

Introduction:

In **Exodus 33:18-23**, Moses was blessed beyond any man living. He asked to see the glory of God. God explained that no man could see the fullness of His glory and live. But He would allow Moses to see His back. No doubt, this anthropomorphic language is intended to signify that Moses experienced a lesser degree of God's glory; he didn't see it full on, but as if it were the backside of the glory. According to **Exodus 34:29-35**, this brush with the glory of God rubbed off on Moses and caused his own face to shine. So much so that he had to veil his face before the people. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine seeing even the back part of God's glory? If you could survive the experience, would you want to see God? If you could live, would you like to be face to face with God even for a moment? Would you like to see God? **Hebrews 12:14** explains the prerequisite: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (NKJV). God has said in both covenants: "Be holy, for I am holy" (**Leviticus 11:45; I Peter 1:16**). And so, the Hebrew writer encourages us to pursue holiness. What are you pursuing? What is your goal? We'd like to invite you this year to join us in a holy pursuit. We'd like to invite you to join us in pursuing holiness. As we work on this, I'd like for us to begin with this theme verse, **Hebrews 12:14**, and see what this statement about striving for and pursuing holiness means for us.

Discussion:

I. Holiness is our goal.

- A. Perhaps this is stating the obvious. But sometimes I think we need to state the obvious or we forget it. Holiness is our goal. Anything else will fall short of eternal significance.
- B. We often talk about **Ephesians 2:8-10**. We are saved by grace through faith. This salvation is not a result of our working lest we should boast. However, God is working. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. We've seen this. We've heard the arguments about this verse. But have you ever noticed the connection to **Ephesians 4:22-24**. I don't hear very many people talk about this connection. The first three chapters of Ephesians are the theological why of Paul's letter. The last three chapters are the practical what. That is, in the first three chapters Paul explains what God has done for us, then in **Ephesians 4:1**, he says, "I therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you..." That is, because of what God has done for us as explained in **Ephesians 1-3**, Paul is now going to tell us how we should act in **Ephesians 4-6**. With that in mind, examine the connection between **Ephesians 2:8-10** and **Ephesians 4:22-24**. Because we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God has prepared beforehand, we must put off the old self and put on the new. Notice that the new self is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Because we are new creations, we must put on God's new creation. But notice the goal of that new creation—to be after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
- C. What is your goal in life? Happiness? Health? Success? Wealth? None of these will provide lasting meaning. Holiness is our goal. And this year we want to highlight that goal and work to make it ours.

II. Holiness must be our dominating pursuit.

- A. When God tells us to pursue holiness, to strive for it, He demonstrates the very nature of what it means to be a Christian. Sadly, too many have a false notion. Too many treat Christianity like it is something that can simply be added on top of all the rest they have going on. They treat it like a giant barter with God. Of course, we all want heaven in the end, and so we hope God will give it to us. We are certain there are some prerequisites, so we try to check them off the list in hopes God will allow us into His holy presence.
- B. But, we don't want to get too radical about this. We have other interests as well. And so we start the bartering process. "God, I've got all these other things going on in my life, how much religion do I have to have to get the required holiness in the end? How many times per week do I have to go to church? How many times per week do I have to pray? How many times per week do I have to read my Bible? How many people do I need to share the gospel with? Which sins do I have to eradicate? Which sins do I just have to try really hard to get over?" At this point, I pursue God as much as you can convince me is required, and then hope for the best on judgment day. Of course, with this approach, I never quite feel like I'm going to make it and often toy with just giving up on the whole thing.

- C. God has not saved us so Christianity can be a veneer over the rest of our life. He hasn't saved us to add one more pursuit among many others. He has saved us so we can pursue holiness, so we can make it our life's goal, our life's work. He has saved us so holiness can be the pursuit that dominates everything else we do. Consider Paul's explanation in **Romans 6:15-23**. Paul compares the life in Christ with the life outside of Him. When we were outside of Christ we submitted ourselves as slaves to sin, to obey it. But now that we are in Christ, we don't just kind of add in a new pursuit. We have a whole new master. This pursuit of holiness is to be our master. We must present ourselves as slaves to righteousness that will lead to sanctification (which is holiness). Holiness is not one pursuit added to many others. It must be our dominating pursuit.

III. Holiness will not happen accidentally by following the path of least resistance.

- A. We are going to unpack this point more in our next lesson. For now, please note that when the Hebrew writer says we must pursue and strive for holiness, we must recognize it is not something that is simply going to come naturally. We aren't going to accidentally stumble across holiness in our lives. If we allow our lives to be driven and tossed by every fad and cultural movement that comes our way, we won't attain holiness. If we are simply flowing on the current of life, we won't achieve holiness.
- B. We must pursue it. We must chase it down. We must hunt it. This means holiness is going to take work. It is going to take effort. Sometimes it means we are going to have to go against our own personal grain. And this, of course, is part of what is wrong with all that we are hearing around us about sexuality and same gender sexuality. Our culture believes if something comes naturally, it must be okay. Our culture believes if we have a naturally strong desire for something, especially if it seems overwhelming, it must be holy. Our culture believes if something is hard to overcome, it must actually be alright. That is simply not the case. Holiness is a pursuit, not a going with the flow. Which is why in **I Thessalonians 4:3-4**, Paul explains that we must learn how to control our bodies in holiness and honor.
- C. Temptation is not the same as sin. The fact that there is some sin out there that really appeals to you, doesn't mean you are a bad person; it only means you are a person. But it does mean you have to pursue holiness in that area with all the more fervor. If you don't pursue it, you won't attain it.

IV. God is sanctifying us.

- A. If you're like me, you're a little scared right now. To be honest, the pursuit of holiness seems a tad overwhelming. Who am I kidding, it seems a lot overwhelming. Therefore, while it is not specifically stated in our theme verse (**Hebrews 12:14**), I want to make sure we realize we are not alone in this pursuit.
- B. Notice what **Hebrews 12:7-11** says. God is not leaving us on our own. Rather, God is working with us so we may share in His holiness. Granted, in this text the work God is doing is discipline. However, this comforts me. "How can discipline comfort you?" you may ask. Because I understand that when the hard things are happening in life, when the struggles and trials plague me, God actually has a plan even for those. As **Romans 8:28** teaches, God can use everything that happens for our good. No, this recognition doesn't mean the Lord's discipline suddenly becomes pleasant. But it does give us the motivation to keep hanging on to Him.
- C. Second, notice that following this mention of God's work, the Hebrew writer says, "Therefore lift up your drooping hands..." and continues his exhortations including the one to pursue holiness (**Hebrews 12:12**). Because God is working and disciplining so we can share in His holiness, our pursuit matters. Because He is working our work in this area can make a difference.
- D. **I Thessalonians 3:11-13** shows the working of God. Let us pray to Him that He may establish our hearts blameless in holiness. And again in **I Thessalonians 5:23-24**. Let us not be overwhelmed by our pursuit of holiness but remember God is carrying us as we pursue it. This is perhaps where that wonderful promise of **Isaiah 40:28-31** can help. We do not need to grow weary as we consider the pursuit of holiness, but rather rely on the Lord, allowing Him to lift us up with wings like eagles.
- E. Finally, keep in mind what faith we can have in God's work. After all, in order to sanctify us, that is, to make us holy, He offered the sacrifice of His Son Jesus (**Hebrews 10:10, 14**). God is sanctifying us, because He wants us to be holy. He isn't waiting on the sidelines just watching to see who will measure up in the end. He is actively participating, offering us all we need through Jesus to fulfill this pursuit. Praise the Lord!

Conclusion:

So, I ask you. What are you pursuing? What is your goal? Is holiness your dominating pursuit? Or is it merely one pursuit among many? Is it merely a veneer you hope will count for something in the end? God wants us holy. He wants it so bad He sacrificed Jesus so we could have this holiness. Will you join us in this pursuit this year?