

## FOLLOWING HOLINESS

### Introduction

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”  
(Hebrews 12:14).

### Purpose Of The Book Of Hebrews

1. The Christians to whom the author writes were being sorely persecuted by non-Christian Jews; whose aim was to get them to renounce Christ and keep the Mosaic Law (cp. Hebrews 10:32ff). The overall theme of the book of Hebrews is that salvation cannot be obtained through any other means than Jesus the Christ. The writer encourages the saints to remain faithful to the Messiah and the faith that sanctified them.

### Analysis Of Chapter Twelve

2. <sup>1</sup>The author has illustrated the nature and power of faith in chapter eleven, and in chapter twelve he exhorts the saints to apply the same principles to their own case, and to manifest the same steady confidence in God and perseverance in their holy walk. For this purpose, he sets the following considerations:
  - a. He sets forth the heroes of faith as witnesses of their strife in the Christian race, and as cheering them on to victory (Hebrews 12:1).
  - b. He appeals to the example of the Saviour. The circumstances in His case which are an encouragement to perseverance in the Christian conflict are these: (i) He endured the cross, and is now exalted to the right hand of God, (ii) He bore the contradiction of sinners against Himself, (iii) He went beyond them in His trials and temptations, for He had “resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:2-4).
  - c. He encourages them by showing that their trials would result in their own good, and particularly that the hand of the Father was in them (Hebrews 12:5-13).
  - d. He exhorts them to perseverance and faithfulness by the fact that if they should renounce their confidence in God, it would be impossible to retrieve what was lost (Hebrews 12:14-17).
  - e. He urges them to perseverance by the nature of the dispensation under which they were, as compared with the one under which they had formerly been - the Jewish. Under the former, everything was suited to alarm and terrify the soul, but the new dispensation is adapted to encourage and to win the heart. To those that fall away, under whatever covenant, God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:18-29).

### I. FOLLOW AFTER GOD

#### A. God is holy.

1. It is because God is holy, that we must be holy. As Peter said, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy [Leviticus 11:44-45]” (1 Peter 1:15-16). The holiness God requires is in respect to our conduct.
2. God wants us to partake of His holiness, and it is through chastening that God achieves this work. The author of Hebrews writes, “For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).
3. Christians are “a people for God’s own possession”. Peter said, “But you are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). The great object for which we were redeemed – to proclaim the glory of God (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:31).
4. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ “that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

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<sup>1</sup> The following remarks were gleaned from Barnes’ commentary.

B. Jesus is holy.

1. As our High Priest, Jesus' holiness has been established. The author of Hebrews says, "For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (**Hebrews 7:26**).
2. As Christians we can expect to suffer for Christ's sake. Indeed, "For to this you were called" (**1 Peter 2:21**). Peter says that Jesus left us an example to follow and then says of Him, "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth [Isaiah 53:9]" (**1 Peter 2:22**).
3. Thus Jesus qualified Himself to be the lamb without spot or wrinkle – the perfect sacrifice for sin. Paul says of Jesus, "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (**Titus 2:14**). "Gratitude for the penalty He suffered in our stead, demands godly living on our part" (Marshall Patton).

C. God's word is holy.

1. God's word has been revealed by the Holy Spirit. Paul said, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (**1 Corinthians 2:11-13**). The Spirit of God is holy and the word He has revealed is holy (cp. **Jeremiah 23:9**).
2. It is because God's word is holy that it can sanctify: Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth" (**John 17:17**). It is by the word that Jesus cleansed His church: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (**Ephesians 5:25-27**).

**When We Follow After God, Jesus, And God's Word,  
We Can Be Holy And Live Holy Lives.**

**II. FOLLOW AFTER PURITY**

A. Pure in mind.

1. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (**Matthew 5:8**). Holiness of the heart prevents impure thoughts. Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (**Matthew 15:19**).
2. The condition of the heart is each one's responsibility: James says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (**James 4:8**), and in view of the promises of God to dwell in us and walk with us; to be our Father and call us His sons, Paul exhorts us, saying, "... let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (**2 Corinthians 7:1**).
3. The heart must be clean, pure, and holy in readiness for the coming of the Lord: "So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (**1 Thessalonians 3:13**).

B. Pure in body.

1. What is the will of God? "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (**1 Thessalonians 4:3**). Indeed, God has called us with a view to living a holy life: "God's call to us does not permit an impure life, but demands purity" (**1 Thessalonians 4:7 TCNT**).

2. It is because God called us unto holiness that Paul says, "... let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). We cited this verse earlier to show that we are to cleanse our minds, but notice, too, that we must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the "flesh".
3. It is essential to understand that we must yield or submit all the members of our body to holiness: "... For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" (Romans 6:19).

C. Pure in all things in this life.

1. God is holy and so we are obliged to be holy in *all* our ways: "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).
2. Unbelievers will, inevitably, make false accusations against Christians, and so it is essential that our conduct is pure and holy at all times, so that such accusations will appear groundless: "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).
3. We should be concerned about holy living because one day the world will be destroyed. How does this affect our holiness? "Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11).

### III. FOLLOW AFTER DISTINCTNESS

A. The world, contrary to its protests, offers no distinctness.

1. The world wants us to conform to its lusts and live by its principles (Romans 12:1-2).
2. Christians, though, are warned not to love the world or the things in the world, because all that is in the world based on lust and pride: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).
3. Christians are a peculiar people that have been called out of the world by the gospel; we must be a distinctive people. "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

B. But we are God's special people and must be distinctive.

1. Israel was a special and distinctive people: "For you are a holy people to Jehovah your God; Jehovah your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6).
2. The church, spiritual Israel, is God's special and distinctive people: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).
3. In Isaiah 34-35, he contrasts the desolation of the nations of Edom with the future glory of Zion. In order to reach Zion, God will establish a highway on which the redeemed will travel: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for the redeemed: the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein" (Isaiah 35:8). Those on the highway are distinctive from those of the world – they are holy.

C. It is essential to be distinct from the world.

1. God has called us out of the world: "Therefore Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

2. Having been called out of the world, we must ensure we do not conform to the world: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (**Romans 12:1-2**).
3. We are to walk as distinct from the world as children of light: “For you were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (**Ephesians 5:8**).

### **Conclusion**

1. We can follow after holiness and be a holy people by...
  - Following after God.
  - Following after purity.
  - Following after distinctness.
2. John says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world” (**1 John 2:15-16**). God has called us out of Egypt and we must not keep looking back with longing eyes (i.e., participating in worldly things), lest we be turned into a pillar of salt.

This sermon outline is based on lesson by Kevin Cauley, which you can see here: <http://gewatkins.net/sermon-on-holiness-following-holiness/>

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