

BE YE HOLY
Second in a Lenten Series: "The Holiness of God"
March 1, 2015 –Leviticus 20 22-26 –Communion
The Church of the Covenant

The most controversial talk I ever gave was entitled, "Should a Christian have a Tattoo?" up at the New Wilmington Mission Conference. The room where I taught Delegate Bible to high schoolers was packed with college age students as well. The mood was angry and combative. At one point one of the college age students rushed the podium lifted up the sleeve of his shirt to reveal a very large "JESUS" tattoo. My comment on the day was "sometimes you win one and sometimes you lose one". Now I am careful at this point because I have a dear friend who is a strong Christian who is also a tattoo artist, so I ask you all not to rush the pulpit today nor to draw too many conclusions too quickly, please. Allow the thoughts to percolate around before drawing too many negative conclusions...

The prohibition in scripture against tattoos and piercings (Leviticus 19: 28) comes from the general section I just read from in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus. It is referred to as "The Holiness Code". It is a whole series of legal teachings from Moses related to what it means to be a holy and separate people from the heathen cultures which surround Israel. The point was this—as the Lord God states in verse 26—"You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples that you should be mine." (Leviticus 20: 26) God is saying to His people that they should be HOLY, because He Himself is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. If you say you are a child of the Holy, Holy, Holy God then you will seek to be like that Holy, Holy, Holy God because God is HOLY. A mark of whether we are or are not a child of the holy God is whether or not we are in a process of sanctification, a process of becoming HOLY. How can we as sinful, fallen unholy people dare to stand in the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God?

Holy means to be separate, set apart. Holiness here in the Holiness Code is clearly to distinguish the people of God from the heather cultures which surround them. They are to be unlike the heathen Philistines; they are to be like the Holy God of Israel. They are to be unlike to heathen Canaanites; they are to be like the Holy God of Israel. "I am the Lord your God, who have separated you from the peoples", (v. 24) "peoples" meaning the Philistines and the Canaanites. "You shall not walk in the customs of the nations". (v. 23), "nations" meaning the heathen surrounding culture. Why is that? Why is the Christian to be unlike our world? Because we have been claimed by and are in covenant with a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God, who tells us that we must be holy even as HE is holy. We must be separate; we must be distinct; we must be set apart. There is something different about us. Someone should see something in us and about us that they note is different and desirable. We are not to be like the world; we are to be like God. The world should see that in us and be drawn to our light and be drawn to the One, True and Living God through the reality of what it sees in us.

And you thought when you were a Christian you got off scott free! You thought that now that Jesus has come that there are no just requirements of the law anymore. Jesus has paid the price so there is no cost to following the Lord. Jesus died on the cross so there is no sacrifice, no different style of life required of us. Jesus came and somehow miraculously wiped clean all the requirements of the holiness of God's people. Some think Jesus came to dumb down God and to turn God into some kindly old grandfather who grants His grandchildren whatever they want and indulgently allows them to do whatever they want to do. Nope. God is HOLY and because God is HOLY we are to be holy also. BE YE HOLY FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM HOLY –hasn't changed one iota. Don't wait till you die and stand in the presence of a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God to figure this out. God is HOLY and He expects us to be Holy as well.

But Christians really are not that different from the world. God has said that Sunday is the Sabbath and we are to keep it HOLY and set apart for HIM but you would be amazed the number of families who prioritize their child's involvement in Traveling Midget Soccer for 4 year olds instead of worshipping the Holy God of Israel on the Sabbath. Just like the heathen culture around us. Parents have trouble holding the line with their kids not going to underage drinking parties and then sleeping over night with a gender mixed crowd of boys and girls. "Oh, Mom and Dad, everybody else's parents let them do it; why can't I?" "Because we are Christians and we are unlike the heathen culture that surrounds us and, by the way, God has appointed me to be your parent to raise you right so one day you get to go to heaven." "We don't do that, son." Be their God-ordained parent, not their buddy. In business I am a Christian business person so I won't lie and I won't cut the corners even to make a buck and even if I lose the deal. I won't do that because I am seeking to follow a Holy, Holy, Holy God with my life and I know that one day "books will be opened" in His presence and I know I will be held accountable to His holiness standards and judged accordingly. I won't do that thing which lacks integrity, because I am a Christian and I follow the Lord." And I could go on and on and on, but I won't. Suffice it to say, we forget that one day we will stand in the presence of a thrice HOLY God to give account for whether or not we realized we were to lead a holy, set apart, different, Christ-like life. Christians perhaps on Sunday; Philistines on Monday through Saturday –do we really think that a HOLY God will be mocked??????

And if you want more proof just look at our world. Christians, according to Jesus, are to be SALT and we are to be LIGHT. (Matthew 5: 13 & 5: 16) Salt is a preservative; salt is there to preserve a culture, society and world. If our culture or our community or our world is going down the tubes, is corrupt and in precipitous decline, then is the problem with the culture or is the problem with the SALT? Is the problem with the Philistines, who will always just be Philistines, or is the problem with the church that has ceased to be Salty anymore? Light drives out darkness.; light illumines the world with the holiness and glory and light of God. So if our world is a dark and darkening place, if our society is sliding into the moral abyss, if you would say that darkness is winning, then is the problem with the darkness or is the problem with the light? As a favorite author of mine writes: "Don't blame the darkness. (Darkness) is just doing what darkness does. The only remedy for darkness is light." (Blackaby, p 52, Experiencing God) When the church rediscovers its holiness then it will rediscover its salty savor and it will rediscover its Lord, who is the LIGHT of the WORLD. As long as the church is just like the world and the heathen culture around it, the church will lack the HOLY POWER to transform its culture and world.

We come to a time of communion. We enter into God's presence. Envision this communion table as God's throne set in heaven, a large wooden mercy seat upon which sits the HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, thrice HOLY, perfectly HOLY God. We quietly enter into the Holy of Holies. A HOLY God opens the book of our life and begins to read. Would HE read holiness or would HE read there a heathen? Blood consecrates us to holiness. The blood of Christ's cross washes us clean and makes us holy. Today, we stand in the presence of a thrice HOLY God in the sacrament of communion. How can we, as sinful, fallen, unholy people hope to stand in the presence of a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God? Recover your salt; recover your light!

I will just pique your curiosity and say –perhaps it is better to piece our heart than to pierce our tongue; perhaps it is better to bear the mark of the Christian than to bear the burdens of the world. And perhaps, then, we all need to come back next week to discover more of what it means to be HOLY people serving a Holy, Holy, Holy God. **BE YE HOLY...FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM HOLY.** And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*