

“Becoming Exceptional”

I. Introduction

a. Quiz:

- i. I wonder if I can conduct a quick quiz this morning. Can everyone grab a pencil or pen and jot down on the top line on your sermon guide, three or four things that are distinctive about yourself.
 1. What words would others use to describe you?
- ii. I wonder now, how many of you included the word “holy” or “godly” in your list?
- iii. I bet few or none of you have because most of us wouldn’t ever describe ourselves as “holy.”
- iv. I believe this is because few of us have a biblical understanding of holiness.
- v. Much of what we hold to about holiness has been learned from our Sunday School classes, hearsay, and assumptions we have absorbed from the world around us.
- vi.

II. Views of Holiness

- a. If we asked people on the street to describe a holy person, it is likely that we would get some of these responses:
 - i. Someone who hides their troubles, carries a big bible and tells other people what not to do.
 - ii. A holy person is someone who is very religious.
 - iii. To be holy is to live in the valley of “no.”
 - iv. Holiness is to live in the town of Pleasantville, where there is no color. Perhaps you remember that movie...it was a strong attack on traditional values.
 - v. Holiness is the opposite of fun!
- b. **God created us for Holiness not Happiness.**
 - i. C.S. Lewis once wrote, “How little people know who think holiness is dull.”
 - ii. I was recently emailed a request from a member of our church to check out a popular self-help speaker. When I did, I discovered a great deal of mushy teachings by this person, including a quote that struck me wrong. It said, “God is happy when His children are happy.”
 - iii. This quotation made it sound as if somehow God created mankind to discover happiness and God was here to guarantee it. The highest goal of mankind, according to this teacher, is to be happy.
 - iv. My bible says something else. My bible says that mankind can never be happy if he isn’t holy. Holiness is the only thing that guarantees happiness.

- v. Could it be that when you meet someone who is genuinely holy, he or she is one of the few people who are genuinely happy?
 - vi. Oswald Chambers said, “The destined end of man is not happiness, nor health, but holiness. God is not an eternal blessing machine for men. He did not come to save me out of pity; He came to save me because He had created them to be holy.”
- c. Even Christians have trouble agreeing on what Holiness is.
- i. Different denominations say different things about it, how it is attained, and what its purpose is.
 - ii. The bible has so much to say about holiness that it is nearly impossible to do a subject like this justice in just a short sermon. I will lay the groundwork for it, and God willing, we may continue this subject next week.

III. Definitions

- a. The clearest illustration of holiness is evident in a passage from Exodus 3:3-5, uncovered in the drama of the burning bush:
 - i. *So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."*
 - ii. How could the ground be holy? Why did God declare the ground holy? Had the sand changed in its character? Could a scientist have viewed that sand and seen a difference between it and the sand that wasn't holy?
 - iii. **Holy means separation or otherness.**
 1. The ground had become holy because God had separated it as the unique place where he would reveal Himself to Moses. Had God chosen another place, it would have been equally holy.
 2. We can further illustrate this with a hypothetical example: Imagine a Levitical priest during the temple sacrifices coming home at the end of a hard day and saying to his wife..."My sacrificial knife is dull. I am going to have to take one of our personal collection to work with me tomorrow."
 - a. The instant that the priest had dedicated that knife to the Lord's service, the unholy, or "common" knife would have become a holy knife.
 - b. This is because holiness can describe "separation" in a person's mind regarding any object. As he sees it no longer as common or ordinary, but especially dedicated or separated to God, it becomes holy in a biblical sense of the word.
 - iv. **Holiness requires both separation FROM and separation TO.**
 1. For that knife to become holy, it had to be separated FROM common use and separated TO the unique and uncommon use for God's service.
 2. The word for holy is translated into such words in the bible as: set apart, dedicated, consecrated, sanctified, holy, separated, and saint. All come from the root word for holy.
 3. God's presence made it holy, once it became a separated object or place.
 4. In other words, holiness requires both subtraction and addition.
 - a. New people must be added to your life, new pursuits have to be added to your life to replace the old patterns.
 - b. 2 Timothy 2:22 "*Flee* (separated yourself from) youthful lusts; but *pursue* (separated yourself to) righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

- c. So much of what we hear regarding holiness is a result of harsh teaching and fire and brimstone sermons which focus on the FLEEING or subtraction aspect of holiness.
 - i. Holiness is not about living in a world of “no”
 - ii. **It is about leaving a world of No IN ORDER to enter the world of YES.**
 - iii. If a person only fulfills ½ of this equation, imbalance and error will disrupt his life.
- v. **Holiness is not just for a select few.**
 1. Pagan cultures have ‘holy men’ who have devoted and separated themselves in pursuit of their tribal deities. But the bible doesn’t speak to a few people to be holy. The call is that all of God’s people be holy...separated and devoted to the pursuit of God.
 2. 1 Peter 1:15 *“But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct, because it is written, ‘be holy for I am holy.’”*
 3. The world religions have many practices that are believed by their adherents to help them become holy. Some men will journey miles to a shrine on their bloodied knees, believing that they will somehow become holy or that their piety will convince God of their worthiness to have their prayer heard.
 - a. Other hold up standards of behavior that they claim will make them holy.
 - b. In Colossians 2:20-23 we find that Paul says about these, *“why do you subject yourselves to regulations – ‘do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ (the world of NO) which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commands and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in SELF-IMPOSED RELIGION, false humility and neglect of the body, but are of NO VALUE!”*
 - c. The doctrines of men created by men which have no solid basis in Scripture are sometimes taught with more emotional fervor by some than what the bible itself has to say.
 4. **External holiness without Internal Holiness is not biblical.**
 - a. A person can have all sorts of apparently holy behavior in his actions, such as piously attending church, being kind to people, giving money to the church or the poor, but until the heart itself is changed and brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the actions are nothing more than what the bible calls “dirty rags.”
 - b. External holiness without internal holiness breeds hypocrisy.
 - c. Internal holiness without external holiness grows into emotional fanaticism.

- d. God always starts on the inside of man and changes him from the inside out. But religion will focus on the outside of a man and polish him up.
- vi. Holiness is EXCEPTIONAL SEPARATION!
 - 1. You might notice that the title of today's sermon is "Becoming Exceptional." This is because holiness is about being so unique, so exceptional, so separated from the world and to the Lord, that we make a difference in the world in which we live.
 - 2. George Barna, a researcher on Christian trends, has discovered that there is only a 9% difference between evangelical American Christian Culture and that of mainstream, secular American culture.
 - a. These differences were measured in terms of values, character and conduct of people in both arenas.
 - b. He also found that a minimum of a 30% difference between a subculture (like Christians) and the culture (America) is necessary for a subculture to have an leavening effect upon the culture.
 - c. This demonstrates that there is NO Separation, No Distinctiveness, No otherness, no Holiness in the church at large in America.
 - i. If our lives are producing the same "stuff" as the rest of the world, why should the world sit up and listen to our message?
 - 3. Obviously, Christians are all too often defined by what they are against, and what we don't do. Holiness is not a negative! It is a positive as well. The world will notice what we DO more than it will notice what we DON'T DO.
 - a. *I am reminded of Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" of Roe versus Wade, abortion case. She ran into Skip Benham, who had an office near the Dallas abortion clinic where she worked.*
 - i. *CNN: The Rev. Phillip Benham, Operation Rescue's national director, described her as being "super hard-core" in her support of abortion rights. "She couldn't stand us. She hated us." But then she and Benham struck up a relationship across the protest lines, when she would go outside to smoke, a habit she still has. They couldn't understand this strange relationship with the head of Operation Rescue and the poster child of the pro-abortion movement," Benham said.*
 - ii. *Benham, an evangelical preacher, began discussing Christianity with McCorvey. She became friendly with some of Operation Rescue's office staff, and then she accepted an invitation from the daughter of the group's office manager to attend church. That night, she converted to Christianity.*

- iii. The group Skip led wasn't just AGAINST abortion, they were for people's souls and needs. The fact that Skip didn't see her as the enemy but as a victim of the enemy allowed him to see her hurt and needs as something that God's love could heal and meet.
- 4. The first century church turned the world right-side up because they loved, sacrificed, and lived lives so were so radically cross-centered (as opposed to self-centered) that people wanted to have what they had.
 - a. The first century Christians were willing to die for Jesus as well as for one another – not just literally but in the sense of self-sacrifice as well.
 - b. And we find it difficult to get out of bed for church or to come to a prayer meeting!

IV. Stages of Holiness in a person.

- a. Holiness is about life change. It is less about how you act and much more about what makes you act. In the bible, holiness has several tenses: past, present and future.
- b. **Positional Holiness** - occurs when you are "saved" (is about your position before God).
Past Tense.
- c. **Presentational Holiness** – occurs when you "surrender" (is about your consecration to God)
Present Tense. (also cover in more detail next week)
- d. **Progressive Holiness** (*next week*) – occurs when you become Christlike – (is about your cooperation with God). *Future Tense.*
 - i. 1 Cor. 1:2 "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord."
 - 1. Sanctified is from the root of holy, meaning those who are separated in Christ Jesus.
 - 2. Called to be saints – not that they are to hope to become saints, but that their current state is a saint.
 - a. A saint isn't some special person who a church hierarchy declares to be a holy person.
 - b. A saint is a person who belongs to Jesus Christ. If you have become a Christian, the bible says you are a saint.
 - c. The N.T. uses the word SAINT 62 times to describe every born again believer in Jesus Christ.
 - d. If you have been born again in Him, you are now a SAINT.
 - ii. At what point did this separation, this holiness take place?

1. It happened when you gave your trust to Jesus Christ for your eternal future.
 2. At that moment, you received the holiness that belonged to Jesus Christ. You gave your sins to Him and you received His righteousness.
 3. In God's sight, you became holy...not because of anything you did, but because of what Jesus did on your behalf.
 4. Theologically, this is positional holiness. We have the position of righteousness before God. We have the righteousness of Jesus. We share in His position. What is His is ours.
- iii. Does your behavior line up with that? Probably not. If you think about the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul wrote to them as "those who are sanctified (made holy) in "Christ Jesus" and "called to be saints." Yet in just a few pages, he admonishes them with very strong language concerning their sins, divisions, envy, and even immorality among them.
1. Yet as you read the book, you don't find him inviting them to become Christians again...no he invites them to change their behavior.
 2. He argues that BECAUSE they ARE saints, they should LIVE as saints.
 3. Christians are saints who may choose to live like sinners for a period of time.
 - a. All believers have been made holy, but not all believers live holy lives.
 - b. 1 Peter 2:9-11 "you are now the people of God...I beg you to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul"
 - c. Peter's exhortation is because they are still sinning.
 - d. Belief in the finished work of Jesus does not by itself, equal holy behavior in the life of the believer.
- iv. So how can we be called holy when our lives don't reflect it?
1. The answer is in the concept of being set apart from the secular (old life) to the sacred (new life), and being touched by the Holy (God), it becomes holy.
 2. When God selected Jerusalem and separated it to Himself, it became holy. The ground became Holy because God selected it and separated it to Himself to meet with Moses there.
 - a. Both are described as holy in scripture not because they were changed in their appearance, but because God had separated them to himself.
- v. Positional Holiness isn't in the change of the person's behavior, but it is because of a change in the mind of God about that person...their position has changed...they have moved from darkness to light, estranged to intimate, from common to holy.
1. So what do you have to do? You can become holy in God's sight by receiving His gift of Jesus Christ, who died on your behalf on Calvary so that your sins could be paid for. He takes your sins and you receive His righteousness. And it is a free gift. A costly, but free gift. You change in God's view of you...you move from the enemy's side of the camp to the friend's side.

2. Last week we spoke of grace and mercy. You cannot earn this gift. And you cannot do good works to be saved just as stopping doing bad works won't save you either.
 - a. Good works might be acceptable restitution for breaking a minor law, but we all deserve the death penalty, and public service won't count toward the death penalty, no matter how many hours we serve or how difficult the work we do.
 - b. Bad works are another way of describing sin. Since Christ paid for every sin you ever committed or will commit, then stopping sin won't change anything.
 - c. Regarding your future in eternity, you are helpless. You cannot work harder or try more to avoid sin. You cannot do one thing to fix the problem of your sin or earn forgiveness.
 - d. To be saved? Nothing except believe and receive the gift that Jesus Christ gave for you. He paid the price you owed.

V. Stage II: Presenting Yourself

- a. Romans 12:1 [“I beseech you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.”](#)
 - i. This aspect of holiness is about what a believer does after becoming a Christian. He is required to separate himself to the Lord. This is a commitment, distinct from our decision to put our faith in Christ, that moves us toward personal holiness.
 1. Unless you understand and break through this stage, you will find yourself floundering in the pursuit of holiness and experiencing regular failure.
- b. This request to PRESENT yourself is not a command but an invitation.
 - i. The phrase [“I beseech you”](#) is a plea to take action. Paul is pleading with his readers by trying to touch their mind and heart.
 - ii. He is speaking to Christians here, they are the ones ALREADY accepted by God through Christ. Their offerings of themselves cannot earn God's approval. In fact, it is because they already have His approval that they are motivated to make this living sacrifice of themselves.
 - iii. Furthermore, Paul doesn't tell these believers that they will be rejected by God if they fail to make this dedication of their lives to God.
 1. He only tells them that (in v2) the result of their action will be a life that is full of God's presence and understanding of His will.
 - iv. Belief in a person and devotion to a person are two different things.
 1. Consecration occurs when a Christian decides of his own free will to dedicate himself to Christ in a deep and meaningful way.
 - v. Oswald Chambers says:

1. “discipleship and salvation are two different things. A disciple is one who realizing the meaning of the atonement, deliberately gives himself to Jesus Christ in unspeakable gratitude. Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow him daily. We are at perfect liberty to toss up our spiritual heads and say, “no thank you, that’s a bit too stern for me,” and the Lord will never say a word. We can do exactly what we like. He will never plead, but the opportunity is there to live a life that God rewards.
- c. The request to present yourself to God is done using the motivation of consideration of the “[Mercies of God](#)”. Did you see that phrase in v1: “I beseech you brothers, by the mercies of God”
- i. God knows you cannot motivate yourself to consecrate yourself, to deny your flesh, and to pursue holiness on a daily basis.
 - ii. **We do not pursue holiness out of a sense of responsibility...but out of a sense of appreciation.**
 1. Paul isn’t relying on threats or even a sense of responsibility...you ought to’s. The motivation to give yourself to God is solely based upon what God has done for you!
 2. Author and pastor Bruce Wilkerson says that when he meets someone who is struggling to commit themselves to the Lord, he automatically knows that their “mercies memory bank” is low on deposits.
 3. And he notes that when he comes across a highly consecrated person, that person has no shortage of personal stories of God’s goodness and kindness to him.
 - iii. The sense of appreciation is built by maintaining a solid balance in our mercies memory bank.
 1. I recall our “Spiritual Awakening Weekend” when Pastor Bernie was here, and how he vividly recalled the great sacrifice of Jesus to us and made it so real that none of us were without tears, and we flooded the altar with our consecration.

The reason we responded was the depth of appreciation that we experienced that day.
 - iv. We are motivated by this appreciation to consecrate all areas of our lives:
 1. Our lives as well as all that we have must be consecrated, set apart for God:
 2. You will notice in the bible, the emphasis on the “holy temple,” the “holy Sabbath,” the “holy altar,” and the “holy places.” These things were separated from common use, from the natural realm of existence and dedicated to the supernatural realm...that to the exclusive service of God.
 3. Have you ever devoted your home to the Lord?
 - a. It is an act that has greater impact than mere symbolism. I have done this before and have known people to do it as well. We walk around the property and dedicate it to the Lord and His glory. Then stand and pray

for the home and everything in it to be dedicated for God's use and service.

- b. The home may still appear to be an ordinary home in the eyes of our neighbors, but in reality it has moved from the realm of the common to the holy.
 - c. After dedicating it, you become aware of how you are a steward of God's assets, the home belonging to Him and His use.
4. If you are looking for a way to take a practical step today, this is one you can take. When you return home this afternoon, take some time to walk your property, pray with your FAMILY over your home and dedicate it and all that is in it to God.
- a. Not only can you dedicate things to God and allow them to become holy in their character and use, you can dedicate your heart, soul and mind to God as well.
 - b. An ordination of someone is a act of dedication and setting apart that person for God's service.
 - c. In the same way, Israel agreed to be God's holy nation, and God gave them distinctive things they would do and be in order to separate themselves and demonstrate themselves as holy.
 - i. They were told to keep the Sabbath as Holy. Unique, Separate, different than another day of the week. It was to help them understand that God is not common, but unique, holy, separate and they were called to be the same.
 - ii. They were told not to sow their fields with mixed seeds, and not to wear mixed cloths (Lev. 19:19). The wearing of an unblended shirt didn't make them holy, it didn't change their character, it was merely an external sign of their belonging to God, of their uncommon nature of their relationship with God.
 - iii. The tithe, in Lev. 27:30 "and all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord."
 1. This was clear that the tithe of their income was uncommon, it belonged to God and was separate from the other 9/10's of their income.
5. It represented a setting apart of the giver as well. Your conduct and your tithe are acts of consecration to God as well. They are acts of "spiritual service" or "worship to God.

VI. Decision time:

- a. You have the opportunity to make a decision today about your holiness. It isn't about a life of 'no's' but rather about leaving the world of "no" in order to experience the world of "yes." The world of God's blessings, His favor and His love.
- b. If you have never experienced the new birth, the positional holiness that Jesus offers you, by trading in your sins for his righteousness, the old for the new, you can do that today. In a moment, we will be having a time of response, and you can slip out of your seat and walk up the aisle to meet me here at the front where I will pray with you and help you seal your eternal future.
- c. Or you may be struggling with consecration, of giving God your life, of surrendering the control of your life. You feel like you are holding back, and you have tried over and over again to surrender, yet you keep finding yourself back in the drivers seat ,and God is somewhere in the trunk of your life.
 - i. You will need to spend some time reflecting during our response time. I invite you to sit where you are and list the mercies of God that you have experienced. The blood Christ shed for you, the love He gives you, the new life you live, the forgiveness you have experienced, the forever friendship of your savior, the hearing God who listens and answers your prayers, who meets your needs, who cares for you and who promises never to let you slip out of his hand. Reflect for a time, if you need to, you can spend some time at the prayer rails, as sometimes taking a physical action of coming forward will humble you enough to get in tune and in touch with the Spirit of God.
- d. Whatever your decision, do it while we sing:

1.