

Introduction:

I'm not sure if I should have watched it as a kid. My parents didn't like the show because of some of its immodesties, but when we visited my grandparents and my granddad turned it on, my parents opted to let me watch it rather than to suggest Granddad was less than holy. I still remember the repeated line from "The Dukes of Hazzard" as Rosco P. Coltrane would shout into his CB radio, "I got them Duke boys in my sights. I'm in hot pursuit." A car chase ensued, the Duke boys would make some physically impossible car jump, their horn would whistle Dixie, they would wave out the window, and take off. Though I don't think that holiness is necessarily running from us, I hope we recognize that we need to be in hot pursuit of holiness. In our last lesson, we considered some implications of **Hebrews 12:14** and our need to pursue holiness. We recognized holiness is our goal; more than that, it should be our dominating pursuit. We were comforted that God is sanctifying us so we may share His holiness. But we also learned if it is a pursuit, holiness won't simply happen by accident. I'd like to unpack that idea a little more in this lesson. If this really is a pursuit (NKJV) or a striving (ESV), what does that mean? What does it mean to be in holy pursuit?

Discussion:

- I. We must let holiness be our passion.
 - A. If you want to pursue holiness, you've got to want it. You've got to want it with every fiber of your being. The fact is we don't pursue things we don't want. We especially don't pursue them if they are hard to attain. Some things may register slightly on our desire list, but unless they top that mountain of desire, as soon as the way gets tough, we start wanting other things.
 - B. So, here is my question. Do you want to be holy? Before you answer that question, please think it through. You see, there was a time when I realized I didn't want holiness. Don't get me wrong, I didn't despise holiness. But it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted heaven. So I "went to church," read my Bible some, prayed sometimes, tried to give up some sins, highlighted that there were some sins I had never committed, tried to find people that I was better than. And I hoped this would be enough to get me into heaven. But holiness? No, not really. I just wanted to be holy enough to squeak inside heaven's gates.
 - C. But this is a pursuit. It simply doesn't work that way. If we don't have a passion for holiness, we aren't going to pursue it. Rather, we will constantly compromise it. We saw in our last lesson the connection of holiness and righteousness in **Ephesians 4:24**. While Jesus doesn't use the word holiness in **Matthew 5:6**, we see the principle applied with that connected term, righteousness. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (ESV). We need to hunger for holiness. We need to want it so much we can taste it. If we don't, we won't pursue it.
- II. We must make holiness our purpose.
 - A. If we aren't trying to get to holiness on purpose, we need to understand it won't happen on accident. Consider Paul's example in **Philippians 3:7-15**. His goal was resurrection. He knew he could only have that goal by righteousness, which we've seen is connected to the holiness we pursue. How did he pursue it? With purpose. He set his sights on his goal. He cut loose everything that got in the way. He hung on to only what would help him achieve his purpose.
 - B. Holiness must be our purpose. As we learned in our last lesson, it must be our dominating and guiding purpose. If you are on a journey, you know your destination. You are doing everything you can to get to that destination. You pull out the map, chart your course. If you make a wrong turn, you don't simply carry on in hopes it will eventually lead you to your destination, rather you course correct to point to the right place. Holiness needs to be our destination. It needs to guide our daily decisions. It needs to provide the course correction when we get off track. It needs to govern every decision we make on our journey.
 - C. Let's put this in practical terms. As I prepared this lesson, I considered an area in my life that I think has suffered recently. Television. Certainly, it is okay to have recreation and entertainment. But the pursuit of holiness has to take precedence over all other pursuits. It must govern them. I've realized recently how easily I get sucked in to two holiness hindering aspects of television. 1) What I watch. Once I get into a story, I realize I start making excuses for what I watch. "It was just a quick scene. It doesn't happen that often. It could have

been way worse. It's not like it was pornography." But I need to be asking, how does this fit into my purpose of holiness? Is watching this improving my pursuit of holiness or is it a detour? 2) How much I watch. Again, entertainment and recreation are good, but only when kept in the proper perspective. If I'm not careful, my pursuit shifts from holiness to recreation, and the wrong one begins to dominate. It shames me that I never forget to watch tv, but sometimes I forget to pray.

- D. Perhaps you have a different example in your life. Perhaps your competing pursuit is different. The point is the same. There are competing pursuits that Satan will throw in front of us, tempting us away. If we are going to pursue holiness, we have to do so on purpose.

III. We must put holiness into practice.

- A. Pursuit is not a passive occurrence. It is active. Pursuing holiness is not simply following the flow of the river of life. It is paddling with all your might to go upstream against the currents of the flesh, our society, temptation, sometimes even our brethren. Holiness then is an active practice. And it takes practice. I can't help but think about **Hebrews 5:14**, which talks about letting our discernment be "trained by constant practice to distinguish between good and evil."
- B. In **II Corinthians 7:1**, Paul explains that since we have the promise of God dwelling with us and walking among us as a father does among sons and daughters (see **II Corinthians 6:16-18**), we must cleanse ourselves from every defilement. We must bring holiness to completion. We must do this. This is active practice.
- C. We're going to spend some time this year talking about God's work in our holiness. Certainly, we understand apart from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His grace working in our lives, holiness is merely a pipe dream. However, we must not take that to mean we are passive in our holiness. God is working, but that doesn't mean it makes our work unnecessary. Rather, that means our work is valuable. Consider Paul's statement in **Philippians 2:12-13**. Because God is working, we need to get to work. Because God is working to share His holiness with us, we need to get to work pursuing holiness. We need to put holiness into practice. If we don't actively pursue holiness, we aren't pursuing it at all.

IV. We must persevere unto holiness.

- A. But pursuit, and especially striving (ESV), demonstrates we are not talking about something easy. Again, we know God is working to sanctify us. So, I don't think we should picture holiness as fleeing from us and trying to play hard to get. However, the mere fact that the Hebrew writer uses a word that means to chase or to struggle to get at something should make us aware that there are going to be obstacles. Of course, the obstacles are not of God's making or of the making of holiness itself. Rather, the obstacles are placed in our path by Satan, who longs to topple us from holiness.
- B. When the first couple were in the garden, created in holiness and complete fellowship with the holy God, Satan pointed out the tree of knowledge of good and evil to Eve. Satan prompted her to question the teaching of her husband. Satan raised up the obstacle. And he is going to continue to do so.
- C. In **Hebrews 12:3-4**, the Hebrew writer describes the opposition Jesus faced to His own holiness. He calls us to remember those obstacles so that we won't grow weary or fainthearted. There are enemies to our holiness. They are all around us. They will mock us and belittle us. They call evil good and good evil. They ask us to question the teaching of God. They make fun of God's will and those who follow it as behind the times, ignorant, unenlightened. However, keep in mind that we have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed. Of course, it may get to that for us as it did with our Savior.
- D. What we need is perseverance. We need endurance. It is one thing to pursue holiness as long as it is easily obtained, without hindrance or obstacle. But that is hardly any pursuit at all. We need to understand that we will face hostility. We will face hostility from Satan, from an ungodly world, and even from worldly brethren. We may face hostility from friends, family, and fellow workers. We must be determined to persevere, to endure. If we aren't persevering, we aren't pursuing.

Conclusion:

Brother and sisters, we are in the midst of a holy pursuit. Without passion, purpose, practice, and perseverance, we aren't pursuing. Yes, God has purified us by the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, and is perfecting us by the work of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, our pursuit is really worth something. Are you ready to pursue holiness?