



Growth Questions

“Why do you think it’s necessary to understand holiness as an identity (someone God says you are) before it describes a lifestyle?”

“What’s the difference between a fully-developed theology and ‘assurance of faith’ (Hebrews 10:22)? In what ways are you now more confident in your relationship with God? What areas still provide some inner-tension?”

“In your own experience, in what ways have you seen holiness divide people instead of distinguish them? What are some of the challenges of living ‘Christianly’ in a culture with such divergent values?”

“In what practical ways do you find yourself decisively ‘in the world’? How would you describe the nature of your interactions and relationships with those with conflicting values and worldviews?”

Teaching Notes

“... live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (4:1)

This is a **“pivotal”** passage because Paul has essentially spent the first (3) chapters of Ephesians establishing a culture of chosenness and belonging, securing us in love. Then, and only then, does he venture into any consideration of re-ordering our behavior. *“Now, go and live into that identity; go and be who you were created to be”.*

We cannot allow ourselves to become convinced that holiness is anything other than establishing the ‘shalom’ of God in every facet of our lives and demonstrating to people what it looks like to live “collaboratively” under the reign of God.

“worthy” (Gr. axios)- **having the weight of another thing of like value**

The word functions as a metaphor: you place an amount of weight in the pan on one end and then fill the other with something until the two pans are in equilibrium. When they are, they are said to be **“axios”--- worthy**.

We need to be cautious about our handling of metaphor. Be sure that what's **not** being measured here is our inherent value/worth, as if God piles the weight of his expectations on one side and then dares us to measure up. What **is** being contrasted here is the robust nature of our calling (the life that it makes possible) and the quality of our experience: the life that it is producing.

“As we live in God, our love grows more perfect... we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world” (1 John 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:5).

John says that there is a level of confidence that is cultivated as we see our lives ‘coming together’: faith, not simply as a stated creed, but as a demonstration of our trust in a different way of life. **“Axios”**.

The best way to move toward holiness (in practice and expression) is from a place of holiness.

(e.g. acceptance letter from Ohio State Patrol: the ‘call’ (invitation) re-trained my imagination and established an identity which re-ordered the day-to-day decision-making process for me.)

It would be unlikely that we would ever truly realize the transformation we desire without first being convinced that God is **for** us and that his love secures us and provides the atmosphere in which we can risk authenticity and restoration.

Holiness says...

Our usefulness in living into the ‘God-call’ can only be realized in our difference; not a difference that distances us from the culture, but one that certainly distinguishes us.

Let’s face it, this idea of holiness anticipates that our lives will be different--- not in sectarian or self-righteous ways--- but in beautiful and inviting expressions of God-like character which are making him both attractive and available.

I think the church has spent the last several years attempting to suggest to the culture: **“Hey, look... we’re really a lot like you!”** And, the culture has ignored us because what they are really looking for is **a reason to notice us.**

I’m convinced that people long for us to be ‘different’. I think that people are looking for a reason to trust us... to trust our faith. To provide them with a story and means of pursuing a life that is less self-destructive and healthier.

1 Peter 2:9 *“...chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people belonging (**peculiar**) to God, that you may show the praises of him who called you...”*

“peculiar”- literally means, *‘to make something and then surround it with a circle, indicating ownership.’* **These people are mine!**

Living counter-culturally on the same terrestrial ball--- but under a different rule and with a sacred motivation--- is the best thing we could do for the culture.

Our arguments can be refuted, the miraculous can be dismissed as religious 'slight-of-hand' but, the beauty of the life lived well is both attractive and remarkable.

But, to complicate matters, every one of us here today is a **“recovering moralist”**: although we gather weekly with our community to tout the wonder of grace, *‘behind close doors’* we behave as if there is something that we can do to make ourselves more presentable---- more loveable, to God.

Moralism and relativism are all that we are left with once we give up on grace.

With **moralism**, the gospel gets diluted into some form of God-etiquette but it lacks any deeper incentive beyond, *“Because I said so...”*; the single phrase which did little to motivate me toward obedience as an adolescent and even less to prompt me toward right-living as a Christian.

“Be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 20:26) God doesn't say, *“Try to be holy as I am holy”*--- he wants us simply to allow our present arrangement with him (accepted/loved) to compel us toward a lifestyle that's in keeping with who we really are: “in Christ”. This is not a threat or an ultimatum, but a hopeful invitation to life.

Relativism makes for good party conversation, but leaves us all the unwitting victims of another's self-centered desires. Everyone **“doin' their own thing”** is fine when it comes to the omelet bar, but it's anarchy and chaos when it we take that approach to life.

The alternative approach is not a faith which makes no demands of us, but a faith that demands something better of us; an appeal to live more “humanly”.

“I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from other people” (Lev. 20:24). I'm a different kind of God. You should be a different kind of people.

But, it's hard to be **“unique”**. It's hard to live amongst a culture which in so many ways lives in direct conflict with Godly values and priorities and not become self-righteous and cynical. It's hard to live amongst conflicting values without somehow adopting some of those values along the way and forfeiting our distinctiveness.

Our options, according to Jesus [John 17]:

In, but out ... In, but of... In, but not of...

In, but out of the world (disengaged)

It's the *“beam-me-up-Scotty”*, approach. The objective here is to move to the mountains, accumulate a cache of weapons and stockpile a cold-cellar full of canned goods and wait for the mother-ship to return... for Jesus to come back. But, there's no such thing as a *“safe distance”* from the world. It's the point of the incarnation.

In, but of the world (distinctiveness)

This is the opposite end of the continuum. Here we become so anxious to fit in that instead of identifying with our culture, we become identified by our culture. Ironically, in our misguided attempts at transformation, we end up looking pretty much like everyone else.

In, but not of the world (disarming)

"I'm not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one." (17:15). Holiness requires a decisive "being with" while tenaciously avoiding a "being of". This is where we are fully engaged. Our faith becomes fully functional and fully relational. With this posture, our *"lights shine before humanity and bring glory to God..."* (Matthew 5:16),

In the pursuit of holiness...

Ask God for a 'new heart'. God knew that the only way to restore a disconnected humanity was to place within them a desire for him that was somehow stronger than their urges toward sin [Jeremiah 17:9]. With the new heart comes new passions and new affections designed to respond to God and function in blessing.

- Adopt practices which cultivate and accommodate your new identity.
- Keep company with people who can consistently remind you of who you are.
- Live confessionally. **confess-** 'agree with; to say the same thing as; to concede to the truth'

As simplistic as it may sound, our lives will be dramatically impacted by the confessions that we make. God wants us to say the same thing he is saying. He wants us to agree with him--- concede to blessing--- and allow his declared purposes to inform and form our sense of identity and the lifestyle which proceeds from it.

We lack discrimination when it comes to our endorsements. Meaning, we give consent to a lot of beliefs about God, about life, about ourselves, that **'just ain't true!'** Something deep within us says, *"You'll never be able to satisfy him"*, or, *"You'll never be the father that those kids need"*, or, *"You're nothing without this promotion!"*

When we consent to those things, we give them **authority---** **"meaningful grounds for action"**. It actually creates our reality and establishes the boundaries within which we function.

Some of the first words of God we have on record (Genesis 3): **"Who told you that?"** That question was prompted by the disconnect that humanity felt as a result of experiencing something other than God and his love for them. Just as promised, something within them 'died'.

Confession is the healthy antithesis of shame. It helps to create more distance between my brokenness and the person that I'm becoming. It's not some cathartic attempt to excuse my sin, instead, I am declaring, *"I'm not that person anymore!"*

If our lives are "coming together" (integrating belief and lifestyle), others will be able to look to us to see God; if not, they'll simply look past us and dismiss him because of us.

I've decided that I want people to discover Christ because of me, not in spite of me.