

The Power of a Holy Life

Scripture: Philippians 2:15; 1 Timothy 6:6; Titus 2:5–12; 1 Peter 2:11–12; 2 Peter 1:19

Code: A300

Despite many technological advancements, the twenty-first century has entered frighteningly dark waters. Look at the headlines—the threat of global terrorism, the chaos of unthinkable criminal activity, the defilement of pornography, the confusion of gender roles, the future of the economy, the "lostness" of our children, etc., etc. People are helplessly buckled up, strapped in, and holding on to a world careening out of control into a future of even greater fear, confusion, frustration, uncertainty, and isolation.

As a Christian, a *true* Christians, you are quite a contrast. Anchored in Jesus Christ, you are immovable, steadfast, and strong. Your eyes are fixed on the Word of God, a beacon that stands out like a "lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). As you move toward that light, God changes your life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The message you proclaim and the life you live guarantees you will stand out in the culture.

Holy, righteous lives are the backbone of the gospel we preach. The apostle Paul understood that. In the midst of a pagan society that did all it could to persecute Christians and discredit the Christian faith, he wrote to Titus telling him how to instruct the Cretans "to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12).

As I've reflected on what Paul told Titus, I can see three compelling reasons we ought to live holy lives. And each reason has little to do with benefits that come from godly living, though there are benefits (cf. 1 Timothy 6:6). Rather, Paul sets forth *evangelism* as the motive for holy living.

Holy Living Honors God's Word

In chapter two, Paul instructs Titus regarding different age groups in the church. The young women, he says, are to act in such a way "so that the word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:5). The Greek word translated "dishonored" literally means "blasphemed." We can't allow unbelievers to mock, ignore, or totally reject God's Word. Yet, how we live will directly affect how people feel about it.

No matter what their station in life, Christian men and women who are not what they ought to be will give people reason to blaspheme God's Word. The world doesn't judge us by our theology; it judges us by our behavior. The validity of Scripture in the world's view is determined by how it affects us. If unbelievers see that our lives are truly transformed, separate and distinct from the world, they might conclude that Scripture is true, powerful, and life-changing.

The credibility of the Christian gospel is inseparably linked to the integrity of the lives of those who proclaim it. That's why it is so devastating when well-known evangelists or Christian leaders are caught in some gross sin or immorality. How do you think unbelievers react when they see such hypocrisy? They laugh at it, thus blaspheming God's Word and short-circuiting any opportunity we have to tell them about its power to transform their lives. The impact of the lives of men and women

who bear the Lord's name is vital to the credibility of the faith and the effectiveness of personal witness and preaching. That's ultimately what is at stake in the way we live.

Holy Living Silences the Opposition

Paul's second reason for living holy lives gives us the heart of what he wants to communicate: "so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:8). The Greek word translated "put to shame" literally means "to blush," emphasizing the opponent's utter embarrassment over having no just criticism.

Opponents of Christianity love to gloat when Christians cause a scandal. Don't you think some of the unbelievers in your sphere of influence would love to see you fail significantly so they can justify their unbelief? They don't want to see God transform your life—that would stand as a rebuke to their sinful lifestyles. But that's exactly what you want to do—you want to embarrass them when they criticize you because there is nothing for them to justifiably criticize.

The issue is evangelism. The proper strategy for our evangelization is not methodological. We reach the world through epitomizing virtue, godliness, holiness, and a purity of life that makes our faith and God's Word believable.

The apostle Peter understood the way believers have impact on the godless world. He wrote, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the [pagans], so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Do you see how imperative it is that we live godly lives? We want unbelievers to examine us. They come initially to criticize, but if our behavior is excellent, the criticism of some might turn to curiosity. And if that curiosity turns to conversion, they'll glorify God because of their salvation. Thus we've done our part in bringing God glory. You lead people to the credibility of Christianity and ultimately to conversion by the virtue of your life. So stay away from fleshly lusts and maintain excellent behavior.

Holy Living Makes the Gospel Attractive

Paul states his third reason for holy living in Titus 2:10, "That they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." "Adorn" is from the Greek word *kosmeo* and refers to making something beautiful.

What is our primary message to this world about God? Do we want the world to know that God is omnipotent? Omniscient? Omnipresent? Immutable? Sovereign? Eternal? The Creator and the Sustainer of the universe? Yes, we do. But by far the main attribute of God we want the unsaved to understand is that He is a Savior.

How will we ever make the good news about God as Savior beautiful in every respect if we don't look like we've been saved? When we live in obedience to God, that in itself will be a testimony against wrong. When those around us see us helping rather than exploiting, hear us talking with purity instead of profanity, and observe us speaking truthfully rather than deceitfully, our example will itself be a rebuke of selfishness, unwholesome talk, and falsehood. Simply refusing to participate in a dishonest business or social practice will sometimes be such a strong rebuke that it costs us our job

or friendship. Dishonesty is terribly uncomfortable in the presence of honesty, even when there is no verbal or other direct opposition.

Often, of course, open rebuke is necessary. Silent testimony will go only so far. Failure to speak out against and to oppose evil things in practical ways is a failure to obey God. Believers are to expose them in whatever legitimate, biblical ways are necessary.

Unfortunately, many Christians are barely able to keep their own spiritual and moral houses in order. Thus they lack the discernment, inclination, or power to confront evil in the church or in society at large. That's why it is imperative that we be so mature in biblical truth, and in obedience, holiness, and love, that the natural course of our lives will be to expose, rebuke, and offer remedy for every kind of evil.

Making salvation attractive is a high calling, and we will fail in that endeavor unless we can demonstrate that we have indeed been delivered from sin. Rebuking sin in others without an accompanying lifestyle of righteousness is the greatest hypocrisy. But lives characterized by purity, power, and joy reflect the order, beauty, and power of a saving God. When we make salvation beautiful, we make God attractive.

To convince a man God can save, I need to show him a man He saved. To convince a man that God can give hope, I need to show him a man with hope. To convince a man that God can give peace, joy, and love, I need to show him a man with peace, joy, and love. To convince a man that God can give complete, total, and utter satisfaction, I need to show him a satisfied man. When the world sees people who are holy, righteous, peaceful, joyful, and fulfilled, they see the evidence of God's transforming power.

At stake is the eternal destiny of unredeemed souls. Christians who are unholy lead unbelievers to slander God; those who are holy lead them to glorify God. The central issue in evangelism is holy living. A powerful church is not built on its strategy, but on the virtue and holiness of its people. What we believe is linked to how we live, and how we live is directly linked to the effectiveness of our gospel proclamation. So, Christian, it's imperative that you be "blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

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