

Book Review: The Pursuit of Holiness

This book is about the pursuit of holiness in our daily lives as the title suggests. It was written by Jerry Bridges, the Vice President for Corporate Affairs of 'The Navigators'. He is also the author of The Practice of Godliness.

Since this is a book review, I would summarise this whole book into 17 main points as there are 17 chapters in the book with each chapter mentioning important points relating to the pursuit of holiness.

1. Holiness is for you

The concept of holiness may seem a bit obsolete in our generation, however, holiness is very much a biblical idea. The word holy in various forms occurs more than 600 times in the Bible which highlights its importance. We must face the fact that we have a personal responsibility to be holy. The Bible even tells us that we are to be holy for God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). To be holy is to be morally blameless, separated from sin and therefore set apart for God. Holiness is for us and we are to put away our old self and be renewed in the spirit of our mind.

2. The Holiness of God

God has called every Christian to a holy life. This call to a holy life is due to the fact that God Himself is perfectly holy. As used in the Bible, holiness describes both the sovereignty of God and the purity and moral perfection of His nature. Holiness is the impeccability of all of God's other attributes. God's faculty is holy, His love is holy and his wisdom is holy too.

3. Holiness Is Not an Option

The Bible tells us that without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Therefore, we are to pursue after holiness and make every effort to be holy. The Bible states of both a holiness in which we have in Christ before God, and a holiness which we are to go after. These two aspects of holiness complement each other for our salvation is a salvation to holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

4. The Holiness of Christ

On several events, the Word of God testify that Jesus during His time on earth, lived a superbly holy life. He is described as "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), as one who "committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22) and as "Him who had no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). However, the holiness of Jesus was more than just the absence of sin. It was also His perfect compliance to the will of His Father.

5. A Change of Kingdoms

We have been freed from the reign and power of sin, the kingdom of unrighteousness. However, it wasn't with our own ability that we were set free from sin's reign. Our deliverance was through our union with Christ in His death. We are to count ourselves dead to sin's rule, that we can counter, resist and say no to sin. Through Christ, God has delivered us from sin's dominion so that we can now withstand it. Through Christ, God has delivered us from sin's dominion so that we can now withstand it.

6. The Battle for Holiness

Though we are delivered from the power of sin through our union with Christ, sin will still try to gain control over us just as Paul depicted in Romans 7:21. However, even though believers still have this indwelling proneness to sin, the Holy Spirit maintains within us a prevailing desire for holiness. We are to always be watchful also, as, though sin has been dethroned from within us, it does not change its nature. The bible mentions that the seat of indwelling sin is the heart (Mark 7:21-23, Luke 6:45). Therefore, we are to constantly guard our heart from sin and need to ask God daily to search our hearts. We are to also keep ourselves occupied with the word of God. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps 119:105), and is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrew 4:12)

7. Help in the Daily Battle

To experience practical everyday holiness, we must accept the fact that God in his infinite wisdom, has allowed the daily battle between indwelling sin and us. However, God does not leave us to do the battle alone. He has made ample provision for us to resist sin. God has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us, strengthen us to holiness, enables us to see our need of holiness and enlightens our understanding so that we begin to see God's standard of holiness.

8. Obedience – Not Victory

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to put to death the misdeed of the body (Romans 8:13). It is our responsibility to do our part in staying away from sin and to live a holy life. God gives us the resources essential for our holiness, but it is our responsibility to use the resource God has provided. We are to obey God's Word, abide by it and live with it.

9. Putting Sin to Death

Putting sin to death is an action we have to take as it is crucial in our path towards holiness. The word mortify in the bible describes this action we are to take against sin. However, mortification must be done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must also play our part in the process of mortification as without any action taken under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, nothing would be achieved at the end of the day. For us to put sin to death, we have to obey God's Word. God's Word has to be kept in our hearts and minds such that it becomes a major influence in our actions and thoughts

10. The Place of Personal Discipline

Godliness or holiness is not something we can achieve instantly. Rather, it requires us to have certain level of discipline in order to achieve it over time. Discipline toward holiness starts with the Word of God. Paul mentioned "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2Tim3:16). Reading the Bible consistently requires us to have discipline and following what the Bible teaches and applying it in our lives also requires us to have discipline. Furthermore, discipline also requires perseverance as there are bound to be failed attempts in trying to be disciplined. We are never to slacken or give up even when we are unsuccessful but instead continue persevering just what the Bible says in Proverbs 24:16.

11. Holiness in Body

Genuine holiness requires us to control and discipline our physical bodies. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, we were bought at a price and therefore we are to honour God with our bodies. We are to take responsibility in keeping our bodies holy by fleeing temptations and youthful lusts, keep away from thinking how to satisfy our sinful desires and depend on the Holy Spirit to work in us and to strengthen us.

12. Holiness in Spirit

The Bible teaches us that the commandments of God are meant not only to control our outward conduct, but our inner nature as well. It is not enough that we do not commit murder, we must not hate as well. Sometimes, a bitter, critical or unforgiving spirit may be present in us when we have feelings of indignation toward people who have done us wrong. However, these sinful attitudes keep us from being holy before God. Therefore, we need to constantly pray for humbleness to see those sinful attitudes and for God's grace to purge them out of our minds and replace them with the right thoughts which are well-pleasing to God.

13. Holiness in Our Wills

In all that has been said so far about the need for our responsibility for holiness. The action of our wills is always involved. It is ultimately our will that determines whether we would be holy in our character or not. Therefore, we have to learn how to submit our will to God's will on a daily basis. We need to guard what comes into our minds and what controls our emotion just as Solomon warned us in Proverbs 4:23, and keep our ways pure by keeping it according to God's word (Psalms 119:9)

14. Habits of Holiness

Habit is defined as the "prevailing disposition or character of a person's thought and feelings". Each time we sin, the habit of sinning is reinforced, making us more prone to sin. Our habits are capable of influencing our wills, which would then influence our thoughts and actions as well. Hence it is extremely important that we develop habits of holiness to counter the habits of sin. We need to rely and cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to break our sinful habits as well as make every effort to obey God's Word and say no to sin.

15. Holiness and Faith

Faith is not only essential for salvation, it is also necessary to live a life which is pleasing to God. Thus, faith and holiness are undoubtedly linked to each other. There are several illustrations in Hebrews 11 which depict godly men exercising remarkable faith towards God and His commandments. By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith, Noah, when warned about things not seen yet, in holy fear build an ark to save his family. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrew 11:6). In our pursuit of holiness, it is therefore very important that we must have faith to obey the will of God revealed to us in His Word as well as faith to test upon the promises of God.

16. Holiness in an Unholy World

Christians have to live a holy life in the midst of a world full of unholiness, where temptations are ever unceasing. Paul urged us to come out from among the worldly people, be separate

from them as well as to avoid the unclean things in the world (2Corinthians 6:17). However, we are not to totally avoid contact with the world but to be the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). We have to resist the influence of the world instead of withdrawing contact from it. In times of trials and temptations, God's Word is our main defense and guidance (Psalms 119:9). Exhibiting personal holiness consistently is definitely difficult, thus we have to always look upon God in prayer and look to Jesus as our great example who was Himself holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26).

17. The Joy of Holiness

It is only those who walk in holiness who experience true joy. There is joy when we have fellowship with God. David said "In thy presence is fullness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11). However, joy not only comes from a holy life, it also produces a holy life. Nehemiah told the dejected exiles who returned to Jerusalem that it is the joy of the Lord that is their strength (Nehemiah 8:10). To experience such joy, we have to obey the Word of God, say no to sin as well as to take up the responsibility in keeping ourselves holy.

Conclusion

Let us therefore pursue to be holy as it is required of us by God. It is only when we walk in holiness, then can we have the perfect peace of God abiding in our hearts and the fullness of joy God has promised to those who obey Him.