

Holiness

Exodus 29:36-37 HCSB Sacrifice a bull as a sin offering each day for atonement. Purify the altar when you make atonement for it, and anoint it in order to consecrate it. (37) For seven days you must make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. The altar will become especially holy; whatever touches the altar will become holy.

Introduction

As someone who has grown up in the Baptist denomination, I am very familiar with the term “holiness.” I’ve heard sermons on holiness from before the time I could even say the word. And I agree that holiness is important. It’s something that we must achieve. But it seems that somewhere in our growth and manifestations of the Spirit, by and large we’ve lost our holiness. I firmly believe that we must return to holiness.

But I think that one of the biggest problems with achieving holiness is that we really don’t understand what holiness is. I grew up in a church that said holiness was men not wearing shorts, long hair, or jewelry. It was women not wearing pants, makeup, jewelry, short hair, colored hair, pig tails, hair ribbons, hair clips (unless they were the same color as her hair), or red dresses. Holiness was not watching TV, going to the movies, dancing, gambling, playing pool, smoking, drinking, doing drugs, and a whole long list of other no-no’s. I suppose, even though we didn’t hear as much about it, that holiness also included a lot of do’s, like do read your Bible, do pray, do pay your tithes, do go to church every time the doors are open, and on and on. To sum it all up, holiness was a long list of do’s and don’ts. And if you did the do’s and didn’t do the don’ts you were holy.

Frankly, I went to a church that had a lot of rules. But even if your list isn’t as extreme as mine, your definition of holiness may consist of a list of things you must do and a list of things you cannot do.

Now, in reading Exodus 29:36b, I have come across a problem with this definition. And I think that in examining this problem, we can begin to see what holiness really is, and then we can begin to achieve holiness.

Exodus 29:36b Purify the altar when you make atonement for it, and anoint it in order to consecrate it.

I. Holiness Means Separated From

The first of the two lines says, “Purify the altar by making atonement for it.” Now, atonement was made through a blood sacrifice. And the purpose of atonement was a covering for sin. So this command means “sacrifice the proper animal and sprinkle its blood on the altar to “cover up” the sin that has defiled the altar. Now after this is done, the altar is pure. The altar is, at that point, without sin. Now if we use the definition of holiness, “without sin” then we could say at this point that the altar was already “holy” right? If holy means “without sin” and the altar has just been cleansed from sin, that would make the altar holy.

But God’s next instruction for the altar is “Make it holy by anointing it with oil.” Even when it was made sin-free by the blood, the altar still needed to be “made holy.” So then, what is holy? I’m not going to say that holiness doesn’t at least involve or include living a righteous life, free from sin. But that is not the summation of holiness. While holiness may include being sin-free, and we’ll examine that, sin-free is not the totality of holiness.

Holiness means “separated” or “set-apart.” In this specific case, God was talking about the altar. By anointing the altar with oil, they were signifying that this altar was not just an ordinary altar. This altar wasn’t for just any old purpose. This altar existed for a specific purpose and that purpose was to make offerings to God. No other use for this altar was permissible, because this altar had been set apart for this purpose.



¹I don't know about your homes, but in the Pauley home mom has "good dishes." These dishes are kept in a cabinet with glass doors so that they can be seen because they're so beautiful. When you want to make a snack or grab a bite to eat, you don't put it on one of these plates. You use one of the normal dishes.

You see these dishes only come out on special occasions, usually when there's company around to impress. These dishes are "set apart" for a special purpose. They are separated. They are not stored with or treated like the ordinary dishes. These are special dishes.

Paul talks about these kinds of dishes in

- [2 Timothy 2:20 HCSB](#) Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and earthenware, some for special use, some for ordinary.

Living a life of holiness does not necessarily only mean living a life that is free from sin. It means living a life that is separated or set-apart. It means we are not like ordinary people. We are a special people.

- [1 Peter 2:9 HCSB](#) But you are **a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises** of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Holiness means being different from the world. Now, some older translations, said instead of "special people," "peculiar people." And believe me, when we follow our list of do's and don'ts a lot of people may look at us like we're weird. That's why I'm glad that the modern translations have fixed it to read "special people." While the world may indeed think that we are strange when we follow God's ways, this is not the objective at all.

True holiness pervades every aspect of your life, controlling your every decision and action. But it does involve righteousness. Here's how.

Before we were saved, we may have engaged in all kinds of filthy behavior. We did all kinds of dishonorable filthy things. But it didn't make a difference, because at that time we were filthy dishonorable people. The pig doesn't mind getting dirty. But a high-class gentleman wouldn't dream of going where the pig goes. The high-class gentleman wouldn't dream of doing the types of activities the pigs do. And because of that the man may look down at the activities of these creatures. Now, I'm not suggesting that we all become snobs and look down on sinners. That's the exact opposite of what I'm talking about here.

- [2 Timothy 2:20-21 HCSB](#) Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and earthenware, some for special use, some for ordinary. **(21)** So if anyone purifies himself from these things, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

¹ http://farm1.static.flickr.com/43/87135661_367bc9abb0.jpg?v=0

You see in order for us to remain separated for that special use, we must remain pure. Remember if not purified by the blood, the altar could never have been separated to be used for sacrifices to God. And the same is true of us. We are a special people. We are separated unto God. However, when we become contaminated by sin, we are like a silver cup that is tarnished. Now, I don't know anybody who throws away tarnished silver, thinking that it's now worthless. But at the same time, nobody is going to serve tea to their guests of honor with a tarnished tea set. It's the same way with us. We don't become less valuable to God when we sin. However, when we become contaminated by sin, we lose our ability to be used for special purpose.

Sure sin is pleasurable for a season, but it leaves stains that make it better left alone. We don't miss the low-class pleasures because we know that our separateness gives us access to pleasures that far surpass what the other class of activities can attain. Why would we ever stoop to lesser pleasures? Our tastes are more refined! Because of our separated status, we don't have to engage in the filth of this world. We are different. We are set apart. We would be much better off if we would act snobbish toward sin (not sinners, but sin). If we would realize that we no longer have to sin, because we are separate, we would be much better off.



²In the movie "Lord of the Rings" there is a ring, and it has a power. It was created by the evil force. And it has the power to corrupt whoever holds it. It makes the person very possessive of the ring, until a gentle, kind old man's eyes fill with violent, hateful, fire because he thinks someone wants to take the ring from him. If the man just gives up the ring (which he does) it has no control over him. Now, they are on a quest to carry this ring to some certain place to destroy it. And all along, the boy carrying it must struggle against the power of the ring. All along the ring tries to control him, and there's always the risk that he will succumb to it.

Sometimes we're like that with the world and the world's system. We want to do what is pure and right. And we try our best to. But the world has a power to corrupt people. The world's system has a way of controlling people. Be it through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, this world has a way of corrupting people. And we as Christians know that some of those things are wrong, so we try our best to avoid them. But we don't want to give up the world. We try to hold onto the world and at the same time resist and resist the power of the world. Well, the fact is that the pull of the world is strong. The temptation is tough. And eventually if you cling to this world, it will get you. If you subscribe to this world, this world will win. The way of holiness is not to continue buying into this world's system in a Christian way. The way of holiness is "come out from them and separate yourselves from them."

Now obviously, you can't leave the world right now. That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is the same thing John spoke of in

² <http://www.council-of-elrond.com/castdb/ring/ring1.jpg>

- **1 John 2:15-17 HCSB** Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. Because everything that belongs to the world-- (16) the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's lifestyle--is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God's will remains forever.

I'm talking about Christians that are exactly the same as the world, except they have the name Christian. Oh, they may be more honest, or more pure, or more anything else than the others. But the fact is that their lives are still lived for the same purposes as those who are not Christians "physical pleasures, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions." That person's life is a waste.

II. Separated To

Now holy doesn't just mean separated and that's it. Holy means more than that. Holy means separated for a special purpose. We are not just separate from the world and that's it. We are separated for more than one purpose.

A. We are separated to be the Temple of God.

- **2 Corinthians 6:15-18 HCSB** (15) What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (16) And what agreement does God's sanctuary have with idols? For we are the sanctuary of the living God, as God said: **I will dwell among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people.** (17) **Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord; do not touch any unclean thing, and I will welcome you.** (18) **I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.**

Just as the Tabernacle and the altar had to be set apart for worship of God in the Old Testament, so the Temple must be set apart for God. A Temple is a place where the presence of God dwells. And when we are saved, God's presence comes and dwells inside of us. That makes us the Temple of God.

God cannot live in a Temple that is defiled by sin. God must live in a Temple that is set apart for him. You can't come to church on Sunday and praise God and clap and sing and even shout and dance, but then live any way you want to on the weekdays. You are still the Temple of God on Monday, Tuesday, etc. You must be set apart. That means you exist for the special purpose of being a pure dwelling for God. It isn't just something you do. It is something you become.

B. We are separated to show others the goodness of God.

- **1 Peter 2:9-12 HCSB** But you are **a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises** of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (10) Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (11) Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you. (12) Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do evil, they may, by observing your good works, glorify God in a day of visitation.

Here Peter gives us the purpose for which we have been set apart, So that we can show others the goodness of God. Just in case the people had forgotten, Peter lists for us the things that God has done for us. He talks of the darkness we were once in and how now we live in light. And in case any of the people want to be arrogant about their holy or separated status, Peter is quick to point out that we have received God's mercy. That is, we deserved destruction just like everyone else. We cannot be arrogant, because we have not made ourselves to be what we are. We are where we are only because of the mercy of God.

So, we can see that the thing we have been set apart for is sharing the Good News of Jesus. Now, as I'm sure you all already know, I'm a proponent of sharing the Good News. I believe that we must tell others all about what Christ has done for us. I believe that we must be able to verbally present the Gospel to people.

- **1 Peter 3:15 HCSB** but set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Sharing the Gospel is very important. But look at the way Peter says it, "If you are asked." Why would somebody ask? What would lead somebody to ask?

The answer is in:

- **1 Peter 2:12 HCSB** Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do evil, they may, by observing your good works, glorify God in a day of visitation.

When our boys don't wear shorts and our girls don't wear pants, nobody looks at us and says, "Oh I want to be like that." It's not following a bunch of ridiculous rules that make you holy. Now, I'm not saying that our actions should be determined by what others think. But look at the person who is holy, set apart for God. It is their actions and attitudes in everyday life that attract people to their faith. Even when the holy person is accused of wrong, they act in a way that is honorable. In this world, when someone is accused they become very defensive and often hostile. But the "set apart" person isn't affected by the accusations of this world. His integrity carries him through, in such a way that the accuser in the end, wants to be like him.

When we are truly holy, people will want to have what we have. They will see the difference, and it will be an attractive difference to them. That is when we can explain to them how through Jesus Christ, they too can achieve the same thing. Because it's not that we're better than they are. It's not that we're special in and of ourselves. That's why it's dangerous to use the term "special." We are special. But the fact is that anybody else can be special too. Our lives have been set apart for the purpose of bringing other men and women into the Kingdom of God.

III. How Holiness Happens.

In **Exodus 29:36b**, we have the answer. The purifying is done with the blood, just as we are purified by the blood of Jesus. The holiness comes through anointing with oil. Oil very often signifies the Holy Spirit. And indeed it is the Holy Spirit that sets us apart from the rest of the world.

- **2 Thessalonians 2:13 HCSB (13)** But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
- **Acts 1:8 HCSB** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Remember that the purpose of being set apart is to spread the Good News. We know that apart from the power of the Holy Spirit we are unable to effectively share with others the Good News of God. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the boldness, gives us the words to say, and gives us the power that makes the Good News more than just words on a page, but a reality in our lives.

Jesus said in

- **Luke 4:18-19 HCSB** The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, (19) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That was what set Jesus apart. Lots of religious leaders have come and gone in our world. Lots of them have ideas. They pass their knowledge on to others. They are all about their knowledge. Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived. But if all he had were words, then he would be no better than all the other great teachers. But because the Holy Spirit was upon him, there was power in his words. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that brought the words that he spoke to pass. He had a message. But he had more than a message. He had the power to make that message happen.

We don't have just words and just knowledge at our disposal. Through the Holy Spirit, we have the power to actually experience the things that we preach. So, when we share the Good News, we don't just share empty words. We share a living hope and a living message, one that is backed by the very real power of the Holy Spirit.

- [Romans 8:12-13 HCSB](#) So then, brothers, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, (13) for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Think back to before you were saved for a minute. You were estranged from God, because of your sin and you were completely powerless to do anything about it. If you had tried and tried your whole life to overcome sin, you could never have done it. It is something that cannot be done on your own. Then, in Jesus Christ, God offered you the free gift of salvation, and you received it by faith. The thing that you could never do was done for you.

Now, you try to live a holy life. And we, being people, who love to go back to our old ways, keep trying to do it on our own. We spent our whole pre-Christian life failing at trying to overcome sin. We submitted, and allowed God, through Jesus, to overcome for us, and then we go right back to trying to be holy on our own. No matter how hard you try, you will never be able to be holy on your own. You will never find victory over sin on your own. You will only struggle and fail. However, when you submit to the Holy Spirit and allow him to work in your life, God once again gives you the power to overcome sin. It isn't that you needed God for that first big hurdle and from there on you can handle it yourself. You must daily walk with God, because in the daily struggle you need the Holy Spirit to help you overcome every day.

We're not the first people to think this way. The church in Galatia had the same problem, which Paul addressed in his letter to them.

- [Galatians 3:3 HCSB](#) Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now going to be made complete by the flesh?

Conclusion:

Our own effort was enough before, and our own effort isn't enough now. But just as the blood of Jesus was enough to save us, the power of the Holy Spirit is enough to keep us. The oil of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to keep us set apart from the world. Holy.