

Youth Week 2007
Optional Pre-Week Sunday School Lesson

Who Cares About Holiness?

LESSON BACKGROUND

Have you ever been given some *hand me down* clothes from a friend or older sibling and they just didn't fit right? They were either too big or too small or the clothes just didn't fit your body type. It can be uncomfortable and disappointing. While you were grateful (perhaps) for the gift of clothing, inside you still wanted to wear something that fit you.

Students Should Learn: 1. To begin thinking about the importance of holiness in the life of a Christian. 2. To consider that holiness is more about doing something than about not doing something.	What You'll Need: 3x5 cards pencil PowerPoint presentation containing images (optional) a boxing glove, baseball glove, oversized mitten whiteboard/dry erase markers
Scripture Focus: Leviticus 19:1-2; 1 Samuel 17:38-40; 1 Peter 1:15	

This process is similar to what happens with different traditions and beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. What seemed to fit one generation perfectly doesn't have the same feel or fit for the next. It's a quandary that each generation must face - the task of rediscovering the value and significance of core beliefs within a culture and environment that is different from the one's previous.

In this lesson, the issue of holiness is raised up before a new generation. The question of what it means to be a holy person, to be a holy people must be addressed by this generation. To oversimplify: the generation that grew up during the World War era was clear on holiness doctrine and passionate about it; the Baby Boomer generation found disparity between the holiness rhetoric and the reality too much to swallow; and this generation neither knows the doctrine nor cares about the experience. Could it be that we are only one generation away from losing entirely the distinctive emphasis on Christian holiness?

The difficulty is that the stereotypes and standards that have been passed on to this generation seem hollow and irrelevant to where they live. But that doesn't mean that holiness is hollow or irrelevant. It is the task of those who equip this generation to inspire them to understand the importance of holiness in a way that they can live it out in practical and relevant ways.

First, we need a fresh sense of the nature of holiness. It is not first and foremost a spiritual or emotional experience of a particular type. Nor is it primarily an ethical lifestyle characterized by specific forms of "unworldly" behavior - staying away from bars, refusing to wear jewelry or makeup, not going to parties or dancing, etc. The absolute heart of the matter is that God alone is holy in Himself, and all human holiness derives entirely from an unclouded relationship with Him.

Second, we need to be gripped in both head and heart with the necessity of holiness. In Leviticus 19, God commanded the people of Israel to be holy because He is holy. Many Christian traditions have interpreted this as a challenge to the spiritual elite to aim higher than the rest of us. They would say that this admonition is only for the pastors or the elders or the priests who make it their lifelong pursuit. However, the command is addressed to "all the congregation of the people of Israel" (v2). Holiness is not something for the few, but for us all.

Another misconception is that holiness is something that will ultimately be achieved when one finally reaches

heaven. Many doubt that one can be holy in the here and now. Yet, in Moses' day, the Israelites had no formal doctrine of an afterlife and of heaven and hell. They therefore could have understood the command to be holy as applying only to the here and now. Holiness is for all, it is for now, and it is a divine command, not a request or suggestion.

Third, we have to come to grips with the nitty-gritty of holiness. The theologians and biblical scholars can quibble about the doctrinal niceties, but we ordinary Christians want to know what we need to do or not do to live a holy life. It is the task of Christian teachers and pastors to lead people into the fullness of Christian experience. We must help our students wrestle with what it means to be a holy people in the day-to-day living of the here and now. Our students have resisted the lists of "do nots" and are crying out for a meaningful list of "do's." Their desire is to be a part of a people who are defined by the who they are in the world and not by who they are not.

In 1 Samuel 17, David visits his brothers on the battlefield. It is the Israelites versus the Philistines. The Philistines have a giant on their side and the Israelites have no one who is willing to face him. David arrives and immediately accepts the challenge. Everyone is shocked, including King Saul. But David is adamant that the same God who worked in his life as a shepherd will work in his life as a warrior on the battlefield. The humorous moment comes when Saul takes his own armor and attempts to dress David up in it. It doesn't fit. David was awkward and uncomfortable in Saul's armor. David can't fight with it on. So David refuses it and goes into battle with the tools that he is familiar with. He knew intuitively that he would be better off fighting with his own tried-and-tested weapons. Can you picture the look on the faces of the Israelite army when they see a young teenager without any armor and only some stones and a sling, running into battle?

For this lesson, students are already aware that the armor of their parents doesn't quite fit? They somehow know that holiness is important, they're just not quite sure how it's important. We must help them to put on holiness in a way that makes sense and fits where they live. God has called us all to be holy and will guide us in the pursuit of knowing what that means, both individually and corporately.

(adapted from article *Who Cares About Holiness Anyway?* by Gordon J. Thomas in the book, Holiness 101, Beacon Hill Press)

THE LESSON

Things Have Changed

Have students come up with ways that things they use today, on an ordinary basis, have evolved over time. It might be helpful beforehand to create a PowerPoint presentation of images to help them understand. For example, with music we've gone from record-8 track-cassette-CD-mp3; video has gone from reel to reel-beta-VHS-DVD-MPEG; cooking has gone from fire-hot rocks-ovens-microwaves; writing messages has gone from quill and ink-pen and paper-typewriter-word processor-computer-laptop-pda/phone text message. If students have difficulty, you may want to start them off with a past example of something and let them work their way toward the present day.

*What else has evolved?

*How was life different for your parents than it is for you now?

*What if you had to promote or use one of the old school tools for your music or video or homework now?

*Why wouldn't the way your parents listened to music be as effective now?

*How do you think things will be different in the future?

*How will some of the things we've mentioned here evolve for your children?

Say something like, **It is amazing to see how things change, even in the span of 20-30 years. Today we're going to talk about a spiritual concept that hasn't necessarily changed over time, but the way we talk about it and understand it may need some updating. This spiritual term is called holiness. Now I realize that when I say that word, it probably conjures up some images in your mind. We'll talk about some of those in a moment, and hopefully, this week, we'll be able to hone those images into something that actually resembles what the Bible means when it uses the word, holiness.**

How do you define holiness?

Read Leviticus 19:1-2

Say something like, **In Leviticus 19, Moses is commanded by God to speak to the people on behalf of God. He begins by telling them to be holy and then lists all of the "do not's" It is this idea that holiness is about "not" doing something that has pushed it aside in the minds of this generation. If holiness is to be more than what we "don't" do, then what will we "do" with holiness?**

Read the following definition of the word "holy" from the dictionary.
Dictionary defines holy as:

1. Belonging to, derived from, or associated with a divine power; sacred.
2. Regarded with or worthy of worship or veneration; revered: *a holy book*.
3. Living according to a strict or highly moral religious or spiritual system; saintly: *a holy person*.
4. Specified or set apart for a religious purpose: *a holy place*.
5. Solemnly undertaken; sacrosanct: *a holy pledge*.
6. Regarded as deserving special respect or reverence: *The pursuit of peace is our holiest quest*.

(holy. (n.d.). *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Retrieved September 23, 2006, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=holy>)

Pass out a pencil and an index card to each student. Then invite some students to come to the front. Instruct the students not up front to write down a description of what each person up front is not. Tell them to write down two things for each person. Once all of the students are done, take a moment and read through the "what-you-are-not" descriptions of each of the up front student. Ask them to confirm whether they are not the things mentioned. When you have finished reading, debrief the exercise by asking the group these questions.

- How well can you get to know someone by describing all of the things that they aren't?
- Are any of those similar to other people?
- Is there ever a time when it's appropriate to describe someone by what they are not?
- Do you want to be remembered for something that you didn't do or for something that you did?
- How have people defined being holy by not doing something? What kinds of things have been said "not" to do?

Read 1 Peter 1:15

Say something like, **1 Peter 1:15 says to be holy in ALL you do. In a sense, holiness is more about doing something than not doing something. Oftentimes, young people identify holiness as a way to live where you stop doing bad things. But holiness is so much more than that.**

What do you think holiness means in this generation and how has it evolved from when your parents wrestled with what it means?

Application:

Find a boxing glove, a baseball glove, or an oversized mitten. Have two or three students come up and write a message on a whiteboard or chalkboard while wearing the glove. Then have them put on a regular glove and do the same thing.

Ask,

- **Why was it more difficult to write with the boxing glove.**
- **What difference does it make when things fit us properly versus not fitting properly?**
- **How comfortable are you when your clothes don't fit you right?**

Read 1 Samuel 17:38-40.

Ask,

- **Why did David refuse King Saul's armor?**
- **What did David use instead?**

Say something like, **To be holy as God is holy means that we have to know what God is like. That happens in the context of relationship. Each generation has had to rediscover how the timeless truths of God's Word apply within their current context and culture. Consider the following list by Gordon J. Thomas. He has identified seven traditional ways that Christians have developed a greater intimacy with God and the holiness of God in their lives. While we may not go about these things the same way that our parents did, or their parents did, they have proven themselves over time.**

Pass out another index card to each student. Have your students write the following words written in bold on their index cards. As you state each word, also read the description in italics. Then ask the students for some contemporary ways in which they see that activity at work today.

1. **Repent** - *turning away from my own way of living to God's way.*
2. **Cleansing** - *sin has a way of making me ugly on the inside, asking God to give me a new heart.*
3. **Consecration** - *complete commitment to following after the things of God.*
4. **Listen** - *God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and guides our lives.*
5. **Discipline** - *If we choose to follow after God, we will need the discipline to follow after God even when we don't feel like it.*
6. **Vigilance** - *the alert, watchfulness of God at work in our lives and in the world around us.*
7. **Relationships** - *developing Godly relationships with others, with God.*

Closing:

Say something like, **If the idea of holiness is outdated and irrelevant, what do we need to do to refine, even revive this concept within this generation? If it is desired by God, what does it look like lived out in God's people today? My prayer is that this week we'll take the concept of holiness seriously.**

Close in prayer.