

The weekly newsletter article of Parkside Chapel

LIFENEWS

HORSESHOES & HAND GRENADES & HOLINESS

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In this article, my goal is to illustrate the standard of holiness laid out for us in scripture. Often, teaching about holiness can become browbeating, which is intended to make us feel bad enough to change our behavior. This is not my goal; I hope to demonstrate that our holiness is a co-labor we engage in with God as He molds us into the image of Christ. To begin, we must understand the standard of holiness which is set before Christians. Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

After Jesus taught us that the problem of holiness is in the hearts of men, he ups the ante for our holiness even further. It is the hate in our hearts, the lust after others, and our lack of love for enemies that are at the root of our failings. It is our hearts that need to be changed if we are going to meet the call to holiness presented in Matthew 5. Jesus tells us that the target we are shooting for is the perfection of God the Father. If we have not reached this mark, we are failing miserably. Jesus then perfectly exemplifies this life of imitation of the Father.

A few weeks ago, we had a men's retreat on our campus. During this retreat we talked about holiness, but we also had a cornhole tournament. The tournament reminded me of the saying "Almost" only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades." As we discussed holiness, this phrase fits quite well. Jesus' standard for holiness is not that you could get close,

and that is good enough. Instead, Jesus says that righteousness or holiness has a standard of perfection. We cannot get to the end of Matthew 5 and say that we tried and that should count for something. We find that based on our own work, we will not get close enough, especially since the problem is in our hearts. If we only needed to change our behavior, we might be able to do it; this would leave us in the same place as the Pharisees—clean on the outside but dead on the inside.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus has given us his righteousness; before God, we are seen as holy and righteous. So, what of the standard of Matthew 5? Just before the Sermon on the Mount, we are told that Jesus went through the region of Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom – so the Sermon on the Mount is the Gospel of the Kingdom. The holiness of the disciples of Christ is part of their discipleship. So, Paul can often tell Christians that since they have been declared to be righteous, they are to live righteous lives. What is the standard for our righteousness? We are to kill our flesh and submit to the teaching of Christ.

Again, this could cause us despair as we realize the experience of Paul in Romans 7 is often ours as well. We don't do what we should; we do what we know is wrong and are conflicted within ourselves between the old man and the new. What are we to do in response?

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1) We are to trust the work of Christ! Romans 8 begins by telling us there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. If you have believed in Christ, you are not under the condemnation of God when you die, you are still covered by the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ.

2) Philippians 2:12^b, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." You are called to live a life worthy of the Gospel. To imitate the life of Christ, understanding that the standard of holiness has not changed and is for your good.

3) Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose." The comfort for us as Christians is that our holiness is not simply our responsibility. Instead, we are indwelt by the Spirit of God, who works in us to form us into the image of Christ.

So, when we read Matthew 5 and realize the standard is perfection, we should not despair. We should trust that the same Father, who is the standard, is working in us and alongside us to create this holiness in our lives. As we walk with him, we become more like him.



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