

7TH DAY PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES

2011 End-of-Year Camp Meeting

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Sabbath Sermon

By

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Going Higher in God

An Age-old Quest

From the dawn of history, people have always tried to climb higher, or get to high places. They have peered at the stars, looked through telescopes, scaled mountains and undertaken arduous expeditions and braved great risks. All to get higher!

But many have absolutely forgotten the spiritual highway that gets one to the highest point in all realms of reality! The prophet Isaiah calls it...

"The Way of Holiness"

As its name suggests, strict conditions apply. Only those who qualify walk on it--the redeemed holy ones of God:

"And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

"No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:8-10 *ESV*).

Holiness is of the greatest importance here: no unclean person shall set foot on "the Way of holiness", but be a 'holy fool' (in the eyes of the world) and you shall not stray from it. The clean ones qualified to walk on the way of holiness are those redeemed and sanctified by the Lord Jesus Christ and do not return thereafter to their former filth or state of uncleanness. Uncleanness belongs to their past and their past forever.

In 1 Cor. 6 the Apostle Paul contrasts the former unholy life of the Corinthian believers with their present sanctified life in Christ to drive home his point that only the righteous in Christ are qualified to inherit the kingdom of God:

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,

"nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11 *ESV*).

"Such were some of you", and that includes the sin of homosexuality, now being rammed down the throats of African nations by the West in the name of 'human rights'! "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of Jesus"! God cannot put up with uncleanness; His name is "Holy" and He dwells in "a high and holy place":

"Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity; whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).

The condition of His dwelling is non-negotiable: the place must be holy. Hence, apart from His high heavenly dwelling of holiness, God will condescend to dwell with a contrite person of humble spirit who, because of his humility, will be amenable to the dictates of His word (Isa. 66:2) which make an obedient person holy (1 Pet. 1:22). Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:3: "Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you". In John 17:17, He prayed to the Father on their behalf: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

The sad reality, however, is that the vast majority of people do not cherish God's truth. They live by their own standards, not by what God defines as right behaviour. This is largely the reason why homosexuality, long a detestable sub-culture, has gained wide acceptance in today's world, oddly championed by those supposed to be 'enlightened'.

The truth of God which promotes a righteous, holy life "has fallen in the street" (Isa. 59:14). The result is that 'evil is called good and good called evil, darkness is considered light and light darkness, while a rogue palate insists that the sweet tastes bitter and the bitter sweet' (Isa. 5:20). Moral topsy-turvy-dom! Little wonder, homosexuality is now an out-of-control contagion infecting all sections of society, particularly the youth. The prophecy of Isaiah has truly been fulfilled: "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isa. 1:9; cp 3:9; Rom. 1:26-28).

Be part of the holy "small remnant". Don't jump on the 'gay' bandwagon; it's headed down the same path of destruction Sodom of old went—destruction by fire (2Pe 2:6; Jude 1:7). For the youth among us, it's absolutely vital that you steer clear of bad company (1 Cor. 15:33) and give heed to God's word; otherwise you will surely come under bad influence

and go astray. King David wondered aloud thousands of years ago: "With what shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word" (Ps 119:9).

As a young man or woman growing up, know that the devil would gladly keep you occupied with frivolous and harmful activities which appear worthwhile and glamorous but which has only one outcome for you—your total ruin. Sadly, many of the youth in our country and elsewhere have been caught in this trap of the devil and have ended up as liabilities to society. While some do hard drugs, others specialize in crime or both. The antidote is to familiarize yourself with the Holy Scriptures "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

At no time is the question David asked and answered himself more relevant than today. The world is heavily weighed down with sin and uncleanness (Isa. 24:5-6, 20), but the condition God has set for an enduring relationship with man remains unchanged: "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16 *ESV*).

What the text clearly implies is that we can only be free from holiness if only the God who called us changes from being holy! Since He changes not (Malachi 3:6; Heb. 13:8), we must of necessity be holy in all our conduct like Him!

This is not a call to cosmetic, half-hearted holiness; it's holiness in all aspects of life—from our speech to the food we eat. In view of the popular belief that Christians are not required to keep God's law of food, it's significant that the Apostle Peter quoted directly from the law of food section of Leviticus to buttress his point that Christian believers should be holy like the LORD in all their conduct (see Lev. 11:43-35).

As of the time of the original apostles it was not yet known that the Holy Spirit of God who authored the book of Leviticus (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) had shifted position on the law of food first given to Adam (Gen. 1:29) and then revealed to Noah (Gen.7) and Moses. In writing to the new Gentile believers on the basic principles of behaviour expected of them in the Lord's Assembly, the apostles said to them: "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these NECESSARY THINGS; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well" (Acts 15:28-29).

The holy God requires His people to be holy today as ever, and that includes abstinence from blood (Lev. 17:12-13) and the meat of unclean and strangled animals (Deut. 14:2-3, 21; Ex. 22:31). It's only those meats "sanctified" or set apart as clean by the Word of God that believers may freely eat after offering a prayer of thanks (1 Tim. 4:4-5). (See Rev. 2:14-16 & Isa. 66:15-17).

The Apostle Paul issues a sobering warning in 1 Thess. 4:7: "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness". Your body is the temple of God and therefore obliged to keep it holy from sexual immorality and other kinds of uncleanness (1 Cor. 3:16-17). This way, you would elevate your body above all earthly vices and thereby replicate the heaven-like 'holy place' of God (Col. 3:1-5, 9-10). The way to God is paved with holiness.

"No Ravenous Beast shall be there"

The "lion" and "ravenous beast" mentioned in Isa. 35 are a figurative reference to the spiritual state of unclean people who, like ravenous beasts, 'prey' on anything that comes their way, be it the food they eat or their moral conduct. Among these are 'lapsed believers' who after knowing the truth "turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them", similar to the proverbial dog who returns to its own vomit, and the sow, who after being washed, returns to wallow in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Under no circumstances should you let such a tragedy befall you. If you turn back to uncleanness, be sure that you will not walk on the expressway to the kingdom of God: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5; see also Rev. 21:8, 27; 22:15).

The solution is to "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1; Rev. 18:1-4). Now, is there a particular bad habit you wish to break but find it difficult to do so because that will leave you odd among your friends and peers?

Daniel faced a more serious dilemma as a young Jewish captive serving in Nebuchadnezzar's palace but who also served the Almighty God. When he had to choose between obeying God's law of food and the king's order that he be given the same food the king ate in violation of God's law, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Dan. 1:5-8). Daniel and his three Hebrew friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah made a difference among their fellow Jewish peers in the palace (vv. 3-4, 11-15) who presumably also served God but failed to uphold their faith in the face of the king's order.

Stand for what is right and godly, and you shall walk on the way of holiness.

"The Redeemed shall walk there"

"The way of holiness" is reserved for the redeemed. There is no one who having experienced true redemption ever returns to his/her old ways of unrighteousness and uncleanness. Christ redeems "us from all lawlessness" so that He might "purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14 *ESV*). So then, the outcome of a redeemed life is a transformed life of righteousness, in so far as Christ came to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21) and created us anew "for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

All the Bible personalities who saw the unseen glory of God were holy people. But they were also Holy Spirit-filled, spiritual people who developed themselves in the power of God through constant prayer and periodic fasting (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4, 42-43; 13:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:17, 19). The Apostle John, who perhaps had more divine revelations than any person who ever lived, reports on one of his heavenly visions in which he saw God on His throne: "And immediately I was in the Spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne" (Rev. 4:1).

The same could be said of the prophet Ezekiel to whom the heavens were opened, while he was by the river Chebar, and saw "visions of God" (Ez. 1:1, 4:14).

Holiness and spiritual development are the key to getting higher in God.

If we will follow the same path of holiness and spiritual development the saints of old pursued, we will equally see the greater glory of God, for through Christ "we have access by [the same] one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). It all comes back to Christ's statement in John 14:24: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth".

As commandment-keeping Pentecostals, we ought not to rely on our own strength for spiritual perfection but on the Lord Jesus Christ, who both makes us holy by His blood and Word and empowers us with His Spirit (Phil. 3:3). The Redeemed shall stand before His throne in glory singing joyful songs of Zion:

"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
"And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10).

So let the unrighteous wallow in their filth which they mistake for enlightenment. But be holy for God, even if you are considered a fool for this. You are the one who will see God (Heb. 12:14). It is the highest level any human being can reach! Halleluiah!

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