

Sermon Outline  
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church  
“Personal Holiness is a Heart Issue”  
(Part I of “Which one am I?”)  
January 4, 2025

Scripture

Leviticus 19:17  
Deuteronomy 6:5  
Ezekiel 36:24-27  
Matthew 5:8 & 15:18-20

Core Idea and purpose

**Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:**

- None. This is the first sermon in the series.

**Core theological idea:** Personal holiness is having a heart full of faith, hope, and unconditional love. Holiness is synonymous with Christlikeness.

**Challenge/purpose:** To instill a desire for personal holiness in each person.

The Sermon

God commands us to be holy. In Leviticus 11:45, 19:2, and 20:7, God tells us, “I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore, be holy, because I am holy.” Then, in the New Testament, the Apostle Peter refers to the Old Testament and says, “...for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13-16)

If being holy is a God given command (not a request), then we must ask, “What is holiness?” Unfortunately, many Christians believe that individual Christians become holy by following a long list of rules just right. It is a focus on the letter of the law rather than the purpose of the law.

We must remember that the purpose of the law is more important than the law itself. Allow me to give you an example from secular law. The purpose of the speed limit law is to protect lives. So, in almost every situation, we should follow the speed limit law because we want to do our part to protect lives. However, if you are driving a person who is having a heart attack to the hospital, exceeding the speed limit is excusable. You are protecting the life of the person who is having a heart attack. Thus, the purpose of the law is more important than the law itself.

If the purpose of the law is more important than the law itself, we should ask, “What is the purpose of the law?” Jesus answered this question when he quoted Scripture and said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the

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second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)<sup>1</sup> So, the purpose of the law is love – love for God, our neighbors, and ourselves.

So, holiness is less about following the rules just right and more about fulfilling the purpose of the law, which is love. Therefore, holiness is having a heart full of faith, hope, and unconditional love! It is about the condition of our hearts.

The Old Testament tells us that holiness is not just following the rules just right but about the condition of our hearts. Consider the following Old Testament passages.

- Right before telling us to love our neighbors, Leviticus 19:17 says, “Do not hate a fellow Israelite **in your heart...**”
  - Clearly, holiness is not just about obeying rules but having a heart full of love. Having a heart motivated by love.
  - Holiness, therefore, is a heart issue.
- In Deuteronomy 6:4-6 God tells us to, “...Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength.”
  - Clearly, holiness is not just about obeying rules but having a heart full of love. Having a heart motivated by love.
  - Holiness, therefore, is a heart issue.
- Ezekiel 36:26-27 describes what it will be like when the Kingdom of God is fully manifested on earth. It says, “I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your **heart of stone** and give you a **heart of flesh**. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”
  - Holiness, therefore, is a heart issue.

When Jesus walked the earth, some of the religious leaders forgot that holiness is less about following the rules just right and more about having a heart full of faith, hope, and unconditional love. Jesus had to constantly remind them about the true nature of holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scripture he was quoting is Deuteronomy 6:4-6 and Leviticus 19:18.

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On one occasion, some Pharisees accused Him and his followers of not being holy because they didn't wash their hands before eating. After pointing out that they also failed to follow the letter of the law, Jesus said, “...What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them...whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.” (Matthew 15:1-20)

So, here's the bottom line. Holiness is a heart issue. It is having a heart full of faith, hope, and unconditional love.

If we are to obey God's command to be holy, we must measure our personal holiness. We ask: Are our hearts full of faith, hope, and unconditional love **or** are our hearts full of hate, arrogance, bitterness, anger, lust, prejudice, greed, racism, sexism, or other filth? To do this, we can read a Bible story or parable and ask, “Which character do I resemble at this moment?” If you are resembling a character with a heart full of faith, hope, and unconditional love, then you are being holy. Give God thanks for a holy heart. But if you are resembling a character with a heart full of filth, ask God to cleanse your heart of the filth and replace it with faith, hope, and unconditional love.

**[Talk about a Bible story where you resembled one of the characters and measured your holiness.]**

For the next three Sundays we will practice this process of measuring our holiness. We will read a Bible story, look at each character, and ask, “Which character do I resemble at this moment?” Next Sunday, January 11, we'll read Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the Wedding Party. On January 18, we'll read 1 Samuel 25:1-28, the story of a peace maker and an angry King David. Then, on January 25, we will read Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus climbing a sycamore tree. Hopefully, after this sermon series, we will all read our Bibles every day and when we get to a Bible story, we'll ask, “Which character do I resemble at this moment?”

Let's pray.

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Sermon Outline

I. God often