

Pursue Material Holiness  
November 1, 2020

Our current series of sermons concern holiness. God is holy and commands us to be holy. Last week we explored the holiness of God with a basic meaning of the word holy as “different from.” God is different from us, from the world, from all that he created. He is different in that he is all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing, and perfect in every aspect of his character. He is perfectly good, truthful, faithful, compassionate, kind, loving, and just. God is different from us.

God is holy and commands us, his adopted children, to be holy. But our holiness is not about being different from him. Our holiness is about being different from non-Christians. Our holiness is about growing from imperfect people to perfect people.

**Matthew 5:48 (NIV) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

Let me give you a summary definition of Christian holiness.

**Christian holiness is the dedication of one’s entire self (body, money, possessions, job, abilities, desires) to the purposes for which God (Yahweh) saved us.**

We are holy to the extent that we give all that we are and have to God’s purposes.

That takes in a lot of territory. It means that our holiness is not just about religious activity. It includes every aspect of our lives. This series of sermons is hitting on some of those aspects.

I want to start with this question: **Have you given to God your complete self?** Have you prayed yourself into the hands of God? Have you written a blank check of your life for God to fill in?

Some of you may not know what a blank check is. There are four ways to pay for something today. You can pay with cash. You can pay with a credit card. You can pay with goods, trading something you have for something someone else has. I am including in this category things like gold, stocks, and bitcoins. The fourth way to pay is with a check.

When I write someone a check I make it payable to them. I write their name on it. And then I write in the amount that I am willing to pay them. They take the check to their bank, which contacts my bank, who sends the amount of money I wrote on the check.

On a rare occasion someone might make out a blank check. They write the name of the person they are giving it to, but they do not fill in the amount. The amount may not yet be known. Or they may be willing to let the recipient of the check decide how much the check should be. This is called a blank check. The amount is left blank. And the recipient fills it in.

Holiness is giving your life to God like a blank check. You don’t know what his will for your life is yet. You don’t know today what he may call you to do next year. But you give your life to him anyway. To do so is an act of holiness.

One aspect of who we are is our money and possessions. Holiness include giving these to God. I do not mean for you to put them in the offering plate of the church. Instead, you must commit to Him the

use of all you possess. Offer them, in prayer, to God's use. "God, I belong to you. All I have is yours. I am going to use them in ways that honor you."

This recognizes a holiness view of money and possessions.

**The holiness view of money & possessions: God owns it all.**

**Psalm 24:1**     **The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;**

This is even more true of a Christian.

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)**   You are not your own; you were bought at a price.

You don't belong to you. You belong to Jesus. Jesus purchased us for God with his own blood. That includes all that I own. The state of Maryland thinks I own my home, a pickup truck, and an SUV. In truth, they belong to Jesus. He purchased me, and all that I am and have, with his blood. My money is his money. My life purpose is discovered in relationship to him.

But this is not how most people believe. Instead of looking to Jesus for life meaning, they look to money. Money represents various kinds of meaning to different people.

**To some people, money represents security.** They feel safe because they have a lot of money in the bank or a high-paying job. As financial recessions remind us, these things are not permanent.

**To some people, money represents pleasure.** Money provides the hedonistic pleasures they live for.

**To some people money represents status.** If they are making more than most people they know, this gives them a sense of accomplishment and pride among their peers or in the community.

Perhaps you have heard the phrase, "Keeping up with the Joneses." It is trying to have the things that others around you have. It is a form of peer pressure, but one which we impose upon ourselves. It gives too much importance to what the neighbors think. "Gee, all the neighbors have a pool. We should get one." It is an effort to fit in, be part of a group. We see it in these next two quotes.

Someone has said, ***"One reason why it's hard to save money is that our neighbors are always buying something that we can't afford."***

Another added, ***"People are funny. They spend money they don't have, to buy things they don't need, to impress folks they don't like."***

**To some people money means popularity.** They use money to impress others.

**To some people money represents freedom.** it is true that if you have enough money, you have more freedom. This year many people are afraid to travel. People realized the only safe way to travel was to take their room with them. So RV sales have been really good this year.

Do you see one of these attitudes towards money lived out in the lives of people you encounter? Do you see one of them lived out by you? All of these are human-centered views of money. Christians are to adopt a God-centered view of money. Money is an idol if you worship it. And many people do.

**We must use money for our needs while guarding against its dangers.**

We must live with an awareness of both the advantages and disadvantages of money. The advantage to money is that we use it to provide for our needs. It is good to have enough money to eat without being hungry, for transportation to a job, for health care, for a good roof overhead. There are other things we need in order to function in the world. These days you need an email address and a cell phone.

These are the basics that money can provide us. We should rejoice in enough money for these. Give God thanks for them. And choose to be content with your basic needs met.

**1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NIV) But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.**

But there are dangers associated with money that we must guard against.

**1 Timothy 6:9-10 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

Notice the language here associated with the pursuit of money: temptation, trap, harmful desires, ruin, destruction, sin, and griefs. He is emphasizing the dangers of money.

**There is the danger of addiction to impulse buying.** This buying may involve one or more of the earlier mentioned values people place on money, like security, pleasure, prestige, etc.

Such addiction makes us a slave to advertisers. My sons would always want what suddenly showed up on the TV, but an hour later forgot all about it. Such buying can become an addiction, buying things we don't need or can't really afford.

Years ago one of the men who worked for my father recognized that he had this problem. When he would get his paycheck, he would cash it and then give a large portion of it to my father to hold onto so he would not spend it on whatever he fancied at the moment. My dad would give it to him when his rent was due.

This grown man, older than my father, had never learned self-control against impulse buying. It held power over him. He was enslaved to it. He readily gave into whatever caught his eye.

Does that describe your relationship with money? Are you a slave to spending it? Are you a slave to whatever advertisements you see this week? Some people struggle with addiction to buying.

**There is the danger of neglecting family in the pursuit of money.**

Perhaps you have known someone who lived such a life. At the end of life, many a person has said, "I wish I had spent more time with my family." Children grow up fast. Couples drift away from each other.

**There is the danger of spending more to match the best you have.**

This is a real thing. It has a name, the Diderot (dee-der-oh) Effect. The famous French philosopher Denis Diderot lived nearly his entire life in poverty, but that all changed in 1765. Diderot was 52 years old and his daughter was about to be married, but he could not afford to help with the furniture and dishes and such the new couple needed.

Despite his lack of wealth, Diderot's name was well-known because he was the co-founder and writer of the most comprehensive encyclopedia of the time.

When Catherine the Great, the Empress of Russia, heard of Diderot's financial troubles she offered to buy his library from him for £1000, which is approximately \$50,000 USD in today's US dollars. Suddenly, Diderot had money to spare.

Shortly after this lucky sale, Diderot acquired a new scarlet robe. That's when everything went wrong. Diderot's scarlet robe was so elegant that he began to notice how out of place it seemed with everything else he owned. He began to buy new things to match the beauty of his robe. He replaced his old rug with a new one from Damascus. He decorated his home with beautiful sculptures and a better kitchen table. He bought a new mirror to place above the mantle and his straw chair was replaced with a leather one. He replaced all of his possessions with newer, more expensive ones. And he ended up in debt. He said, "I was the master of my old robe. I am the slave of my new one."

These reactive purchases have become known as the Diderot Effect. The Diderot Effect states that obtaining a new possession often creates a spiral of consumption which leads you to acquire more new things. As a result, you end up buying things that your previous self never needed in order to feel happy or fulfilled. Maybe you have experienced this. You buy new curtains or a new chair and now everything else in the room looks shabby. So you start replacing them. You too have felt the Diderot Effect.

We must guard against the dangers of money.

If we would pursue holiness, we must dedicate our money and possessions to God. To the extent that we can commit our money and possessions to God, we will be holy.