

# Faith's Link to Holiness

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Date: 24 January 2022

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[ 0 : 00 ] When I was young, a long time ago now, around the time of the third grade, I was introduced to organized basketball.

! It would probably be more accurate to describe it as unorganized basketball, but at least we were trying. The coach I had, and I believe that it was Jim Belcher, which I identify more as a baseball coach, but I believe it was Coach Belcher.

He was a good baseball coach, a good basketball coach, terrible football referee, but we won't get into that tonight, Mike. But that very first lesson, they taught us the concept of the pivot, you know, a pivot in basketball.

Pivoting in basketball is the act of rotating one's body while keeping the ball of one's foot in place on the floor.

And as long as you don't lift that foot up, you can turn all kinds of directions. If you're caught lifting the foot, lifting the ball of the pivot foot from the floor, you're guilty of an infraction.

[ 1 : 23 ] The ball goes over to the other side. You've walked, basically. Well, that's an awkward introduction, but in our study of pursuing holiness in an unholy world, we're fast approaching a time when we're going to make a pivot move.

We're going one direction, we're going to slightly go another, but we're going to keep the ball of our foot down. So it's a legal move. We're not abandoning the study.

We're just going a new direction. We are still going to be studying holiness, but we'll be incorporating some new terms.

I took a quick look ahead and it appears to me that we have about 17 lessons left until we shut down for our customary summer sabbatical.

Of course, there's always something that seems to come up, intervene or interfere with our schedule. So we'll see how many weeks we actually get in.

[ 2 : 33 ] We're not going to develop this theme at any deep level tonight, but I thought it might whet your appetite just a little if we talked about it.

I looked up synonyms for the word holiness. I was actually surprised. I'm sure you all know that a synonym is a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language.

If you wanted to use the concept of begin, you could inject words like start or commence or initiate. Those are all synonyms or synonymous with one another.

So I put in the word holiness. I want to see words which were synonymous with that word. And I was a little surprised at the list.

Here's what I came up with. Sanctity, divinity, godliness, saintliness, sanctitude, sacredness, faith, devotion, devotedness, divineness, spirituality, religiousness, piety, piety, piety, pious, piousness, righteousness, goodness, perfection, virtue, purity, and sinlessness.

[ 3 : 59 ] I was pretty amazed at that. Now to bring you a small measure of relief, we're not going to be doing an exhaustive individual word study of all those terms by mid-May.

I don't intend to do that at all. But there's two or three words in there that are going to deserve some of our attention. And we'll spend some time with them along with our study of holiness until about the mid-May time frame.

We'll probably be mentioning sanctification being made, recreated in the image of Christ. And we're going to be definitely using the term godly or godliness.

There may be a couple of others. We'll see. But that's not our lesson tonight. It's merely a preview of things to come in the near future.

When it comes to pursuing holiness, there is a lineage or maybe I could say a linkness between holiness and the exercise of faith.

[ 5 : 17 ] In the pursuit of holiness, Christians in every age have been called on to engage in duties that appear to be sometimes unreasonable, scary, dangerous, maybe ridiculous or perhaps even absurd.

That is how it may have appeared to their friends, particularly unbelieving friends, their enemies and to the unbelieving world around them.

I mean, if you want to hear criticism of evangelical Christians today, just go to Washington, D.C. You can hear all kinds of chatter. It's okay. I criticize them too.

In more than just a few instances, those God-commanded duties cost the life of a believer. We hear about those often in VOM in our world.

Diane and I have been on a couple of tours of Scotland. I called a part of the Reformation tours over there. But we've been to the very spot where people were executed for their faith.

[ 6 : 36 ] They wouldn't deny Christ, so they were hung. They were beheaded. They were burned at the stake. There was all kinds of ways to inflict capital punishment in Scotland.

Scotland went through what they called the killing times. And it's estimated some 18,000 people were martyred during the killing times in the late 1600s.

It's a pretty amazing story. Stories, plural. One of the great expressions of truth, though, in the Word of God and certainly of faith is Abraham.

I think we call him Father Abraham. And I think the kids sing a song about Father Abraham. And I tried to do that, but I kept getting it wrong. And Diane said, just give it up. But I did. His name was originally Abram ben Terah, meaning Abram, son of Terah.

Ben is son. He lived with his father. He lived with his brothers, Nahor and Haran in Ur of the Chaldees.

[ 7 : 46 ] Just to kind of give you a geological lesson, that's southern Iraq today. A lot goes on throughout the millennia in that region.

It's pretty amazing. Interestingly, the people in Ur of the Chaldees have no reason to doubt that they've included Abraham and his family there.

Their principal religious service consisted of a pagan moon worship. When it became full, they'd go out and worship the moon. The name Abram means exalted father.

And we know God later changed His name to Abraham, and He did it for a very specific reason, because Abraham means father of a multitude.

A multitude. God changed Abraham's name because of the changed role he would have in the future when he would literally become the father of a multitude of nations.

[ 9 : 03 ] That's why God changed His name to Abraham. In Judaism, Abraham is the founding father of that special relationship between the Jews and God.

In Christianity, He is the spiritual progenitor of all believers, Jewish or Gentile. Hence, we call Him Father Abraham, and we talk about being grafted in.

And in Islam, He is a link in the chain of prophets that begins in the Quran with Adam, culminates in Muhammad.

Now, they started well, but they got off track. Terribly off track. By the way, just so you know, Abraham was the tenth descendant from Noah.

So that's kind of the timeline that we're talking about. Here's what the author of the book of Hebrews had to say about Abraham in the great chapter 11.

[ 10 : 09 ] In Hebrews 11.8, By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance.

And I just love this. And he left not knowing where he was going. He didn't have a clue. God called him and he said, okay.

We used to have a pastor here and when I got transferred to New York City with the FBI, he said, God would have to come down and call me by my middle name for me to move to New York City. I just want to make sure it's really Him.

But he obeyed and what did he obey by? Well, by faith. He obeyed by faith because he believed these instructions were from God and obviously being from God, they were the will of God and specifically the will of God for his life.

And so the Bible says he obeyed. Didn't know where he was going. But that didn't matter. He was told to go. And you know, let's just think about that for a moment.

[ 11 : 38 ] It could not have been easy. I mean, there's no way that's going to be easy. He and his family, I think, were most likely living a good life in Ur of the Chaldees.

They'd been there probably multi-generational. They were living a good life there. and now Abraham, he becomes Abraham later, but we're going to refer to him as Abraham, received instructions to pack up and become nomadic.

That's not an easy life. I've actually seen nomads in the Sahara Desert. They're still there. It's kind of amazing to see them every now and then. There'll be a caravan of camels and they'll have a big screen TV on one of them.

They're going to put it in their tents, get a satellite hook up. Pretty amazing. Probably going to watch OU. I mean, that's all I can think. But now there are going to be nomads.

They don't have a home, a place to call home. Not an easy lifestyle even in our day. It's a tough one. The passages that we have as our focus tonight is in Hebrews 11.

[ 12 : 55 ] That's the great chapter depicting the heroes of the faith. And you can preach on that for a long time. All the heroes of the faith. And if we were to quiz every true believer in our country as to the meaning of the word holiness, which we've been studying, I think answers that included separation from impurity and moral evil would be very popular.

Though true, that is nevertheless a narrow view of holiness. The broader view is that holiness is marked by obedience to the will of God in whatever He asks.

And that's Abraham. Abraham. He said, you're going to leave here, Abraham. You're going to leave all this behind. You're going to go to a place I'll show you. If our attitude is that I will obey God in these four areas of life, but then these three over here, I can't really do that.

Maybe we think it is asking too much of us. If we are disobedient, though, in one area, we are not at that moment pursuing holiness.

You find a believer that's disobedient in one area, and trust me, I'm not criticizing anyone here but myself. You leak all over.

[ 14 : 24 ] You leak all over. The chain of Christian strength is only as strong as the weakest link in that chain. Whatever the weak link is, that's your strength.

You've got to work on that. Whatever it is. Well, what if we were in a situation where our obedience may cost us great suffering?

Tremendous suffering. What if we were in a situation where obedience to the clear command of God would probably result in the end of our life?

You know, let's face it. It's easy from afar to say, oh yeah, I'd jump right in there and obey that. Well, when we're faced with that, we might at least give pause.

We're human. When you go to glory, I would encourage you to look up Richard Warmbrand, founder of Voice of the Martyrs, and his wife Sabina.

[ 15 : 28 ] You'll know him. Richard was huge. Sabina's about four foot nothing. They have new bodies. I guess they're still the same height. Richard served 14 years in prison in Romania because he wouldn't deny Christ.

He wouldn't deny Christ. They beat him. I've met him several times. Richard couldn't wear shoes. He had to wear house shoes or socks because they beat him on the soles of his feet.

And I've met Richard. Go ask Alan Ewan. He spent 22 years in a Chinese prison and then served an additional 10 years under house arrest.

What was he guilty of? Preaching the gospel of Christ. He preached the gospel. And he was not allowed to leave his home when you're under house arrest in China and you cannot look out a window.

And the secret police are all around watching to make sure you don't do that. And I was honored to have met with Alan on two different occasions. And I've told you this before but it's okay.

[ 16 : 39 ] If I didn't repeat we'd be out of here in five minutes. Alan was sent to a prison way up in North China near Mongolia.

and I think the high temperature gets up to like 38 degrees in the summer. It's really cold. High altitude. And he worked at hard labor.

And he wasn't in that good of health. He's a little bitty guy. I don't know about now. He's in glory. But he was up there where it was he talked about the cold. It was always cold.

And Alan came in from hard labor one day and they told him and said well you've got a roommate. We have to double sell.

Ironically he had prayed that morning Lord if you don't strengthen me I'm going to deny Christ and go home. I've got six kids and a wife to take care of. And he'd been there like eight years on a 22 year sentence.

[ 17 : 40 ] And he said do something to strengthen me or I've got to leave. He comes in and his new roommate comes around and sticks out his hand and said I guess we're going to room together and my name's Watchman Nee.

I mean if you've got to go to prison and the guy says I'm Billy Graham that's who Watchman Nee was in China. That's who Watchman Nee was in China. And I was greatly honored to have met both of those men and on more than one occasion.

Hebrews chapter 11 has been one of those areas of the Bible that has brought peace and comfort to millions of believers. It is there that we read about many of the heroes of the faith.

And there's a most interesting verse in that chapter Hebrews 11 13 talking about them all these died in faith.

And it goes way back like it starts with Abel. All these died in faith. But listen to this without receiving the promise or the promises.

[ 19 : 06 ] God made them some promises or a promise and they died without receiving the promises but having seen and welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on earth.

And it may be difficult for us but that's us guys. We're not citizens of this world. Our citizenship's in the heavenlies. And the older I get and I'm not quite the oldest person in here but almost Jerry. The older I get the more I really am more tuned in to the citizenship above than I am to my citizenship here.

I just really am. But here we have these great heroes of the faith and they welcomed God's promises but from a distance.

In their lives we see the element of obedience to the will of God. They were not concerned with ten ways to claim the promises of God.

[ 20 : 23 ] They were not concerned with buying all kinds of books on God's promises. They were concerned with being obedient to God.

Twofold obedience. Obedient in life and obedient in death. That was their concern. And personally I think that's why they're the heroes of the faith.

I think that's why they're the heroes. We know that faith is an essential to salvation. In fact Ephesians chapter 2 tells us that we're saved by grace through faith.

Obviously faith is necessary to salvation. Faith is also necessary to a life that is pleasing to God. It pleases God. He sees our faith in intimate detail. That doesn't bring me comfort every day. Just sometimes.

[ 21 : 34 ] Only through faith can we obey the commands that God has given us. Abraham stands as an illustration of a life lived by faith.

That's something to go from a pagan moon worshiper father of many nations. That faith was not introduced into Abraham's life until he met the true God.

He met the true God. We know that Abraham received instructions from God that came to him in two parts. The first part was leave your father's house and go to a land that God would show him at some point in the future.

If Abraham would obey God, the Lord would make him a great nation and all the families of earth would be blessed through him. We see then that the instructions that Abraham received from God were in the form of both a command and a promise.

On his part, Abraham believed these came from God and he obeyed. By obeying the command, Abraham fully expected that the promise would be fulfilled.

[ 22 : 57 ] Now, every kid that ever grew up in Sunday school is familiar with the story about Father Abraham. We should not consider Abraham's obedience to leave as some small effort to perform.

Oh yeah, no problem Lord, we'll pack tonight and we'll be on the road at 8 o'clock in the morning. He was not going to leave and check in that evening to a motel 6.

Wasn't going to do it. His home in Earl of the Chaldees is all that he'd ever known. He felt both safe and secure there. And just to pick up and leave was not as simple as driving to Texas for a couple

of nights and then returning home, which I did last week.

I was amazed. We left on Tuesday. We came home on Thursday. I told Diane, I feel like we've been gone a month. We were there 48 hours. Many of you have heard of John Brown, but I'm not talking about the one you've heard of up in Kansas, Osawatimie Brown, Civil War guy.

John Brown was a great Scottish theologian. His grandfather was a premier theologian and well educated with a doctorate.

[ 24 : 19 ] and this John Brown, the grandson, was self-taught. Never went to school. As a young boy, he worked as a shepherd.

That sounds familiar, you know, Bible, but this was in Scotland. Out in the fields, tending the flock, he had time on his hands. So he didn't want to be bored, he wanted to be constructive, so he sat down under moonlight or a campfire and learned both Hebrew and Greek.

I still hold out some hope that maybe I can learn Hebrew and Greek before I'm called home.

Actually, I think I'm going to have to learn it in heaven. I don't think I'm going to. He was most famous for writing a commentary on the book of Hebrews.

This is how John Brown described the journey of Abraham. Abraham by faith leaving Ur of the Chaldees for an as yet undiscovered country was little different from a person previous to the discovery of America leaving the shores of Europe and committing himself and his family to the mercy of the waves in consequence of a command of God and a promise that they would be conducted to a country where he should become the founder of a great nation and the source of blessings to many nations.

in other words just piling a boat and go where the waves take you. That's how John Brown mentioned or disclosed Abraham's journey but this was on sand and not on water.

[ 26 : 05 ] I want to make a great statement so you know it's not original with me. We'll clear that up real quick. It's an important comment, an extremely important one. hope you guys will reflect on it the rest of the week.

The path of obedience in the pursuit of holiness can sometimes be contrary to human reason. You want me to do what Lord?

What did that passage say? That's not for me is it? Let that truth swirl around in your head the rest of the week. if we're going to follow the path of obedience that leads to holiness, we must have similar or even the same convictions that Abraham had.

We say, wait a minute, God hasn't spoken to me. Well, when's the last time you picked up your Bible? That's how he speaks to us in our day. We speak to him through prayer.

He speaks to us through the written word. What does that involve? Convictions that Abraham had. Two things.

[ 27 : 17 ] We must be convicted that if it is God's will that we pursue holiness regardless of how painful we might think that pursuit might be.

We've got to do it. We must also be confident that the pursuit of holiness will result in God's approval and blessing even if the evidence and circumstances make it appear otherwise and we're going the wrong direction.

But if we're being obedient to the revealed word, we have nothing to fear. There are many examples of these two jewels, I'll call them, found in the Old Testament as God dealt with the nation of Israel.

One such was God's command that Israel was to keep the sabbatical year. We are probably not totally familiar with that concept called the sabbatical year.

If you want to do some private study on the topic, it's found in the book of Leviticus chapter 25. The nation would sow crops and reap crops for six years.

[ 28 : 32 ] As a result of their obedience, God would especially bless the sixth year with abundant produce which was intended to get the nation through the seventh year when no crops would be planted.

The land set fallow until the eighth year when the cycle began again and they would plant for six years. And then the land would rest. And we know now in modern science that's a great thing. That's a really good thing. That didn't happen in Oklahoma when we had a dust bowl. But that's a good thing. By doing this, the people were putting their obedience on display.

But the land's fertility was also being restored for when the cycle would begin afresh. people. But people being people, the Israelites had great difficulty in obeying.

And you can hear them, can't you? What if we run out of food? Surely they did not understand what God was commanding us to do. We've misinterpreted this.

[ 29 : 48 ] What if there's a fire and burns up the field? We lose our crop. I was out in West Oklahoma one time investigating a case out there.

Weed harvest was Saturday. Weed harvest was Monday. And on Sunday they had a horrendous hail storm. It just wiped out the crop in about six counties.

Just, I mean, big hail. people. The reality was that when this command was obeyed, the nation prospered.

When it was not obeyed, the nation suffered. They suffered physically, but they suffered spiritually even. It was more intense.

well, do we have a New Testament counterpart to this? Well, Jerry Bridges offers one. I wouldn't have thought of this and most of us probably wouldn't.

[ 30 : 52 ] But there's a great passage found in Matthew chapter six. Remember, this is all right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus speaking, but seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be provided to you.

But you've got to be seeking His kingdom and His righteousness. In context, this was the Lord's cure, if you really read that whole section, for anxiety among believers, which continues to plague the human race.

what are we going to eat? What are we going to drink? What clothes are we going to wear? Am I going to be able to afford the latest fashions?

I love the way the Lord summarized this chapter in verse 34. He said, so do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. Jesus says, don't worry. When I was a young FBI agent, I had a real life experience with this.

[ 32 : 08 ] There were a lot of non-believers in our office. I've never met a lot of believers in law enforcement. I was a police chief, maybe six, maybe. FBI even less.

But there was a senior agent I worked with down there named Ron. Ron, good guy, up in his 80s now, mid-80s. And Ron and I would visit a lot and we'd talk about the Lord.

Another agent in the office was a member of a very liberal church in Tulsa and he came to Ron for advice. And you know, we've all heard this term, but he says, Ron, I know you're a religious person. It's like taking your fingernails down a blackboard. I know you're a religious person and I need some advice. Well, it turned out this particular agent, and I didn't really know him, he left before I got there.

He was in charge of the church budget and he told Ron, the church funds are depleted. We don't have any money.

[ 33 : 15 ] He said, we cannot pay the mortgage on the building, we can't pay the light bill, and we cannot pay the pastor's salary. And he says, Ron, I need some advice.

Well, Ron says, well, let me start here. Has your church come together and prayed about this? And this agent says, he just stared at Ron's eyes and he looked at him amazed and he said, Ron, I'm serious.

Give me some advice that will actually work. Ron said, I don't think I can help you. I mean, that was their attitude. That was their attitude.

Well, I hope we understand in this lesson that we have seen linkage between faith and the pursuit of holiness. As one person has said, we are to obey the commands of God and leave the results to Him.

let's just leave the results to Him. And you know where we really get in trouble? I'm going to help God out of this thing. Surely God can't get out of this predicament.

[ 34 : 28 ] I'll help Him. Now, God doesn't need our help. I can assure you. Well, we've been studying the pursuit of holiness since September of 2021.

So I want to close tonight with a passage from Hebrews 11 6 that might help us in achieving this most worthy goal. Because it's there that the Holy Spirit recorded for us, without faith it is impossible to please God.

Can't happen. Without faith, we cannot please God. And I looked at that today over and over.

And I wrote this, can we not also say, based on that truth, that with the exercise of legitimate faith, it is not only possible to please God, it is certain that we will please God.

He'll look at our faith and the exercise of it, and He will be pleased. Thank you.