

Great Expectations

In our previous lesson, we looked at what makes a Christian. We introduced in that lesson the great expectations that God has for those who are His children. In this lesson we want to explore those expectations further. What kind of a standard has God set for His people? How seriously does He expect us to take His instructions? How dedicated does He expect us to be to Him, and His inspired instructions?

Slaves of Righteousness...

We began to talk about the concept of being slaves of righteousness (from Romans 6) in the last lesson. There, we defined *righteousness*, and discussed some of God's expectations concerning being righteous. With this lesson, we want to look at how God expects us to look at the need to be righteous. How seriously should we take His instructions to be righteous?

To begin to answer this question, we can look at how Paul speaks of our obligation to righteousness in Romans 6. As we have noted, he used the phrase "slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). This word *slave* means:

*37.27 δουλόωb (a figurative extension of meaning of δουλόωα 'to enslave,' 87.82); καταδουλόω (a figurative extension of meaning of καταδουλόω 'to cause a person to be a slave,' not occurring in the NT): to gain control over someone and thus make such an individual subservient to one's own interests—'to gain control over, to make a slave of, to cause someone to be subservient to, to cause to be like a slave.'*⁴

The word slave has a very negative connotation in our society. We think of every reference to slavery, because of our national history, as a terrible thing. While this is understandable, it is important to realize that slavery is something that has been going on for thousands of years. It has been a part of world history, and as such forms a basis of understanding Paul's instructions. When Paul penned this letter, his audience understood the concept of slavery. They had both forced slavery and indentured servanthood. They knew what it meant to be a slave! Paul could use the idea of a slave to illustrate the complete submission of one to the instructions of Christ.

A slave had a responsibility to obey his master in all things. He did not have the right to question his instructions, or to debate whether he would be obedient or not. He was required to simply be obedient. He did what he was instructed to do. He was expected to be completely submissive to his master. Paul, in Romans 6, contrasted the two possible options available to every person. He said that one could be a slave of sin (a position that every person has found themselves in at some point) or a slave of righteousness.

Consider the implications of Paul's use of these phrases! One who is a slave of sin will submit himself to that manner of life. He will continue in sinful practices. He will make that his normal way of living. This does not mean that he will never do anything good, or right. However, those things are not done out of a dedication to righteousness. Rather they just happen to be in the desires of the selfish person who has dedicated himself (though certainly not consciously) to a life of sin. This

¹ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains 1996* : 474. Print.

person is on the “default path.” He has not chosen the path of righteousness, and therefore he has landed on the path of sin. On the other hand, there are those who make themselves a slave of righteousness. Remember what Paul said about this choice:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:16–18).

To be slaves of righteousness, one has to make the choice that he is going to leave the slavery of sin, and instead obey the instructions of the Lord, which leads to righteousness! Obeying the instructions of the Lord is what sets one free from the slavery of sin, and enslaves one to righteousness.

As we mentioned before, we often have a negative connotation concerning slavery. However, Paul wants us to envision that complete submission to righteousness. He wants us to conjure up the imagery of the servant who has nowhere else to turn, and who turns his very being over to the master that rules over him. When the master gives instruction, the slave responds in obedience.

The use of this language should convey to us just how seriously God expects His people to take the idea of righteousness. It is not a premise that we can “take or leave.” It is not something that we can decide for ourselves what is pertinent and what is not. We, as the slave, cannot look at the instructions that are given in the inspired word of God, and decide we do not like it so we can ignore it. Our obligation is to be completely devoted to the Lord, and His instructions. If He has declared it, we will obey it!

Be Holy, For I Am Holy...

The idea of holiness is closely associated with the idea of righteousness. Righteousness has to do with actions, acting rightly according to the instructions of the Lord. Holiness has more to do with possessing specific qualities. Holiness is more about who we are, rather than what we do. The two, in the end, cannot be separated! One cannot be holy without acting in a righteous manner. One cannot act in a righteous manner without being holy.

Holy is defined as:

88.24 ἅγιοσα, α, ον; ὁσιοσα, α, ον; ὁσίως: pertaining to being holy in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essentially divine qualities in contrast with what is human—‘holy, pure, divine.’

ἅγιοσα: κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἅγιον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε, διότι γέγραπται ὅτι Ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιός εἰμι ‘be holy in all that you do, just as he who called you is holy, because it is written, Be holy because I am holy’ 1 Pe 1:15–16.

ὁσιοσα: κύριε ... ὅτι μόνος ὁσιος ‘Lord ... for you alone are holy’ Re 15:4.

ὁσίως: ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν ‘our conduct toward you who believe was holy and right and without fault’ 1 Th 2:10.²

Holiness is defined as:

88.25 ἀγιωσύνη, ης f; ἀγιότης, ητος f; ὁσιότησα, ητος f: the quality of holiness as an expression of the

² Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 744. Print.

divine in contrast with the human—‘holiness, divine quality.’

ἀγιωσύνη: τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης ‘as to his divine being, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God’ Ro 1:4.

ἀγιότης: εἰς τὸ μεταλαβεῖν τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ ‘so that we may share his holiness’ He 12:10.

ὀσιότης: ἐν ὀσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνη ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἡμῶν ‘to be holy and righteous before him all the days of our life’ Lk 1:75.³

Vine’s Expository Dictionary says this about the word *holy*.

...fundamentally signifies “separated” (among the Greeks, dedicated to the gods), and hence, in Scripture in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred.⁴

This concept of being *separated* is significant to understanding what is meant by *holy*. God intends for His people to be separated from sin, to be set apart from a common use to a spiritual use.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 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.” Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1).

This is going to make a person stand out from what is seen as normal. He is not going to act like the people of the world, but instead is going to act more and more like the God who has purchased him from the slavery of sin. Vine’s Expository Dictionary went on to say:

*“It is evident that *hagios* and its kindred words ... express something more and higher than *hieros*, sacred, outwardly associated with God; ... something more than *semnos*, worthy, honorable; something more than *hagnos*, pure, free from defilement. *Hagios* is ... more comprehensive.... It is characteristically godlikeness” (G. B. Stevens, in *Hastings’ Bib. Dic.*).⁵*

To become *holy* demands that we take on the qualities of deity. The idea is not that we are somehow becoming deity, or becoming equal with deity, but rather that we adopt the qualities in our lives that reflect the qualities of deity. We strive to become more like God. We will come back to this idea a bit later in this lesson.

As Obedient Children...

Peter addressed the need for holiness in a manner that should help us to understand how we achieve such lofty goals:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your

3 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996 : 744. Print.

4 Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* 1996 : 307. Print.

5 *Ibid.*, 308. Print.

conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13–16).

In our previous section, we saw that there is an expectation for us to become more like God. We are supposed to adopt the characteristics displayed by deity. But, how are we supposed to do that? To many, achieving this end is impossible to even consider! However, Peter’s instructions should help us to understand the process of becoming more like God.

Peter said that we become more like God by being “as obedient children.” The idea here, as is found in other passages in the New Testament, is that one must learn to follow the instructions and examples of the Father. Be like obedient children. Obedient children do what they are told to do. They realize their position in hierarchy and realize that they must simply follow the directions that are given to them. They are not like the rebellious child, who rejects the instructions of the parents! This one can never realize the grace that has been delivered to us through “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Only those who choose to submit to the instructions of God can respond as “obedient children.” This response will lead to particular actions. Peter said that responding as “obedient children” will keep a person from conforming “to the former lusts,” that is, those things that they were involved in before he became the child of God.

We have been called out of that world, and God intends that we separate ourselves from the practices of that world. We must be holy, because we want to be like God, who is by His very nature holy.

Paul used the imagery of a child walking in the footsteps of his Father as an example of how the Christian is to conduct himself. In Ephesians 5, Paul introduced this topic in this way:

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children (Ephesians 5:1).

Paul set the stage to depict those who were imitators, or followers of God. Through the following context, it seems that Paul was painting the picture of a child walking in the footsteps of his parent. Consider that Paul, as he continued this train of thought, he came back to the idea of how a person walks. Three times Paul identifies that manner that one is supposed to walk, and each one of these points back to the idea of us being “imitators of God as dear children.”

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Ephesians 5:2).

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise... (Ephesians 5:15).

These characteristics that we are to walk in are all characteristics of God. In each of these examples, Paul specified the connection between what we are, and where we gain those characteristics. We walk in love because Christ has loved us (He has shown that characteristic for us to follow). We walk as children of light because we have been made light by the Lord. We are light because we follow after Him, and He is light (1 John 1:5). In the last example, Paul made it clear that walking circumspectly is to be done because that leads us to understand and emulate the will of the Lord:

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17).

Only by walking in wisdom can we come to understand what God’s will for us is. We cannot walk in foolishness and believe that we can either find, or obey what God would have us to be doing in life. Wisdom leads us away from sin, and toward righteousness. This wisdom leads to the holiness that God clearly expects of His people!

Our Measuring Stick: Christ

Far too often, when we discuss the ideas of righteousness and holiness, we find that we hold ourselves up to the wrong standard. We often compare ourselves to others who are like us. If we can convince ourselves that we are doing well because we are like someone else, or even maybe that we are doing better than another, then we think we are serving God acceptably. Paul addressed this thought with the Corinthians:

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Corinthians 10:12).

Paul said that those who compare themselves to others who are just like them are not wise! We just saw in the previous section that those who are not wise cannot come to understand the will of the Lord!

Rather than comparing ourselves to others, we need to have the right measuring stick by which to evaluate our situation before God. How are we doing? Are we good enough? Paul shows us who we should be using to measure our progress as Christians:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Our goal, and responsibility, is to grow spiritually to be just like Christ. When we are measuring ourselves against other men, we are using an imperfect standard. If the standard is flawed, then our measurement can be nothing short of flawed. However, if we measure ourselves against Christ, we use the perfect standard. While we will never measure up, we can at see where we stand spiritually. We can (if we are honest with ourselves in our evaluation) identify where we need to make improvements. We can pinpoint the areas of our lives that need the most focus and work!

It is certain that God has great expectations for His people. He is not content with us just getting by. His expectation is that we will dedicate ourselves to become a holy people, completely set apart from that which is common to fully serve Him. He expects complete, unquestioning obedience, as a child obeys his parents. He expects us to follow in the footsteps of Christ. That does not mean that we are simply trying to be good, but rather that we are seeking to become as nearly like Christ as we possibly can! Paul said that we are striving to “perfect holiness” (2 Corinthians 7:1). That takes a level of commitment that most people are simply not willing to give to God. But, if we are to be His children, His disciples, then this is not a suggestion, but a requirement! As we continue through our studies we will see just how much God requires. We should be determined to constantly be growing toward this perfection in Christ!

Questions...

1. What does it mean to be a slave to righteousness? What implications go with this terminology?
2. What is the difference between *righteousness* and *holiness*? How are these two thoughts connected to one another?
3. Can one truly be holy today? Why or why not?
4. The New Testament writers frequently use the figure of *children* to discuss the need for obedience. Why is this such a good figure for illustrating obedience?
5. In Ephesians 5, Paul instructed his audience to be “imitators of God as dear children.” In what ways did he say these dear children should act?
6. Why should we not measure ourselves against other people to determine how well we are doing spiritually?
7. Who should be our only measuring stick for spiritual growth?