

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Living as Christians in a Secular World through Holiness”
(Part II of “Christian Living in a Secular Society”)
October 26, 2025

Scripture

Leviticus 11:45; 19:2 & 20:7
1 Peter 1:13-16

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- (10/19/2025) Going deep into God’s written word sets us apart from secular society

Core Idea: As we become holy, we will stand out from the secular world and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.

Challenge/purpose: To encourage the congregation to seek holiness from God.

The Sermon

Last week, we started our series on “Christian Living in a Secular Society”. As you may recall from last Sunday, we live in an increasingly secular society. This means that the number of people who may be spiritual but religiously unaffiliated is increasing. We call these wonderful seekers the nones, because they are not associated with any organized religion. In North America there was a 92.3% increase of nones from 2010 to 2020. It went from 59,340 to 114,130. In the United States, in 2010 16.5% of the population were nones and in 2020 it went up to 29.7%, an increase of 13.2%. ¹ We live in an increasingly secular society.

So we, as followers of Jesus, need to live as faithful Christians in an increasingly secular society. When we do this, we stand out and become living witnesses for Christ. Last week, I talked about living as Christians in a secular society through Bible study. Today I will talk about living as Christians in a secular society through holiness. As we become holy, we will stand out from secular society and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth. Let me say this again: As we become holy, we will stand out from secular society and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.

When I was a Boy Scout, we were required to wear our uniforms whenever we traveled to a camping site or Scouting event. When we stopped at rest areas, gas stations or restaurants, the public would know who we were and what we represented. For this reason, the adult leaders repeatedly told us, “You must

¹ [Countries with the most people with no religion & global unaffiliated population change, 2010-2020 | Pew Research Center](#)

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behave!! You represent the Boy Scouts of America and your behavior reflects on Scouting!!!!!!”

Various organizations expect certain types of behaviors from their members because their behavior reflects on that organization. In other words, people judge that organization based on the behavior of its members. That’s why most organizations require a standard of conduct for their members. Lawyers must follow a rigid set of ethical rules to remain a member of the bar. Likewise, doctors must follow their own set of ethical rules to maintain their license to practice medicine. Otherwise, no one would trust doctors or lawyers.

The same is true for us. As followers of Jesus, we reflect on Jesus. When we judge people, or mistreat those who are different from us, we give people the wrong impression of Jesus.

So, God requires a certain type of behavior from us. But God does not stop there. Along with requiring right behavior, God also requires us **to be** ethical and loving **in our hearts**. It’s not enough just to do right. As followers of Christ, we must also **be** righteous at the very core of who we are. Being righteous at the heart level is called holiness. The Lord God expects and empowers us to be holy.

God’s command for His people to be holy is not new. In Leviticus, God called his people to be holy on at least three occasions:

- Leviticus 11:45 – “I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.
- Leviticus 19:2 – Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.
- Leviticus 20:7 – Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God.

This call to holiness transferred over to both Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. First Peter 1:13-16 states, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” As soon as you repent of your sins, receive God’s forgiveness, and begin a restored & loving relationship with God as a new creation, God expects you to pursue holiness.

This call to pursue holiness is not a suggestion or request. It is a command. It was a command in the Old Testament. It’s a command in the New Testament. The difference is that in the New Testament, God promises to empower us to

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obey this command. More will be said about this near the end of this sermon. For now, we just need to acknowledge that it is a command.

In view of God’s call for us to be holy, it’s logical to ask: “What does it mean to be holy?” or “What is holiness?” and “What does holiness look like?” To answer these questions, we must first recognize that there is personal holiness and social holiness. First, we will talk about personal holiness. Then we will talk about social holiness and how personal holiness progresses into social holiness.

So, what is personal holiness? Well, many people mistakenly think of personal holiness as following a list of rules just right. In the Old Testament, there are over 600 purity and ritualistic laws. These laws were designed to help the Israelites become a distinct people so they could fulfill God’s loving will. However, in their zeal to obey God, the Scribes and Teachers of the law created thousands of regulations to ‘help’ the Israelites follow the 600+ laws already found in the Torah ². By the time Jesus was born, many Jewish religious leaders were teaching a personal holiness that was based upon following a long list of rules just right. This was a serious misunderstanding of personal holiness.

On multiple occasions, Jesus corrected this misunderstanding about personal holiness. When Pharisees accused Jesus of being unclean because He wasn’t following the letter of the law Jesus replied, “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the **heart**, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the **heart** come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean’” (Matthew 15:17-20 & Mark 7:17-23). In Luke 6:45, Jesus stated, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his **heart**, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his **heart**. For out of the overflow of his **heart** his mouth speaks” Almost the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7) emphasizes the importance of the condition of one’s heart. Look especially at Matthew 5:21-47.

These passages demonstrate that personal holiness is not a matter of strictly following a list of rules. Personal holiness is a matter of the condition of your heart. We become holy when we develop a heart that is characterized solely by love. The summation of the law is love. Jesus stated that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). If we always take the loving course of action, we’ll automatically obey the law. Thus, we will have personal holiness.

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As followers of Jesus, our unconditional love for all people should be demonstrated in our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. This is what separates us from secular society and enables God to use us to accomplish divine purposes. It's not the ability to follow rules that distinguishes the Christian from secular society. It's the ability to love all people unconditionally that separates the Christian from secular society. Personal holiness, therefore, is having a heart that is solely motivated by an unconditional love for God, neighbor and self.

Jesus is the perfect example of personal holiness in everyday life. Holiness and Christlikeness are interchangeable terms. Jesus never passed up an opportunity to help people. He would help people even when it interrupted his plans for the day (Matthew 15:21-28). That's personal holiness. Jesus always did the will of His Father, even at great suffering. In the garden of Gethsemane He said, "...Yet not as I will but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). That's personal holiness. Jesus demonstrated love and concern for people in general and especially for the lame and hungry (Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 6:34, 8:2). That's personal holiness. Jesus demonstrated love for those who were torturing and murdering Him. While dying on the cross, Jesus pleaded with His Father, "Father forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) That's personal holiness.

Think of a time when someone showered you with unconditional love that you did not deserve. How about a time when you showered an undeserving person with unconditional love? That's personal holiness. When a person decides not to take advantage of an opportunity to seek revenge but helps the offending person instead. That's personal holiness. Forgiving the person who killed a family member. That's personal holiness. Not having money to do something you enjoy because you gave it to a charity or ministry. That's personal holiness. Developing a default reaction of love rather than sin in any given situation. That's personal holiness.

Now remember, we cannot become holy on our own. Our sinful nature will get in the way. Only God's grace can change our hearts so we can become holy. God's grace is the unconditional love of God that is made know to us by the Holy Spirit. As we pray, God's grace works to change our hearts to make us holy. As we fast, God's grace works to change our hearts to make us holy. As we study Scripture, God's grace works to change our hearts to make us holy. As we worship, God's grace works to change our hearts to make us holy. And, finally, as we seek to serve other people, God's grace works to change our hearts to make us holy.

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Now that I’ve discussed personal holiness, I must define social holiness. Then I will demonstrate how personal holiness progresses into social holiness.

Social holiness is working to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth. The Kingdom of God is life as God intends, life as God intends in heaven, life as God intends in our hearts, and life as God intends on earth. God does not intend for there to be poverty, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to alleviate poverty. God does not intend for there to be hatred, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to love everyone. God does not intend for there to be racism or sexism, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to eradicate racism and sexism. God does not intend for there to be oppression, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to establish justice.

Let’s talk a little about this last one. Justice stops the strong from oppressing the weak. Justice also stops the rich from taking advantage of the poor. Justice for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of the world is important to God because God loves everyone. Look at this slide. There are over 80 verses on this slide demonstrating that justice for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed is important to God. This is just a small sample of all the verses about justice.

Personal holiness naturally progresses into social holiness. With personal holiness, unconditional love fills our hearts. We then begin to empathize with people who are poor or oppressed. This leads us into mercy ministries to help people meet their needs. Most churches do this well. Here at Burton Memorial UMC we participate in mercy ministries through our Food Pantry, God’s Kitchen, and Child Development Center. The next step towards social holiness is justice ministries. This is when Christians pursue justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Folks like William Wilberforce, the leading abolitionist in the English parliament, practiced justice ministries. Today, we can practice justice ministries by participating in the prayer vigils that are conducted every Sunday at 5 PM in front of the ICE Detention facility known as Alligator Alcatraz. If you would like to do that, let me know.

So, as we develop personal holiness, we will stand out from the secular world and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth, which is social holiness.

Let’s pray.

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I. Introduction: Last week, we started our series on “Christian Living in a Secular Society”.

A. As you may recall from last Sunday, we live in an increasingly secular society.

- This means that the number of people who may be spiritual but religiously unaffiliated is increasing.
- We call these wonderful seekers the nones, because they are not associated with any organized religion.
- In North America there was a 92.3% increase of nones (religiously unaffiliated) from 2010 to 2020. It went from 59,340 to 114,130.
- In the United States, in 2010 16.5% of the population were nones and in 2020 it went up to 29.7%, an increase of 13.2%. ³
- We live in an increasingly secular society.

B. So, as followers of Jesus, we need to live as faithful Christians in an increasingly secular world.

- When we do this, we stand out and become living witnesses for Christ.
- Last week, I talked about living as Christians in a secular society through Bible study.
- Today I will talk about living as Christians in a secular society through holiness.
 - As we become holy, we will stand out from secular society and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.

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- Let me say this again: As we become holy, we will stand out from secular society and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.

II. God calls us to be holy

A. When I was a Boy Scout, we were required to wear our uniforms whenever we traveled to a camping trip or Scouting event.

- When we stopped at rest areas, gas stations or restaurants, the public would know who we were and what we represented.
- For this reason, our adult leaders repeatedly told us, “You must behave!! You represent the Boy Scouts of America and your behavior reflects on Scouting!!!!”

B. Various organizations expect certain types of behaviors from their members because their behavior reflects on that organization.

- In other words, people judge that organization based on the behavior of its members.
- That’s why most organizations require a standard of conduct for their members.
 - Lawyers must follow a rigid set of ethical rules to remain a member of the bar.
 - Likewise, doctors must follow their own set of ethical rules to maintain their license to practice medicine.
 - Otherwise, no one would trust doctors or lawyers.

C. The same is true for us.

- As followers of Jesus, we reflect on Jesus.
- When we judge people, or mistreat those who are different from us, we give people the wrong impression of Jesus.
- So, God requires a certain type of behavior from us.
- But God does not stop there.

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- Along with requiring right behavior, God also requires us **to be ethical and loving in our hearts.**
- It's not enough just to do right.
- As followers of Christ, we must also **be** righteous at the very core of who we are.
- Being righteous at the heart level is called holiness.
- The Lord God expects and empowers us to be holy.

D. God's command for His people to be holy is not new.

- In Leviticus, God called his people to be holy on at least three occasions:
 - Leviticus 11:45 – “I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.
 - Leviticus 19:2 – Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.
 - Leviticus 20:7 – Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God.
- This call to holiness transferred over to both Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.
 - First Peter 1:13-16 states, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy.”

E. As soon as you repent of your sins, receive God's forgiveness, and begin a restored & loving relationship with God as a new creation, God expects you to pursue holiness.

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- This call to pursue holiness is not a suggestion or request. It is a command.
- It was a command in the Old Testament.
- It's a command in the New Testament.
 - The difference is that in the New Testament, God promises to empower us to obey this command.
 - More will be said about this near the end of this sermon.
 - For now, we just need to acknowledge that it is a command.

F. In view of God's call for us to be holy, it's logical to ask: “What does it mean to be holy?” or “What is holiness?” and “What does holiness look like?”

- To answer these questions, we must first recognize that there is personal holiness and social holiness.
- First, we will talk about personal holiness.
- Then we will talk about social holiness and how personal holiness progresses into social holiness.

III. So, what is personal holiness?

A. Well, many people mistakenly think of personal holiness as following a list of rules just right.

- In the Old Testament, there are over 600 purity and ritualistic laws.
- These laws were designed to help the Israelites become a distinct people so they could fulfill God's loving will.
- However, in their zeal to obey God, the Scribes and Teachers of the law created thousands of regulations to ‘help’ the Israelites follow the 600+ laws already found in the Torah ⁴.

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- By the time Jesus was born, many Jewish religious leaders were teaching a personal holiness that was based upon following a long list of rules just right.
 - This was a serious misunderstanding of personal holiness.
- B. On multiple occasions, Jesus corrected this misunderstanding about personal holiness.
- When Pharisees accused Jesus of being unclean because He wasn't following the letter of the law Jesus replied, “Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the **heart**, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the **heart** come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean’” (Matthew 15:17-20 & Mark 7:17-23).
 - In Luke 6:45, Jesus stated, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his **heart**, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his **heart**. For out of the overflow of his **heart** his mouth speaks”
 - Almost the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7) emphasizes the importance of the condition of one's heart.
 - Look especially at Matthew 5:21-47.
- C. These passages demonstrate that personal holiness is not a matter of strictly following a list of rules.
- Personal holiness is a matter of the condition of your heart.
 - We become holy when we develop a heart that is characterized solely by love.
 - The summation of the law is love.

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- Jesus stated that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40).
 - If we always take the loving course of action, we'll automatically obey the law.
 - Thus, we will have personal holiness.
- As followers of Jesus, our unconditional love for all people should be demonstrated in our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions.
 - This is what separates us from secular society and enables God to use us to accomplish God's purposes.
 - It's not the ability to follow rules that distinguishes the Christian from the rest of the world.
 - It's the ability to love all people unconditionally that separates the Christian from secular society.
- D. Personal holiness, therefore, is having a heart that is solely motivated by an unconditional love for God, neighbor and self.
- E. Jesus is the perfect example of personal holiness in everyday life.
Holiness and Christlikeness are interchangeable terms.
 - Jesus never passed up an opportunity to help people.
 - He would help people even when it interrupted his plans for the day (Matthew 15:21-28).
 - That's personal holiness.
 - Jesus always did the will of His Father, even at great suffering.
 - In the garden of Gethsemane He said, "...Yet not as I will but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).
 - That's personal holiness.
 - Jesus demonstrated love and concern for people in general

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- and especially for the lame and hungry (Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 6:34, 8:2).
- That’s personal holiness.
- Jesus demonstrated love for those who were torturing and murdering Him.
 - While dying on the cross, Jesus pleaded with His Father, “Father forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)
 - That’s personal holiness.
- F. Think of a time when someone showered you with unconditional love that you did not deserve.
 - How about a time when you showered an undeserving person with unconditional love?
 - That’s personal holiness.
 - When a person decides not to take advantage of an opportunity to seek revenge but helps the offending person instead.
 - That’s personal holiness.
 - Forgiving the person who killed a family member.
 - That’s personal holiness.
 - Not having money to do something you enjoy because you gave it to a charity or ministry.
 - That’s personal holiness.
 - Developing a default reaction of love rather than sin in any given situation.
 - That’s personal holiness.
- G. Now remember, we cannot become holy on our own.
 - Our sinful nature will get in the way.
 - Only God’s grace can change our hearts so we can become holy.

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- God’s grace is the unconditional love of God that is made know to us by the Holy Spirit.
- As we pray, God’s grace works to change our hearts to make us holy.
- As we fast, God’s grace works to change our hearts to make us holy.
- As we study Scripture, God’s grace works to change our hearts to make us holy.
- As we worship, God’s grace works to change our hearts to make us holy.
- And, finally, as we seek to serve other people, God’s grace works to change our hearts to make us holy.

IV. Now that I’ve discussed personal holiness, I must define social holiness. Then I will demonstrate how personal holiness progresses into social holiness.

A. Social holiness is working to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.

- The Kingdom of God is life as God intends,
 - life as God intends in heaven,
 - life as God intends in our hearts,
 - and life as God intends on earth.
- God does not intend for there to be poverty, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to alleviate poverty.
- God does not intend for there to be hatred, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to love everyone.
- God does not intend for there to be racism or sexism, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to eradicate racism and sexism.
- God does not intend for there to be oppression, so we, as followers of Christ, do what we can to establish justice.

B. Let’s talk a little about this last one – justice.

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- Justice stops the strong from oppressing the weak.
- Justice also stops the rich from taking advantage of the poor.
- Justice for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed people of the world is important to God because God loves everyone.
 - Look at this slide.
 - There are over 80 verses on this slide demonstrating that justice for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed is important to God.
 - This is just a small sample of all the verses about justice.

V. Personal holiness naturally progresses into social holiness.

A. With personal holiness, unconditional love fills our hearts.

- We then begin to empathize with people who are poor or oppressed.
- This leads us into mercy ministries to help people meet their needs.
 - Most churches do this well.
 - Here at Burton Memorial UMC we participate in mercy ministries through our Food Pantry, God’s Kitchen, and Child Development Center.
- The next step towards social holiness is justice ministries.
 - This is when Christians pursue justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.
 - Folks like William Wilberforce, the leading abolitionist on the English parliament, practiced justice ministries.
 - Today, we can practice justice ministries by participating in the prayer vigils that are conducted every Sunday at 5 PM in front of the ICE Detention facility known as Alligator Alcatraz. If you would like to do that, let me know.

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VI. So, as we develop personal holiness, we will stand out from the secular world and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth, which is social holiness.

Let's pray.