

Holiness in Extroversion

by James Blaine Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holiness in defending against the menace of worldliness and the need for sanctification to live a truly spiritual life.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 6:24, Mark 8:36, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Ephesians 6:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, James 5:1, 1 Peter 5:8, 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Holiness"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches on the importance of pursuing peace and holiness to see the Lord, warning against the dangers of failing to uphold God's grace, allowing bitterness to take root, and falling into worldly temptations like Esau who traded his birthright for a meal. He emphasizes the need to guard against the penetrating power of the world, which can lead to spiritual coldness and death if not resisted. Chapman highlights the significance of maintaining inward holiness while being vigilant against external influences that threaten to compromise one's faith.

Transcript

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears (Hebrews 12:14-17).

Describing his childhood days, when their pioneer family lived in a sod hut on the plains of North Dakota, Dr. J. G. Morrison used to say that they did not need a thermometer in the winter. The door to their sod hut was put together with nails, driven from the inside out, so that the heads were exposed on the inside. Fuel, consisting partly of prairie grass twisted into knots, was scarce. They kept the fuel stored in the hut for times of blizzard. One of the faults of the grass knots was that they burned up too quickly and required constant attention at the firing task, if the hut was to be kept comfortable. On nights when the blizzard was hastening on toward its full, Father Morrison would go at bedtime and examine the nail-heads on the hut door. If the frost had come through and was showing up on the nail-heads, the father would say, "It's at least twenty below zero, boys. Arrange to take your turns at firing; we must keep the fire going all night."

Dr. Morrison used to use this story from pioneer life to illustrate the penetrating power of the world. He did not attempt to apply all the details of the story, but said simply that the world presses in on the Christian

like the cold of a Dakota blizzard and, unless we guard against it, it will penetrate and drive out our spiritual life and warmth and leave us cold and dead and formal.

In our previous sermon we talked of the demand that Christians get sanctified in order to assure themselves against the uprising of inbred sin in their own hearts. We called our topic on that subject "Holiness in Introspection." Our thought was that the demand for inward holiness was being considered from the approach of the condition of the regenerated heart -- from the consideration of self-inspection. Now we consider the central exhortation of Hebrews 12:14 from the approach of the outside -- the menace of the world without.

It is true that nothing on the outside of us can get in and give us trouble, and break our fellowship with God, without our consent. But it is also true that this consent may be only negative in form, and yet be sufficient. That is to say, if we do not give all diligence toward barring our door against the intruder, we give him tacit permission to break through, and our carelessness makes way for our downfall.

In the special portion of the scripture passage which we are considering today, Esau is called a "profane man." This word profane is something of an equivalent of our word secular. Esau was a secular, that is to say, a worldly man. We may not now go into the story of this strange, wild man's life in detail. We think of him simply as he is presented to us in the historic picture. Esau weighed values in balances, measured them in terms of herds and flocks and silver and gold, and computed them in degrees of promotion and earthly honor. This is apparent all through the story, but it has pointed illustration in his disposition of the birthright.

The first-born son in the patriarchal family was the priest and king, and often the prophet of the tribe. He did have a larger share of the material accumulations of the father than other sons, but this was out of consideration for his heavier responsibilities and consequent increased expenses. The position was looked upon as the gift and the calling of God, and its precincts were sacred. In the very nature of the matter, no one was to seek the place, and likewise no one was expected to treat the place lightly, having had it thrust upon him by the providence of God.

Esau came in from the fields hungry and weary. The odor of a dinner of herbs reached his nostrils. "Feed me with that red pottage," cried he to his brother. His crafty brother proposed exchanging the dinner of herbs for the birthright. A truly godly person would have spurned such a suggestion, and would have elected to die of hunger rather than to commit sacrilege. But Esau weighed the whole matter in the scales of the secular. Said he, "If I die, the birthright will do me no good. If I live, I can get along without it." And so the exchange was made -- a spiritual heritage was sold for a physical price.

Later Esau would have ignored this hasty deal, and would have gone in for his father's blessing as though it were still rightly his own. But in this attempt he was thwarted. He missed the spiritual blessing which he had formerly despised. Isaac gave him blessings, but go and read the list and you will see that they were all on the plane of Esau's epochal choosing. He had said, "Give me the pleasures of the body at the price of the purity of the soul," and this plane became fixed for time to come. He could have more land, more cattle, more money, more position, more of everything on the secular plane, for he had allowed the secular to saturate him, and he had come to the place where he could not turn back to the better sphere which he had bartered away.

The Bible gives a good many examples of backsliding, and some fine examples of restoration from backsliding. But it is impressive to note that those who left God for money -- who sold out to secularism --

are not among those who later came back. Think of Achan, Judas, and Demas -- a bag of silver and a golden wedge, thirty pieces of silver, "having loved this present world" -- these are all symbols of permanent apostasy, for there is no record of any of these men ever coming back. Murderers and adulterers like David and cowards like Peter returned, as did the prodigal of the parable, but the love of the world holds its victims in an everlasting grip. By this we do not intimate that covetousness and love of the world are in reality incurable, but only that the facts show that they hold their victims in a strong and lasting grip.

It has often been observed that the more one has of this world, the more he wants. The reasons are, no doubt, that man is so made that the things of this world cannot reach and satisfy his deep cravings and that, when the love of the heart is warped to make a god of the things of time, its very exercise causes it to grow, so that always the worldling is a discontented idol worshiper.

Not many people have money who do not also allow money to get them. Not very many people become more religious as they become more prosperous in the things of this world. This does not mean that such a course is impossible, but only that it is exceedingly difficult. Jesus made the observation, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" and a righteous man who is rich is almost as rare as a great man who is also a leper. This is not because the rich are worse than the poor, but because they are more subject to the pressure of the world than the poor are.

Once when I was preaching in a Southern farming community where the soil was thin and unproductive, I was asked by an elderly Christian man to preach on James 5:1, "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you." I hesitated and explained to the brother that I thought our people were so poor that they were tempted rather by the rigors of poverty than by the ease of plenty. The adviser was disappointed, and said: "I never have been able to get a preacher to preach on that text here, and they all make about the same explanation you make. But you are all mistaken. Our people need to be warned against the dangers of riches as much as any people need it. Just because they do not have money does not keep them from desiring it, and it is not money but the love of money that damns men's souls in perdition. The fact is that the rich have some compensation. They lose their souls over money, but they get the money. The poor, on the other hand, lose their souls over money, and they do not get the money. The rich are like fish that get caught while taking a fat bait. The poor are like fish that get caught on a bare hook." I did not preach on the text, but neither did I forget the old man's homily.

Let us go again and read John's putting of the world, that is, of worldliness: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (I John 2:15-17).

There is no escape from the presence of the world, for it is about us on every side, and approaches us almost as intimately as the atmosphere we breathe. But although we are inescapably in the world, we must yet be always separate from it; for if it does penetrate us and saturate us, it will enslave us and destroy us.

Dr. H. C. Morrison was a young, ambitious preacher, thinking of promotions and increased pay in the ministry yet ahead. But he invited a young country circuit rider to go with him for a visit to Cincinnati. The two young preachers, the one used to the sights of luxury and the other seeing their symbols for the first

time, spent the day looking at fine buildings, examining goods in the shop windows, and wandering about amidst the bustle and activity of a great city. When they returned to their room in the evening, the poor young circuit rider sat down and, heaving a sigh, said, "Thank God, I have not seen anything today that I want!" Morrison was shot as one whose armor joints were not closely joined, and immediately announced himself a candidate for the grace and experience this young country preacher had which could make him immune to the best the world has to offer.

Two young Confederate officers were invited to dine with General Stonewall Jackson. Both these young men were known to have commenced to trifle with drink, while General Jackson was well known as a total abstainer. At the table, evidently bidding for the General's favor, the young officers took up the topic of liquor. One of them said he did not like the taste of liquor. The other said he did not like the effect of liquor. Quietly, the General said, "I like both the taste and the effect of liquor, and that is the reason I never touch it." If these young men were telling the truth, they were trifling with fire without serious cause, and were in the greater danger because they thought themselves master. The General, being warned, was wise enough to leave the fire alone.

It would not do for us to say that everyone is tempted to lie, to steal, or to commit adultery. It would not do for us to say that all are tempted to become drunkards or crooked politicians. But it is true that everyone is surrounded with worldliness, and that this colossus in one form or another is pressing heavily upon the door of every heart, threatening to break in. It may not be a fight for some to live honest lives, but it is a fight for anyone to live a truly spiritual life. One cannot get away from the world simply by shunning its forms, -- although the wise do this to the limit of their ability. Safety cannot be found in the monastery or in the seclusion of the desert. The Christian's safety comes from having One enthroned in his heart that is greater than he that is in the world. It comes from having the palace of his heart so truly occupied that the intruder must be able to cast out this "Stronger Man" before he can make spoil of the goods.

Once I was invited to speak to a youth group, and was asked to select my own subject. It happened that I was present at the meeting of the group when another speaker addressed them, and I listened interestedly to an address on the theme, "Watch Your Weak Places." The speaker said that everyone has a weak place in his armor, and he should discover what it is and then guard it extra well. He used a good many illustrations, cited some splendid examples, and, I think, did the group a great deal of good. But I felt that the scope was not fully covered; so, when my turn came, I spoke on "Guard Your Strong Points," and I pointed out that often men fall when attacked at their strong points. There was Moses, the meek man, who lost Canaan because of the upspringing of pride before the rock from which he was to bring out water. There was Elijah, the man of courage, who fled the threat of the queen, wearing himself so completely out that days of rest were required to get him on his feet again. Then there was Peter, the bold man, who denied his Lord before the accusing finger of a maidservant. And so it often is -- when we are strong just then we are weak.

The warning of the text is in substance, "Lest you become secular --" lest you become worldly. When worldliness breaks in on women it often becomes apparent in such symptoms as gaudy dress, extravagant clothing, social conventionalities, and tokens of luxury and pleasure. When worldliness breaks in on men it often breaks out in pursuit of money, ambition for office, inordinate affection for property, titles, and aspirations for fraternal honors. But just as the symptoms of disease in the body must not be accepted as identical with the disease itself, so here likewise The disease is usually more deep-rooted and critical than the symptoms indicate, and the cure must be internal rather than external, to be true and sure.

The classic story is that Mohammed refused to enter Damascus, lest the beauty of the place induce him to give up his God-assigned task to tarry there. But the average man must go on into Damascus. He must work in the shop, clerk in the store, and be vexed with the words and deeds of the wicked every day. The average woman, likewise, cannot avoid contact with the world in her daily work and companionship. Sometimes the companionship within the inner circle of the home is a menace to the holy. Yes, always the pressure of the world is upon the door. And lest this monster break in and destroy the palace, "follow holiness" until you find and possess this glorious experience and state.

The menace of worldliness as applied to a group of God's people is well represented by the experience of Israel and the Moabites. Barak, the king of the Moabites, was frightened by the appearance of the tribes of Israel on the border of his country, and he sent to Balaam, a soothsayer of great reputation, to come and pronounce curses upon this lately appearing enemy. Balaam could not find it possible to pronounce direct curse upon Israel, but he did give Barak advice that led to near disaster for Israel. Balaam advised that the Moabites fraternize with the Israelites, mix with them in marriage and in religion, take away from the Israelites their separated character, and bring them down to the level of other nations and peoples. The scheme almost succeeded. God's people have power above others only when they are a separate people.

It is not so easy to find examples of what mixture does in the heart and life of the individual. This is not because such examples do not exist, but because we cannot judge individuals so accurately and justly as we do nations. But our own experiences will serve the purpose, for we all witness the sad effect of divided allegiance upon our own hearts and lives. We know how "like-other-men" we become when we attempt to serve two masters. We know how vain it is for us to try to get the Lord to share the throne of our hearts with some other. "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"! What a triad against which to fight!

Evangelist U. E. Harding was in a railway station over in Illinois waiting for a train. An old and broken man entered the station crying newspapers. The voice sounded familiar, and upon inquiry the evangelist found that this was a man he had once known as being a sincere Christian, a strong preacher, and a successful soul winner. It was not necessary now to ask if he still retained these virtues. So the evangelist asked simply, "How did it happen?" The other replied in a subdued and broken voice, "Oh, it was just a lot of little things." Just a lot of little things, but these little things, like the camel's nose pushed into the Arab's tent, made way for bigger things, and here was a ruined life -- ruined because he did not heed the warning to make a holy heart his defense.

It is not what happens about us, not even what happens to us, but our response to our environment and to our providences that makes the difference. And the responses that make the difference are not the studied responses of the philosopher, but the spiritual responses of the man beneath the scholar. It is what you are that counts more than what you think. And if men use such care to think clearly, how much more should they take care to be holy?

Visiting a mission compound in China, I noticed that every room was crowded full of people, and it seemed to me there were more people than the activities of the mission required. I inquired of the missionary in charge, and he said, "Yes, we are overcrowded, but you see there are soldiers quartered in the compound just across that narrow street. If they came over here and found unused room, they would carelessly take quarters with us, and then it would not be easy to get them out. Therefore, for safety's sake, we make it a rule to have our buildings full and running over." And that is the way of safety for the Christian's heart and life -- keep the heart clean, full of the love of God, and running over with the divine blessing, and the world

will not be able to get in.

No matter who you are how long you have been a Christian, or how many things you have in your favor, there is just one way to safety, and that is to get sanctified wholly, keep the fullness of the blessing always, and by such means you can live in the world, and yet not be saturated by the world. Holiness is the only cure for worldliness as a disease, and it is the only preventive against it as a menace.

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