through the grace of God I can get back up and with Christ's help, I can be forgiven; but I have to keep on getting up when I fall down and keep on following Christ until he calls me home.

1 John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When we slip and we all do we need to repent and confess and keep on trying to follow Him. In 1 John 7:8 the Greek verb tense is for an ongoing action, if we repent and confess our sins "the blood of Christ" keeps on cleansing us every time we sin.

Why Is It Hard For Us To Be Holy?

We are God's children with a direct line (prayer) to the Creator of the universe and we have Christ's Spirit dwelling in us and guiding us. What's the problem? Why isn't it easy to be holy?

The problem is that we are in a spiritual war. Christ is at war with the evil in this world. His resurrection assured victory, but our enemy hasn't given up yet. He wants to take as many down with him as he can before Christ returns to judge the world.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We have a powerful vigorous enemy who is out to destroy us if he can. But greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

1 John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.

So we need to abide in Christ, be sober and self controlled. we can overcome by the strength which God supplies.

Now let's take a closer look at this. What does "practice self-control" in order to be holy mean? What are we supposed to do?

THOUGHTS

Thoughts lead to words and to deeds, so the first part of staying holy is to clean up our thoughts.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ;

If you fill your mind with evil thoughts, what you say and what you do will become evil. You may be able to hide what's inside of you for a while, but sooner or later it will leak out.

Matthew 15:19-20 For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile the man.

Be careful what you desire. Don't let your thoughts dwell on something you shouldn't desire. Of course stray thoughts may sneak in, but we don't have to reflect on them. As the old farmer said, "I can't stop the birds from landing on my head, but I don't have to let them build a nest there".

James 1:14-15 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

The Cherokee tell of a young boy talking with his grandfather. He asked "What sort of man will I be when I grow up?" The wise old grandfather told him that everyone has two wolves inside of them, a good wolf and a bad wolf and they will determine what sort of man he will be when he grows up. Then the boy asked "What determines whether I will be good or bad, which wolf wins?" The wise grandfather answered "The one you feed".

Which Wolf do You Feed?

The old CRT tubes used for television were vacuum inside, when cracked they would implode and scatter glass all over. Nature abhors a vacuum. You can't leave your mind empty, something will move in. If you don't fill you mind with good, Satan will find a way to fill it with evil. Paul gives us good advice on what to think about.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think about these things.

As we grow in Christ and put on his spirit, our thoughts and our emotions will grow more like him, we will start really caring about other people even loving them, just like Jesus does.

Colossians 3:12-14 Put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so you also do. Above all these things, walk in love, which is the bond of perfection.

As we follow Jesus we are transformed by renewing our minds. We renew our minds by prayer and by reading and studying God's word and using it as our guide for decision making as we walk down the sometimes confusing and often difficult pathway of life.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

In Psalms King David tells us how to be pure. He says to live according to God's word and hide it in your heart.

Psalm 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. With my whole heart, I have sought you. Don't let me wander from your commandments. I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Our weapons of spiritual warfare are not guns and bullets. The shield of faith enables us to stand and we sow God's word everywhere in hopes of raising a crop of righteousness. Our sword, our primary weapon is the active and living word of God, the Bible. We need to think about it, to meditate on it, and to get familiar with it.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Years ago I fenced with a friend who was taking a class in fencing. With a flick of his wrist he could knock the foil out of my hand every time. If we can't handle our sword, the Bible, the evil one can attack and defeat good ideas, because we don't know how to defend ourselves. We need to be well versed in the Scriptures.

Practice doesn't make perfect, but it sure helps. In Oklahoma we are proud of our football teams. Think how good they will be, if the only time they practice is for an hour or two every Sunday morning?

WORDS

The second part of the puzzle on "How to be Holy?" is to straighten up our words. Christ said that we will be judged by our words.

Matthew 12:36-37 I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Christ also told the people that if your heart is evil your words will show it.

Matthew 12:34-35 You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things.

Paul warns us to build up not pollute and tear down other people with our words. Do your words encourage and build up people or hurt and destroy them?

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for building up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Words and dynamite should be handled carefully. Words are powerful and very dangerous. A single angry word can destroy a relationship. Words can wound like a sword or they can be soothing and kind and bring healing. Sharp words from someone close to you can hurt terribly and severely damage your self image. "You'll never amount to anything." "You're worthless." "You dummy." etc.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise heals.

Bad words lead to judgment. Christ said that it would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and be dropped into the sea than to cause one of his little ones to be lost.

Luke 17:1-2 He said to the disciples, 'It is impossible that no occasions of stumbling should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble'.

Each of us needs to ask, are my words clean or dirty, gentle or harsh, kind or cruel, wise or foolish, uplifting or tearing down, healing or hurtful?

DEEDS

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child makes himself known by his doings, whether his work is pure, and whether it is right.

The third part of the puzzle on "How to be Holy?" is your actions, your deeds. Christ warns us about evil prophets, false teachers, and tells us that we can recognize them by their fruit. What am I doing? What sort of fruit am I bearing?

Matthew 7:15-18 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit.

Here is a list of evil works which we will do well to avoid.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

And here is a list of good works which we will do well to cultivate in our lives and in our hearts.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

CONCLUSION

It is possible with God's help to clean up our thoughts, words and deeds. You and I can be holy and stay holy by getting back up every time we fall down. As Winston Churchill said in a famous speech during the darkest days of World War Two, "Never, never, never, never, --- never give up!"

Galatians 6:7-9 Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not be weary in doing good, for we will reap in due season, if we don't give up.

I am not a perfect being, I am a forgiven sinner. Because of Christ's sacrifice for my sins and with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit which carries my prayers directly up to God who hears and answers my prayers, I can be holy. Praise God!

We close with the words of Christ from Revelation.

Revelation 22:11-13 He who acts unjustly, let him act unjustly still. He who is filthy, let him be filthy still. He who is righteous, let him do righteousness still. He who is holy, let him be holy still. Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with me, to repay to each man according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.