

SERMON SERIES ON WCA'S BELIEFS

We believe in a lifestyle and practice of ethical conduct and integrity consistent with the character of Jesus Christ and biblical standards. (Romans 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 4:13–32; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–11; 2:11–13; 3:9–11; 1 Peter 1:13–16)

Introduction

We believe that if we claim to be a Christian, a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, that our lives—including our attitudes, our conversation and our behavior—will be like Christ's and consistent with the standards which God's Word exhorts us to reflect.

Jesus severely condemned the religious leaders of His day for hypocrisy—not living according to the scriptural standards they preached and demanded of others. And He warned His disciples of this tendency: ***Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*** (Lk. 12:1). And he went on to say, ***... unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*** (Matthew 5:20 NIV)

But Christ's example and the standards of God's Word are extraordinarily high! Who can actually measure up to them!? Furthermore, who is qualified to judge whether anyone is living up to such standards? In fact, don't the scriptures tell us not to judge others?

Let's examine this issue with the goal of both understanding and conforming to a lifestyle and practice of ethical conduct and integrity consistent with the character of Jesus Christ and biblical standards.

I. First, we must understand that God desires to transform us and conform us into the image of Christ.

Mankind was created in the image and likeness of God; we are designed and created to reflect the character of God.

But the Bible says all have sinned and fall short of that image.

Jesus came to show us what the Father looks like and what we're supposed to look like. And God gives us the Holy Spirit to work in us to transform us into the likeness of Christ. As Paul said,

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (NIV)

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, (Galatians 4:19 NIV)

God's work in us is an "inside job." Where the Pharisees—and other religions—seek to change only the outward behavior, God is changing us from the inside out. It is God working in us, giving us both the desire and the ability to change.

II. Second, we must understand that we are to make every effort—with God's help—to live holy and godly lives.

Someone asked [Jesus], "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "MAKE EVERY EFFORT to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. (Luke 13:23-24 NIV)

Paul exhorted the believers in Thessalonica,

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 NIV)

And Peter tells us, ***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."*** (1 Peter 1:15-16 NIV)

In light of God's certain and immanent judgment on this wicked world, Peter poses the question: ***what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*** (2 Pet. 3:11)

The Bible is clear on what will keep us out of the kingdom of God:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NIV)

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21 NIV)

But we are all a “work in progress,” and we must not succumb to Satan’s lie that we cannot attain a life of holiness and godliness. We must not be seduced into thinking that mediocrity is acceptable.

Christ’s words to the church in Laodicea are sobering!

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV)

And so, Peter exhorts,

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, MAKE EVERY EFFORT to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (2 Peter 1:3-7 NIV)

III. Third, we are to encourage and even correct one another when necessary.

Didn't Jesus say, "***Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*** (Luke 6:37 NIV)?

He did! And many use it to defend themselves against criticism of their behavior.

But the judgment Jesus spoke against was a self-righteous judgment; judging as if the one judging was without fault, and as if they had the authority to condemn.

There is, however, a judgment that has a correct motive. It is the judgment that seeks to correct and protect.

James wrote, ***My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*** (James 5:19-20 NIV)

And Paul instructed, ***Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*** And then he added, ***But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*** (Galatians 6:1 NIV)

Jude tells us to ***Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*** (Jude 1:22-23 NIV)

Paul's judgment of a member of the church in Corinth may seem harsh, but it was necessary in order to correct and protect the church and to bring about repentance in the one sinning.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5 NIV)

We know that the individual referred to repented, because Paul speaks to the

incident in his second letter to the church, and encourages the believers to restore the member.

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Corinthians 2:6-8 NIV)

When one part of our physical body becomes injured or sick, the rest of the body responds in order to protect and bring healing.

In the same way, when one member of the body of Christ is infected with sin, the rest of the body needs to respond so as to bring healing and wholeness. And sometimes that response may seem radical. But it is necessary in order to both protect and restore.

IV. Finally, we must know that if we do sin and fall short of the standard that Jesus Christ and God's Word requires of us . . . ,

. . . we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn. 2:1-2; see also verses 3-6)

The apostle John assures us, ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** (1 John 1:9 NIV)

The transformation that God is working in us can only be accomplished by His grace. And it comes through conviction and repentance, and it is a lifetime endeavor.

Conclusion

But make no mistake, ***without holiness no one will see the Lord.*** (Heb. 12:14). And while God's grace is greater than our sins, and where sin abounds, God's grace abounds more, that doesn't give us license to be complacent or negligent in our efforts to live holy and godly lives.

Jesus said, ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in***

your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' (Matthew 7:21-22 NIV)

And then He said the most terrifying words one can hear: ***Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*** (Matthew 7:23 NIV)

Let us therefore pay close attention to Paul's word to Titus:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14 NIV)