

# Holiness and God's Will for His People

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It hardly seems possible that it was 10 years ago that I preached through the book of Hebrews giving attention to every verse and was, it took some little time in going through. This morning, I want to go to a chapter that I dealt with quite at length then to talk a little about holiness and God's will for his people. In verse 14 of the 12th chapter, read previously in the service: follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Then, in verse 10, he says that the fathers of our flesh, our human fathers verily for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure as it seems good to them. But God does it for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness.

Now, I want to begin where every sermon must begin if it is to have any biblical basis at all. I must begin with the fall of man. If it were not for our having fallen into sin, there would be no reason for the church. For the church is the lifeboat in which are collected, the saved ones who have been saved in the going down of the great ship.

Now, with the sin of man came dreadful consequences. A number of them we are familiar with. They're all about us: weaken bodies, impaired minds, and mortality--the necessity to die, along with sorrows and toil and tears. But the most fearful and the most appalling of all our losses, in the fall, is the loss of personal holiness, character. All the other woes that we know are only the sad children of this one woe, for it alienates us from God and makes us a stranger to Him.

I was thinking this morning and looking over it in the Scriptures that there isn't any other condition which God recoils from in human life, except unholiness. He says to the sick, wilt thou be made whole. He says to the poor, come and He feeds them. He touches the lame and the homeless and the dying. That is, we find Jesus doing all these things in the Scriptures. So, our Lord does not recoil from our misery. He does not recoil from our weakened bodies. There's nothing repugnant in our impaired minds. Nothing in our mortality nor our sorrows nor tears nor toil. But there is one thing God will not have, and that is, unholiness.

I read here in the Scriptures, he that overcometh shall inherit all things and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death. And in the 22nd chapter, I read, blessed are they which do His commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter

into the gates of the city. For without are dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and idolaters and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

God does call all they that are heavy-laden He calls to Himself. That isn't God's problem. The problem is the restoration of personal holiness of heart. This is God's most urgent labor. And it is that to which God now sets Himself in this dispensation. And it is for this that He gave His eternal Son in death. It is for this that He gave the Bible, and it is for this, the church continues to exist. It is for this that the Holy Spirit is present and remains present. God wants to make His people right again. And He wants to make us right inside. Differences of opinion about what you do on the outside. But the outside has very little significance. It's the inside that matters. And God wants us to have restored to us that which we lost in sin, and that is, inward purity.

Now, in the twelfth chapter here, he gives us a little inkling of how God goes about it. You know, we would like to think that holiness is a quality like, say, music or health or anything that you might impart, that you might hear or see or touch, but it isn't. It is a state of heart. And God would bring us to a state of heart and He has many ways, but I'm thinking of one today. I call it the re-education of the heart. Holiness can't be perfected without what God calls here chastisement, and says that while no chastening is joyous, it nevertheless yields fruit. And that fruit is holiness. We might be partakers of His holiness. You see my friends, resistance, he talks about resistance up here in verse four, you have not yet resisted unto blood, resistance. Holiness can't be perfected without resistance. Resistance is necessary in human development.

For instance, a tree rejects the lumbermen, rejects the lumberjack. And he works hard cutting that tree down and taking it out to market. And in doing this, he develops those tremendous shoulders and huge biceps for which lumberjacks are famous. The mountain resists the climber, the mountaineer, and so he gets those great calves and great leg muscles and great chest from climbing the mountain; and so, with the wrestlers. So everywhere we grow by facing up to resistance, meeting it, and fighting it.

Now our enemy is ignorance according to this here. Our enemy is ignorance. We are said to be disciples. And you know what a disciple is? He's somebody in school. It's all the one word. The disciple is somebody who is in school and a disciple is somebody who's going to school who's enduring. It's somebody who's going to school and the discipline is what he's going for, the chastisement, the discipline of God. God is teaching us. Our enemy is ignorance, and it resists every effort to learn, the native blindness that we have by having fallen in sin. And the struggle with ignorance is used of God.

And when God would make us holy, He does it by re-educating our heart. And He has to begin with practically total ignorance. Worse than that, He begins with bad teaching, which of course is worse than ignorance. Because you see, we've all been to the school of Adam, you and I. That old fellow, I

don't know whether I like him or not. I often think of Adam, our common father. I wonder what he looked like and all. He must have been a very wonderful looking being. God made Him in His own image, but he fell. And then when he fell, he began to beget his children, and we are of the loins of this fallen man. And we not only have his bad nature, but we have him as our teacher. And we're victims of Adam's false view of life. And so, we've got to unlearn so much. If we could come to God as a clean, clean slate, with no wrinkles developed on our moral brain and let God work, it would be a relatively easy thing for God to write on the blackboard that was perfectly clean. But for God to have to erase off the blackboard that which we've put on when we've been going to the school of Adam for so many years.

Think of a man converted, say, when he's 50 years old. A man who has read a lot, thought a lot, studied a lot, listened a lot, suffered a lot, experienced a lot, traveled around a great deal, and has educated himself. He's been to the school of Adam. And he's got a number of degrees just from living in Adam's world and going to the University of Adam. Well then, he suddenly is converted through faith in Jesus Christ. We like to think and sometimes we make it seem to be so, that our conversion is an instantaneous transformation, complete and final, and that old things have all passed away and all things have suddenly become new. But when Paul said that, Paul had been on the way quite a while.

The fact is, God puts the new seed of the Spirit in the heart of the new born-again man and begins to teach him. And it takes a long time to teach him properly, because he has to unlearn everything that he learns just as when a foreigner comes over here, he speaks with an accent because he has absorbed his mother tongue. He has nursed it at the breast. He has breathed it in with his native air. And his tongue and lips have learned to form the peculiar sounds of his own language. And so, it is very rare indeed, that a man or woman who comes to this country or goes from this country to any other, after they're, say, in their middle teens, it's very rare they learn to speak their new acquired language with anything but an accent.

And so, it is you and I that have a kind of spiritual accent. We learned it from Adam. We have learned unconsciously to think as he thinks and appraise as he appraises. And then we're converted. We're transformed suddenly and changed and transplanted to a new world. And we speak with a moral accent for a long time. And God has to begin to re-educate us.

Now, God is the teacher of course back of all, and it tells us that here in Hebrews very plainly, that God is the teacher back of all, but he uses many assistants. God has many assistants. And the humble ones, too, He has and he uses those humble ones to humble us. I'm thinking about how God taught some of His people in the Old Testament. There was the man, Job.

Now, Job got a degree from God. And he got it after going through a long, hard schooling. But it wasn't a dramatic and beautiful thing with God coming down from heaven and sitting on a tuft of

grass while the angels circled and played harps around him. And Job comes up and kneels before Him in ecstasy of adoration while God teaches Job. That's the way Job would have liked it. And in the very doing of it, Job would have hardened himself instead of softened himself. God would have been too easy on Job if He had come to teach him Himself. So, He sent his three friends, Job's three friends, commonly called with good-natured irony, Job's comforters. And they did anything but comfort the man. They took the liberty of close friendship to skin the man until they had him all worked up. Well, Job had to learn and he had to learn from three people who weren't worthy to teach him. That was to humble Job.

And then I think of another man, Peter. Peter had to learn from a rooster and Paul had to learn from a thorn and David had to learn from his enemies and Joseph had to learn from those evil brethren of his. God's blessed people have had to learn from some mighty unworthy teachers. And he does this to humble us.

If he sent an archangel down, if you could imagine that 50-year-old man that I told you about that got converted. And now he's got to unlearn a lifetime of wrong beliefs and learn a whole world of new ones. Wouldn't that be something if God were to send the archangel Gabriel down and make a nice little booth with the honeysuckles up over the windows and the birds roosting in them? Wouldn't it be something for that man if he could tell his children and his grandchildren and they tell their grandchildren. You want me to tell you about my Daddy? He must have been a wonderful man, because he was converted when he was 50 and God sent an angel to teach him. No, God wouldn't spoil him like that. So, God doesn't send angels. God sends comforters and roosters and thorns and enemies, and he sends resistance.

Well, a lot of people had to learn a lot of things in the Bible. For instance, there was Abraham. You know what he had to learn, one thing he had to learn at least? There were a number, but he had to learn that even his beloved son had to go if he was to keep God. God won't play second to anybody. If the church people could only find that out and take it seriously and do something about it, we'd have revival on our hands. God won't play second to anybody. If you love God first and most, then you can love whom you will. But if you have anybody ahead of God, God won't endure it. And Abraham for all of his faith and all the rest, must have had his son Isaac a little too close to his heart. So, to push him aside, God said, take him out and slay him.

And you know, I read the other day something very beautiful. I had never said this before because I never found it out until last week myself. But I reread where some great old saint of God said this. He said that the more spiritually you are, the more you're willing to change your mind when you see you're wrong. And the less likely you are to set your teeth and go ahead even if afterward you find you've been wrong, but you won't admit it. He said this. He said If Abraham had been a fanatic, he'd have killed his son, even after he was told not to. He wouldn't have gone that far with it and said, well now just a minute God, here I have gone through all this. You told me to slay my

son and I believe you meant slay my son. What about this now? Am I wrong? Have I got it wrong about this? He said if he had been a fanatic, he'd had killed Isaac.

And you know, that's exactly what was the matter with Jonah. He was a fanatic. God said to Jonah, go preach to Nineveh, 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed. And Jonah went and preached and then got up on the hillside and waited for the fireworks, but that didn't come. Instead of that, there was repentance that went from the throne out to the farthest suburbs. Everybody repented. And Jonah the fanatic was mad. And he said, let me die God. I might as well die. You're not following along with me. I said they'd perish and here you've forgiven them. While Jonah was a fanatic, Abraham wasn't. Abraham learned when God said, go slay your son, and then God said, no, Abraham, I see you're willing to do it and that's all I wanted.

Why, lots of people would have gone right on and killed the son anyhow. They said, I believe that. That's the faith of our fathers. That's the doctrine of my church. That's what I have learned. God said that to me when in prayer and I've got to do it. And you couldn't have argued him out. But Abraham was ready to listen to God. God said, once, go slay Isaac. He said, again, don't slay Isaac. And Abraham was charitable and broad-minded enough to hear him talk twice. Do you know what I mean?

I know a dear brother who's now long, oh, not long, five years maybe, with his Savior. And he's definitely, definitely way beyond me in spiritual growth and experience and all the rest and will be and I'll never catch him. But he was such a great believer in physical healing that when he got something wrong with him that would have yielded to surgery, he refused to take it and he lay down and died. He's in heaven with his Lord, but he had settled it that he'd never let a doctor handle him. And the result was he died rather than have anybody fool around him. Now, you know, I consider that that was great, but not quite great. He'd have been greater if it had been willing to say, Father, maybe you're talking twice instead of just once. Maybe you're saying it again, it is written, again is written. He heard it is written, but he didn't hear again, it is written.

Well, Abraham learned and then of course, Job. And what did he have to learn? Job had to learn he was a self-righteous man. He was a good man and he loved God and eschewed evil, but he was still a self-righteous man. And he had to find that out. And he couldn't find that out by being preached at. Knowing preachers, we have the panacea, just wind and words. All we need to do is make everybody over, to get up and talk to them. We ought to find out you can't do it. You can talk to people till you die. I'm preaching to people right here now that have a, you've jammed my wavelength years ago. You don't hear a thing I say. Well, you're self-righteous and I can never make you see it, because you've jammed my broadcast and you're not hearing me. You like me all right and you're not against me, but you just don't hear me.

And you could have preached to Job I suppose until he was 108 years old and Job never would have known that he was a self-righteous man. But when those three friends got working on him, he found it out. And later on, God said, Job, Job, let me speak to you. Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth? And He began to ask Job that series of tremendous questions. Talk about the space age. He had Job out there in space 10,000 miles from the nearest heavenly body, throwing him about, tossing him about with words, God's words, not mine or the preachers. And when it was all over, Job knelt and said, I am vile. What shall I answer Thee. I've spoken twice. I've spoken three times, but O God, what shall I answer Thee. As soon as he found out he was self-righteous, why, God said to these three friends, now go ask Job to pray for you. He sent these very three teachers around to Job to be prayed for. But Job had to learn that.

And then there was Elijah. Elijah was a strong, bold man. Oh, I wish we had more Elijahs. I wish every pulpit within the confines of what they call Chicagoland had Elijah's courage. The man who wasn't afraid of anybody except a woman. And he was only afraid of her because he'd had a terribly heavy, spiritual nervous experience and he was afraid of her just for a few minutes. But Elijah had to learn what a weak man he was. He had to learn even though he had the courage of lion, he was still a weak, fallen man. So, God allowed Jezebel and Ahab and backslidden prophets and cowardly preachers and all the rest to work on Elijah.

Then there was Paul. Ah, what shall we say about Paul. I feel always like taking off my hat and standing quietly at attention when I mention that man's name. There was a man that seemed to have as few faults as anybody and the most virtues. You can find virtues all the way along and hardly a fault. But I'm grateful for one thing; it comforts me in my necessity. I am glad for the time he turned around, raised his hand and called a High Priest a whited-wall. He said, you whited-wall, you wait for God's judgment. Somebody jumped up and said, you dare talk that way to the high priest. And then Paul apologized, immediately and said, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. That was a little too hot. I didn't quite mean it like that. In the first place, I didn't know he was a high priest. I'm glad for that at least one time, Paul evidenced that he wasn't perfect. But he had to learn that he wasn't. And he had to learn it in a way that was the most painful. He had to have a thorn in his flesh.

We won't go into it. I don't know what it was. I don't know and I don't know who does. Some people think it was his bad eye, but I don't know. A thorn in his flesh. Do you ever have a thorn in your flesh? Did you, ever working around, say, on your hedge or in your garden and you get a thorn in here? And it's just under the, just under the nail and you monkey with it a little while and say, oh well, forget it. And it won't forget. It just keeps, you bump it, ow, you say, and draw back and can't find it and examine it and say to your husband or wife, would you look at this. And they come and make it worse. And then the next day, the next day, it begins to what we used to call on the farm, beal. I don't know whether or not you know that word means fester. And you've got a thorn there and it's not serious. It's just mean. It isn't going to kill you, but it's terrible. I had an equivalent of a thorn in the flesh here. It's better now. I don't know how I did it, but I cut my finger

right on the end. And then I had to type out some editorials. You know, it's a painful thing. No, it's nothing to write and ask prayer about, but it's just mean. And I endured that pounding away. The only two fingers I use are these and one of them had had a cut there. It wasn't bleeding. It was just there.

Well, that's what it was. It was It wasn't going to kill Paul. It didn't disqualify him for the fight. It just irritated him. And you know, he was just so good a man that he had to have it. If he'd been a little worse, he wouldn't have needed it. But he was just so good that he needed it. That's why God even has to send thorns to the holiest people that live. They're too holy to be safe without a thorn. A good man who's living in God and walking in the light, soon finds that out. And his own goodness would be a danger to him except his Heavenly Father sends him a little thorn. They are not nice, but they are mighty useful.

And then Jesus our Lord had to learn also, and with great reverence I say this. He had to learn obedience by the things He suffered. I wouldn't even dare to say it except it says, says the Holy Ghost. It says He learned obedience by the things He suffered. And because He knew the pain and the terror of temptation, He can be now a faithful high priest to all of us tempted people.

Now, there are some weaknesses. Maybe I'd better skip it, but I just drop it here that there are some weaknesses that we hinder ourselves--we slow down our learning. Let me name them for you. One of them is to seek comfort from our friends. One of the worst things you can do when God begins to lay conviction on your soul is to run to your friend for comfort. If God begins to lay a lash on my heart, all I have to do is run to McAfee. He'll comfort. No, no. It's wonderful, wonderful. But I don't do it. At least, I hope I don't. It's such a sneaking thing that sometimes you can start a conversation not knowing that way deep down in your subconscious, you're going to work around to get a compliment and get your heart comforted. You know, it's easy. Our cat, she'll come up and wants me to scratch her under the ears. She'll lay there by the hour with her eyes shut, that is, not by the hour, but at least as long as the hour will last, she'll lie there, her eyes shut and let me scratch her ears.

Well, it's possible when God Almighty is laying the lash on you to try to make you a partaker of His holiness, it's possible to run to somebody to get your ears scratched. Having itching ears said Paul. I wonder what he meant. Well, let God correct you, friend. Take your medicine. He does it that you might be a partaker of His holiness. He does it in order that He might re-educate your heart--get Adam's teaching out of you and Christ's teaching into you.

And then the second mistake we make is seeking a blessing instead see of seeking a holy life. You go to the average audience and say, who wants to be holy and give an altar call and there won't be anybody come. Say, who wants a blessing, and the whole front of the church fills up. We want blessing, but we don't want it the holy. Let's watch that.

And then, let's watch the third thing and the last. Let's watch comforting ourselves with our excuses. I'm grimly determined I'm never going to go to God with an excuse and say, God, but listen, circumstances. God, but listen, other people. God, but listen, my relatives, my wife, my father, Board members. No, no, never so help me. Let's not be so weak that we negate and destroy the teachings of the Holy Ghost that he's trying so hard to teach us that He might make us holy, that we might be like Him.

Let's not run to the comfort of our friends. Let's not go to God and seek to comfort ourselves with excuses. Let's not seek to be blessed, but let's seek to be holy. O God, makes me holy. Make me holy. That's the prayer of every Christian. And you know that the more you pray that prayer, the more earnestly, the more sincerely, the more persistently you pray that prayer, the more God will send you the little teachers to teach you, but the quicker it'll get over with and the fewer they will become. And you may be permitted of God to spend your last days as a ripe shock of corn, the sun shining on it.

So, may God give us the grace to remember that there's only a one thing that alienates and that's unholiness. And there's only one way God can finally bring holiness to our hearts and that is by the blood and the Spirit and the teachings of His own discipline. Amen.