

INCENTIVES TO PURSUE HOLINESS

Introduction

1. In a previous lesson – “The Battle For The Mind” – we showed how the Holy Spirit transforms us through the renewing of the mind: as we allow the Spirit to influence us through the word that He revealed, then the mind is renewed day by day, which leads to transformation; it is an on going process (**Ephesians 4:23; Romans 12:2**). Indeed, God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (**Romans 8:29**).
2. God, through His word, has given us everything we need for living a godly life (**2 Peter 1:2-3**). But Satan also seeks to devour us (**1 Peter 5:8**) and, being the god of this world (**2 Corinthians 4:4**) and having all the world under his sway (**1 John 5:19**), he is seeking to influence our minds unto evil (**John 13:27; Acts 26:18; 2 Timothy 2:26; 1 Thessalonians 3:5**), which he does through all that is at his disposal in the world.
3. It is essential, therefore, that we guard our hearts against all the evil and corrupting influences of the world. Solomon wrote, “Guard your heart above all else, for everything you do flows from it” (**Proverbs 4:23**). In that lesson we looked at some scriptural advise in regards to minimizing the evil influences of the world on our minds. True, we have to live in the world and we can’t completely avoid evil influences, but (i) we can take steps to minimize such influences, and, (ii) we can certainly abstain from evil influences where we have a choice.
4. What I’d like to do in this lesson is look at some of the incentives we find in John’s first epistle to pursue holiness. For unbelievers such incentives will not mean anything, but they will be of great value and encouragement to every *sincere* believer.

Incentives To Pursue Holiness:

1. **Regular confession of sin.** **1 John 1:8-10**. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us”.

Regular confession of sin is an incentive for every *sincere* believer because we are revealing our sins and expressing our shame, which leads to a strong desire to repent; a confession without a pledge to repent will not procure or secure forgiveness. Examine yourself: review your day – reveal the details of your thoughts, your words, and your deeds. Confessing our sins can be uncomfortable and it will surely bring on shame, especially as we look toward Calvary and remember the suffering Jesus endured for our sins.

2. **A desire to remain in communion with Christ.** **1 John 2:3-5**. “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him”.

Every *sincere* believer is deeply concerned about remaining in fellowship with Christ and walking in His love. Those who have gone astray in their hearts may claim “I know Him” but they are deluded if they are not keeping His commandments. Of course, keeping His commandments means avoiding sin – anger, gossip, bad-mouthing, etc. – because we know that sin cuts us off from fellowship with God (**Isaiah 59:1-2**).

3. **Remembering that we are engaged in a spiritual war.** **1 John 2:13-14**. “I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one”.

John reminds young men that they have “overcome the wicked one”, which reminds us that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare. Satan, the god of this world, is behind all the evil influences in this world, and every *sincere* believer will take this seriously – he will, therefore, put on the whole armor of God (**Ephesians 6:10-18**); he will seek to mortify the deeds of the flesh (**Romans 8:13**). Here is the promise of God: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (**James 4:7**).

4. **Love not the world.** **1 John 2:15-17.** “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”.

Coveting evil things, evil ambition, illegitimate fulfillment of fleshly lusts, obsession about appearance, etc. Yes, some people love the world and the things in it - such people do not have the love of the Father in them. While it is not wrong to desire the necessary things of the world to live in it or admire the beauty of the earth, nothing in the world must overtake the things that every *sincere* believer loves the most. This means prioritizing: God, family, service to God, fellowship with the saints. We must learn to ration the things of the world, e.g., I could buy an expensive gold watch but I'll make do with the stainless steel one I already have.

5. **Value the goal of faith.** **1 John 3:2-3.** “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”.

One day soon the Lord will be revealed and we shall be like Him. This is a thrilling thought for every *sincere* believer. This great hope surely fills us with a desire to purify ourselves of sin because how can we hope to see the Lord if we are allowing Satan to influence our hearts?

6. **Sin is a transgression of the law.** **1 John 3:4.** “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”.

People, even Christians, have a tendency to trivialize sin. I am sure we agree on what are the most grievous sins, and that the perpetrators of such are living in defiance against God. But then there are those sins that we almost account as nothing and our attitude betrays us: “I know it’s wrong and I’m working on it”, and, even worse, “I wish I didn’t do that!” Unbelievable! John’s statement is a simple fundamental truth but it ought to give us a jolt – sin is a transgression of the law and to walk in sin, even “little sins” is to walk in defiance against God, and a *sincere* believer will be horrified by this thought.

7. **Jesus was manifest to take away sins.** **1 John 3:5.** “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin”.

Jesus was not manifested to forgive us so that we could continue in our sins; He was manifested to **take away** our sins. The Lord purchased us, redeemed us, that we might be a holy people. We were purchased to be sanctified. This is God’s will for us, our sanctification (**1 Thessalonians 4:3**).

8. **We have been empowered.** **1 John 3:9-10.** “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother”.

What we see here is that the power and dominance of sin has been broken – This is a cause of great rejoicing for every *sincere* believer – we are no longer under the power and dominion of sin. What an incentive to holiness!

9. **The guilt of the hypocrite.** **1 John 3:18-19.** “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him”.

John is saying, don’t let there be a gap between your profession and your performance. Every *sincere* believer hates the idea of being a hypocrite – of claiming to be one thing and practicing the opposite. A hypocrite is despised by everyone and one who is a hypocrite despises himself. Such a person has no assurance of salvation; he has no peace of mind. It is only those who walk in accordance with what they professes who hearts are assured before Him.

10. **Keeps himself.** **1 John 5:18.** “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him”.

John says “keep himself”. The idea is that of keeping your guard up. Every *sincere* believer is concerned about being knocked down and so, just like a boxer, will keep his guard up. We are not unaware of the wiles and schemes of the devil and so we will be on constant guard against the fiery darts and temptations of the devil.

Summary

1. A *sincere* believer desires to be transformed and he knows this is only possible through the renewing of his mind, and he understands that this is a process that is achieved through a continual study and application of God's word.
2. But Satan is also seeking to influence our minds through all at his disposal in the world. We can minimize the evil influence of Satan by following the scriptural directions we discussed in the previous lesson – “The Battle For The Mind” - but we also have many incentives to pursue holiness:
 - a. Remember to confess your sins.
 - b. Remember to protect your communion with Christ.
 - c. Remember that you're in a spiritual warfare.
 - d. Remember not to love the world.
 - e. Remember your destiny.
 - f. Remember that sin is a transgression of the law – sin is defiance against God.
 - g. Remember that the purpose of your salvation is to be sanctified.
 - h. Remember that we have tremendous power – we have been freed from the power and dominion of sin.
 - i. Remember that you don't want to be a hypocrite.
 - j. Remember to keep up your guard up.

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