

20. We believe in the maintenance of good works and holy living; in Christian holiness, through absolute surrender and consecration; in Christian modesty in the manner of dress and wearing apparel; and with regards to recreation, we believe in liberty of conscience and a godly example to the world.

(Transcript of message preached by Pastor Rick Minett on August 28, 2005 at Grace Community Church)

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

The Bible Talks A Lot About Freedom

In Galatians 5:1, Paul says, *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."* And what was that yoke of bondage? It was a list of "do's and don'ts"! It was called the Law. So in essence, what Paul was saying was this, "Child of God, Christ came so that you could be unshackled from a list of do's and don'ts. He came so that you might discover that religion isn't about rules and regulations, but rather, it's about a relationship with God." I grew up in a "do's and don'ts church". Many a Sunday sermon focused on all the things that we could and couldn't do, and as I remember, about the only thing as Christians that we were permitted to do was go to church and eat. Everything else was either sinful or questionable at best. The history of the church I attended as a young person was deeply rooted in the "holiness movement" of the late 1800's and early 1900's. The early church fathers preached against a whole host of things including: Tobacco, secret societies, alcohol, life insurance, doctors, medicine, dancing, movies, coca-cola, public swimming, professional sports, bowling, beauty parlors, jewelry, and much more. My wife's grandfather, Rev. James McKeehan, told me that when he first became acquainted with the holiness church back in the 1930's it was considered unholy to have anything but black buttons on your shirt. Even the plastic buttons that most of us have today were considered too flashy and therefore ungodly. He said it was a hassle changing all the buttons on his shirts, but he did because it was expected of him.

Now of course, times have changed. And though there are still a few things on that list that I'm opposed to, I'm all for life insurance, doctors, medicine, beauty parlors, and an occasional Coca-Cola as well. Times change, don't they? But what about holiness?

The Bible Talks A Lot About Responsibility

Now just because Christ sets us free that doesn't mean we are free to do whatever we want, whenever we want, with whomever we want. Our freedom must always be used in such a way as to bring glory to God. That is why, in 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul says, *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."* What is he talking about? He's talking about freedom. But he goes on to say in verses 19-20, *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."* What is he talking about now? He's talking about responsibility. In reality, holiness isn't about rules and regulations because those change depending on one's environment and they change over time; holiness is about living a life that brings glory and honor and praise to God.

Years ago I read an article written by a music-major in college who was preparing to take his final exam. He was a senior and this exam was going to be a huge part of his final grade so it was very important. A week before the exam, his professor said, "Students, for your final exam you will have to write a musical composition and I want you to be creative. When I grade your work, my primary question will not be 'Is this musically correct?' but rather, 'Is this good music?'" And the student said, "For four years they crammed my head full of rules and now they are saying, 'Don't worry about the rules, just write good music.'"

That's worth pondering: "Don't worry about the rules, just write good music." For instance, our pianist can sit down at the keyboard and play nothing but scales and he will be musically correct, but that doesn't mean he's playing great music. And by doing so, he is definitely not using his talents to glorify God the same as when he plays a beautiful worship chorus or hymn. In the same way, it's true that we may not make any mistakes if we only live according to a list of do's and don'ts, but that doesn't necessarily mean we are living a happy life or a life that is having an impact for the Kingdom. What should be our focus? Good music! And Paul defines good music as living our lives in such a way that it brings glory to God.

The Bible Talks A Lot About Holiness

The church may not talk about it a lot, Christian television may not talk about it a lot, Christian bookstores may not stock many books that talk about it a lot...but the Bible sure does! For instance, in 1 Peter 1:13-15, Simon Peter says, *"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."* And one of the reasons that we are called to be holy in our conduct is because of what Simon Peter says in 1 Peter 2, and that is, *"...that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."* He goes on to say in verse 15 of that same chapter, *"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men..."*

The world criticized Christians 2,000 years ago and it still does today; in fact, critics today are widespread, far-reaching, very vocal, and have influenced the vast majority of the world. And at times, because of our own actions, we have only added fuel to the fire! Who is probably the most respected preacher or statesmen in Christianity today by the unsaved community? My guess would be Billy Graham. And the reason he's so respected is not because he owns a private plane (because as far as I know he doesn't) or because he owns a huge home in Palm Springs (because he doesn't), but he's respected worldwide because of something called integrity. Do you know what silences critics? Things called purity and godliness and virtue and righteousness. Your testimony on the outside is gained by your integrity on the inside! Dear one, the greatest tool of evangelism we possess is doing right and living right. People only hear about Jesus, but they see us. And because they see us, they read us a whole lot more than they read the Bible—watching to see if we walk the walk that we talk. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Simon Peter says that we should abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. In other words, just because you are reborn, regenerated, and renewed doesn't mean the battle is won. The battle rages because that redeemed spirit is still incarcerated in an unredeemed body. That's why this is a war—a war between the new man and the old flesh that is determined to hang on as long as it can. It's the war Paul was talking about in Romans 7:23, when he says, *"I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."* It's the war James was talking about in James 4:1, when he says, *"Where do the wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"* There's a war going on and it's going on inside of us! And it's a very serious war! And that is why Peter tells us to abstain. In other words, don't even give it a chance to gain ground! In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul says that we need to *"cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* And Simon Peter reminds us that when we learn to discipline what's inside of us it will impact what's outside of us! Our holiness will impact the world so much that even if it hates us, it can't help but glorify God because of our witness and testimony.

The Bible Talks A Lot About Saying "No" To Certain Things

The Apostle Paul talks about the subject of holiness to virtually every church he writes a letter to; and to the church that was located in Thessalonica he writes, *"Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you should abstain..."* (1 Thessalonians 4:1-3).

See, we're back to that same word again—abstain! And then in verses 7-8, Paul says, *"For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit."* Some people want chapter and verse for everything. In other words, "Show me in the Bible where it says this is wrong?" But I don't think we need chapter and verse for everything because most of the time we know when something is right or when something is wrong, don't we? We know when we need to say, "no." The preacher doesn't need to tell us. The preacher doesn't have to tell us what's right to wear; if we are truly seeking the Lord, He'll tell us. The preacher doesn't need to tell us if this place is appropriate to go to and this place isn't; if we are truly seeking the Lord, He'll tell us and He'll convict us.

Now I know there are some people who never seem to be bothered by anything they do. I'll never forget that when I was coaching Luke's five-year-old basketball team we had a little boy on the team that constantly chewed gum during the game. He would run down the court and the gum would fly out of his mouth, but it never bothered him. He would just reach down and pick it up and put it back in his mouth and start chewing. This would happen about ten times a game and each and every time he would pick it up, even when the other boys had stepped on it, put it in his mouth again and keep chewing. Nothing ever bothered this little guy! But as Christians, we are supposed to be bothered by certain things. Sanctification is a choice! If you want your life to change and glorify God, there will be certain things you will need to say "no" to and I can promise you that the Word of God and the Person of the Holy Spirit will speak loud and clear to you if you'll listen.

The Bible Talks A Lot About Saying "Yes" To Certain Things

If we want to be sanctified people, folks truly desiring to live a holy life, then we not only need to say "no" to certain things, we also need to say "yes" to certain things. For instance, we need to say "yes" to the study of His word. We need to say "yes" to prayer. We need to say "yes" to church attendance. We need to say "yes" to Christian fellowship.

There's a popular bracelet that the young people wear that has this inscription: WWJD. It stands for: What Would Jesus Do? Picture Jesus living in your house—what would He do? Picture Jesus riding in your car—what would He do? Picture Jesus sitting at a table with you and your friends—what would He do? Picture Jesus being with you wherever you are and whatever you are dealing with, and I can promise you that you will just know what to say "no" to and you will know what to say "yes" to. You'll just know! So instead of having the preacher shell out a bunch of rules and regulations about Christian conduct that will make some mad and others glad, I just want you to remember that the Bible talks a lot about freedom, responsibility, holiness, and it talks a lot about saying either "no" or "yes" to certain things. But the Bible also talks about another thing having to do with this subject of holiness, and it may be the most important of all.

The Bible Talks A Lot About The Fact That Our Lives Should Glorify God

Simon Peter tells us to live holy lives so that people that don't even care for us will glorify God. The Apostle Paul repeats this same truth over and over again, and one of my favorite references is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31, when Paul sums it up this way, *"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* Instead of a list of do's and don'ts, how about that? Whatever you do—ask yourself: Is this going to

glorify God? Is this going to draw me closer to Him? Is this going to affect my loved ones? Is this going to affect my testimony? Never forget that there is a consequence, good or bad, to everything we do. There is a reaction to every action. The Bible says that whatever a man sows, that He will reap. Every action, every decision...has a seed in it that is going to bring forth something of life or something of death. And because of that, everything we do affects not only us but everyone else we come in contact with. So let's use that influence for good so that others will want to glorify God because of our good works.

Maybe you want to do exactly that—you want God to be glorified in and through your life—but you are struggling with something that you know can destroy that very goal and you are not sure what to do. I want you to remember one more verse of scripture; I want you to tuck it deep in your heart and pull it out as often as you need it. It is 1 Corinthians 10:13 and it says, *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."* First of all, that tells us that it is not a sin to be tempted. It is common to man, so don't let the devil put you on a guilt trip because you are tempted. Secondly, that tells us that no sin is irresistible. This verse tells us that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to resist. And thirdly, this verse tells us that God is always there to help us overcome the temptation and escape it. But with that being said, let us remember that we play a part in that escape as well.

In the 14th Century in what is now called Belgium, there was a Duke by the name of Raynald III who was most commonly known by his Latin nickname, Crassus. Crassus means "fat" and he was called that because he was grossly overweight. One day Crassus and his younger brother, Edward, had a violent disagreement which resulted in the younger brother leading a revolt against the older. He had his brother captured, but not killed. Instead of killing him, he built a room around Crassus and promised him that he could regain his throne as soon as he was able to leave the room. The room had windows and a door and there were no locks, but Crassus was too big to fit through any of them which meant that the only way he could gain his freedom was to lose weight. Sounds pretty simple: Just lose some weight, squeeze through the door, and regain your throne. But Edward knew his older brother. He knew his weaknesses and every day he sent his older brother an array of delicious foods full of chocolate and fat. And instead of dieting his way out of prison, Crassus only grew bigger. And when Edward's critics accused him of being cruel, he replied, "My brother is not a prisoner. He can leave when he so wills!" Historians tell us that Crassus stayed in that room for ten years until the walls were torn down, only after Edward died in battle. But by then his health was so bad, Crassus died shortly thereafter as well. For years he was a prisoner—not of his brother—but of his own appetite!

The story seems hard to believe, but we see it happen time and time and time again in the spiritual realm. Jesus has already paid the price for our freedom. Matter of fact, He's given us the keys to the door—but some people never walk out because they've become a prisoner to their own appetites. God has called all of us to a walk of holiness, and rest assured, God never calls us to do anything that He first doesn't equip us do. We can be holy, but it takes absolute surrender and consecration because we can't do it in our own strength.