

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AND ▶ HOLINESS



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Foreword

Over the years I have found it important to consider the wisdom of the book of Job in dealing with not just the unexpected but the normal events of life. To understand Job is to understand how to live, not just survive.

At the same time we need a goal for our reflections. Our lives should be about more than understanding how to live but understanding the purpose of our life. The Bible makes this very clear, we are to strive to be like God in his holiness. Life provides the opportunity to learn about God and to become like God.

I trust these short thoughts will be helpful in that process.

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Job – Reflections on Life

Thought 01

Job 7:17, 18

Why is man important to God?

Job wonders why man is of any importance to God and why God should take so much time to bother with a man. The real problem is that he can see no answer to his perplexity as relates to the situation he is now experiencing. All that he sees is his small world and it is filled with pain and misery. Death seems to be the only escape from the pain and the only way that he can get an answer from God.

In fact, it is in death that Job sees his being forgiven and drawn back to God. Job longed for death, both for relief and as a sign that he had been forgiven or at least that the punishment was over and completed.

In the same way, Jesus death is the sign that we are forgiven and that God does care. Job's question of why is man important to God is rarely answered, only that God created man.

In the morning I saw you
The being that I had made
My love was so complete
I lowered myself to save you

In the evening I saw you
I drew you close to me
The man I created was mine again
And never again would he leave

Thought 02

Job 1:5

Job...sacrificed for them: for he thought they might have sinned against God.

This is a powerful sign of the depth of a man's righteousness. He is not only concerned about sin in his own life, but sin in the lives of others. Not only that, he shows his concern by offering a sacrifice for them. Later God tells the three friends to plead with Job to sacrifice for them that they might be forgiven. God entrusted to Job the responsibility of the intercession for others. Granted, it was by sacrifice, but Christ lays on us in Matthew 16:19, and 18:18 something quite similar. He states that what we allow on earth will be allowed in heaven and what we forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven.

Question - are the lives we live such that God will entrust to us the kind of responsibility he gave to Job? Are we so close to God that rather than think about ourselves we are more concerned about other people's relationship to our God?

Lord I heard my neighbor cry
His world had collapsed
Lord I heard my neighbor cry
And I failed him at last

Thought 03

Job 4:7-9

Eliphaz Speaks

Over and over again the point is stressed that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. It becomes Eliphaz' religion. Man must be righteous so that he can gain the favor of God. Or the reverse of it. When he is punished by God he knows something is wrong so he can correct it. Again he is righteous and is rewarded. Is this the God we serve?

This is the God of our own conceptualizing. We want to be rewarded for what we are doing. Jesus, in talking to the apostles, told them through a parable that once they had performed their tasks they should realize that what they had done was only their duty. Paul picked this up in 1 Corinthians 9:16, 17 and declared that he could claim no credit for what he was doing except that his reward was the chance to preach to people without charging them to listen. In other words, it was his duty and it was done without expecting earthly rewards.

It is time to play the game

 This requires so many good deeds

 A whistle blows, a penalty called

 Personal foul, penalty man goes to hell

Why do you serve God, for your own benefit or because he is God? Job said, "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed by the name of the Lord."

Thought 04

Job 8:8

Inquire now of the older generation

This is a sign of respect in a culture. But sometimes it is a sign taken too far. It is good we listen to our elders; but what if they are wrong? If our faith and belief is based on the faith of our parents and elders, what good is it? Will it save us or give us an adequate answer? Read on and listen to Eliphaz quote the sayings of the elders, and you will soon see they are inadequate. They do not answer Job's questions of why, at the end of chapter seven.

Job wanted to ask God, Eliphaz turned to the sayings of the wise and elders. Is your faith based in what others say or have you gone to God, as Job did, for your answers?

Lord, I hear the words of others
And they are rank, without feeling

Lord, I hear the words of others
And they are hollow, without love

Lord, I wish to hear you speak
That I might find my faith in you

Lord, I wish to hear you speak
That I might know you myself

Thought 05

Job 3:20-26

Why should the ... have no rest

This passage gives to us what most people consider the basic theme of the book of Job, the problem of suffering. The problem of suffering is important, but look again. The question is not why is there suffering but why is man born if he is going to suffer? Job has no problem with the suffering of life. His question is why does God, knowing that this man will suffer, allow him to be born?

Job's friends will try to answer the part of Job's question that deals with the why of suffering. They completely omit the why of Job's birth and what God's purpose for this man's life is. Think about it. Why are you alive and what is God's purpose for your life?

Job saw his suffering as God building a hedge around him. This hedge restricted Job and limited his activity. Job sensed there was a purpose for this action, and Job wanted to know why.

Did you ever wonder why
And then wait long enough
To get the answer
And thus by waiting
To meet your God

Thought 06

Job10:1

...I give free rein to my grief...

Job out of his pain spoke freely to his God. Job told God exactly how he felt and why he felt that way. I wonder if the fear of the Lord has so gripped us that we are afraid to express ourselves. Oh yes, we talk to God but we do it politely. Job was anything but polite; he was angry, he was sad, and as he talked to God that's just what he told God. He spoke about what he felt and why he felt that way and then waited for God to answer.

Hebrews 4:16 challenges us to present ourselves before God. Since we are His creation, He is concerned and as God He will listen. Christ at Gethsemane spoke the words in His heart, honestly, openly to His Father. There are many more examples of this, but Job is the best. He shows us that his relationship with God was such that he could say exactly what he felt. And we too can experience that freedom, for Jesus has opened to us a special relationship as children of God. Hadn't we better begin to make use of this relationship with our God, our Father?

You are my God
 You who loves me
You know all of my needs and hurts
 You listen to me

You are my God
 You want me to speak
You have made me for fellowship
 You are waiting for me to speak

Thought 07

Job 11:7

Can you fathom the mystery of God...

A good question. Zophar is right in asking such a question of Job. It is good for us to think about the God we believe in and serve. But Zophar did not stop there. He began to explain to Job the mystery as interpreted by Zophar. He said this is the mystery and this is how it works. A nice compact easily defined mystery. Not too hard to explain.

I think we are often guilty of doing just this to others and to ourselves. Frankly my God confuses me; I don't know what He will do next or how He will do it. Yet He has told me He loves me and that all that occurs is for my benefit. Personally I like it this way. I have a relationship with God that isn't static or predictable; rather I have an exciting God who can bring life into the most mundane of things. And even when I don't know what's happening or why, I can trust Him.

A predictable pattern
Easily explained
Without life

A God who is God always
Creating life in me
Unexplained

Thought 08

Job 14:15

Thou would long to see the creature thou has made.

Job would appear to be a man without hope. Looking at what was happening to him he has reason, his despair is great. He can only see death; death doesn't solve his problem, it just ends the pain.

Yet there is reason to think otherwise. In 13:15, Job says, "Even though he slay me yet I will trust Him." Job believes death is inevitable but there is still hope that he will see God and be able to present his case before Him.

This hope grows so that in Job 14:15 we see the desire that God too longs to see Job, in this passage his hope for a solution based in God finds its expression. Yet even here there is uncertainty. Job is wishing, hoping that this will be the case, for he doesn't know for sure. So Job struggles on, looking and waiting for God to answer.

How far will we go when we don't know the answer? Job knew he would die, but he wouldn't quit. He still felt somehow, someway, he would be given an answer by God and be vindicated.

Job's life was on the line
He didn't know why
Yet he was prepared to die

Job put his life in God
All he had was pain
And he trusted God again

Thought 09

Job 15:9

What do you know that we do not know?

Everything Job has said has been an open challenge to his friends. First he challenged their view of God and how He acts in their world. He found that they didn't listen or hear him, but responded by attacking him. So Job attacked them for their lack of feeling or concern and got the same response. You see, to his friends, to attack their understanding of God was the same as slandering them. In their world the amount of knowledge accumulated was a measure of greatness and so to tell someone they were wrong was very personal.

We're not much different today. For when someone asks a question that suggests our view or understanding is inaccurate we become very defensive. Often we will attack the person as Eliphaz and the others attacked Job. We forget about love and understanding in the fight to prove we are right.

Who do you think you are

My ears burn with the accusation

I find it harder to love

Who do you think you are

The discussion becomes an argument

I cut my friends to ribbons

Who do you think you are

A simple question causes great hatred

I cry as I lose a friend

Thought 10

Job 16:4

If you and I were to change places

Job is desperately in need of some understanding from his friends. He even suggests changing places to show them how poorly he has been mistreated by them. But there is no response from them and once again Job appeals to God. He presents his plea and from somewhere a ray of hope shows him that he does have a witness in heaven and that God will hear his plea.

Now look ahead; man cries out that God is unfair. Yet God, unlike Job's friends, responds to the idea of changing places. God comes to earth and experiences the life of man with its pain and suffering. Job asked for relief and sought for one to arbitrate between him and God. In Christ we have such a person. Are we like Job's friends, unwilling to listen and learn? Or can we follow God's example of love and concern for those who are suffering and need someone to care about them? Job's friends failed at that point, but Job knew God cared and so he went right to God with his complaint.

Question: Are we willing to leave ourselves behind and become signposts which point to a God who cares? Or will we be like the friends, afraid to correct our errors in order to help someone?

My friend was in pain and sick
 For fear of being sick too
 I avoid him
I carried in me the sickness of sin
 God came and lived with me
 I was soon healed

Thought 11

Job 18:4

Is the earth to be deserted to prove you are right?

Bildad goes off on a rampage filled with venom and hate. He attacks Job, his family, home, health; everything that is vital to a man's sense of security. Nothing is left untouched; to start it off he implies that everything on earth would have to vanish before he would even consider the words of Job. Bildad has made a serious mistake, Rather than meet the man and learn who he is before judging him; he looks at the circumstances of the man. He implies that before he will consider Job's words, such a disaster as the complete desolation of the world has to occur; the rocks must move from their place. It is interesting to note that Bildad and his friends defend God but never desire a sign from God to prove the accuracy of their words.

Let us beware of taking a position so strongly that when it is shown to be inaccurate we are not willing to change. If we do they may seek God's protection from us, the very ones who should be helping them.

I'm so convinced of my way
That I act perfect
Judging another by my ideas

I'm so convinced of my way
That my friends must hide,
Calling to God for protection from me

Thought 12

Job 19:6

I tell you God Himself has put me in the wrong...

What a contrast! His friends claim that Job is the source of the wrong which has brought down God's judgment. Job all but says that God has created pain and the problem.

If God is loving, what is it then? Read on. Job 19:21, "Pity me...for the Lord God has touched me." Job is saying something else from his friends or what the one verse implies. In Job 9:20 Job says that though he himself is right God will "by my own words" condemn me. Job is saying that it is not something "in me" that has caused this but something that is part of the very nature of God.

Job doesn't know why but he does know that what is happening is linked to God. The strength of this feeling keeps appearing in the vindicator or redeemer sayings. In time Job will see that because of who I am and who God is I am in trouble. I will need a redeemer, a vindicator, to set it right.

God I see your actions
Not your motives
I try to defend myself
Futility is all I receive

God I know it's you
Tell me the reason
I will be vindicated
You are my only source of hope

Thought 13

Job 20:3

A spirit beyond my understanding gives me the answers.

Zophar succumbs to his emotions and loses control of himself. My distress of mind forces me to reply and this is why I hasten to speak. Without a moments thought he launches into a ringing vendetta against those that are evil. Thus he closes with “such is God’s reward...the appointed...by God.” Much of what Zophar says is just plain speculation and wishful thinking. His only support is the words of others and “a spirit.” Now granted these two sources are impressive and must be considered. The problem is Zophar doesn’t consider them as to their validity or accuracy, rather he accepts them point blank. His own words are, “my mind forces me, I hasten to reply.” The implication is that Zophar trusts his emotions and their accuracy more than the use of wisdom in judging if something is accurate.

Beware o man

 The witness you feel

Be sure o man

 The accuracy of the words you hear

Beware o man

 Lest your feelings prove you false

Be sure o man

 Of the wisdom conveyed by words

Thought 14

Job 21:22

Can any man teach God...

The battle in Job has not been about suffering but about God and the manner of His immanence. The friends cannot seem to see this simple fact. And they will not believe Job's words. With that thought one should probably call them his adversaries. For again Job must defend his position with a ringing affirmation of God. This statement, "can any man teach God..." leaves open the mystery of God and His methods. To keep their focus there Job then follows by anticipating their argument and refuting it solidly. The cry of Job is to see God as He is, not as others see Him, and to get there he must wade through the old concepts. The friends or adversaries don't measure up and are of no help; the cry rings on deaf ears and cold hearts. Can any man teach God? Which God have you met with today? Think about it. Is it God, God, or a tool you use to maintain your way of thinking and your way of life?

Come to me God

Make your true presence known

Hear my cry

Teach me who God is

Thought 15

Job 22:2

Can man be any benefit to God?

Eliphaz has said very little and holds true to form for the most part. And when he does say something important it is usually buried or lost to something else that he says. Here is such a case in verses 2, 3 of chapter 22. Let's forget about the rest of the chapter and just think about this set of questions. Is man any benefit to God? Is even a wise man? One step further, is your righteousness an asset to God? Then the final question, If your conduct were perfect, would God gain anything from it? Eliphaz was trying to tear Job apart. Yet when removed from the context and toned down these are critical questions. What do you think you're worth to God? What do you think you can do that will benefit Him? Why did He send His Son? Finally, why did God create you?

In the twinkling of an eye
I was born
I didn't know why
And often I didn't care

In the twinkling of an eye
I was born
I didn't know why
But now I had met my God

Thought 16

Job 23:3

If only I knew how to find Him.

When you last wanted to meet God where did you go to find Him? Did you go to the church or for a walk? Did you hide in a corner or stand on a busy street? Did you open His word or did you stand where you were and talk to Him? Job wanted to know where to find God. Little did he realize how close God was to him. God was as close as Job's life was to Job's body. How close is God to you? More important, how close will you let God be? God is already here; we just need to clear our thoughts of all unnecessary interference to realize it. Then we must be willing to wait for God's timing. And when He does reveal Himself, be ready to accept completely what He reveals. Job wanted to find God and kept looking for Him. What he got wasn't exactly what he wanted, but he didn't argue about it or reject it. Rather he submitted himself to God who reveals Himself to His creation.

Where God are you hiding today
Won't you show yourself
By doing it today

Where God should I look today
Won't you show yourself?
When I go your way

Thought 17

Job 25:4

How then can a man be justified in God's sight?

Their world was crumbling and their anxiety was growing in intensity. They have lashed out at Job. Job in turn has questioned the rightness of their doctrine and not without reason. So Bildad throws it back at Job. How can man be justified if it is not by his own righteousness? Bildad asks Job the same question Job has been asking God. So far God has not answered Job and Job knows he doesn't have an answer for Bildad. Bildad, if he had been listening, also knows Job has no answer to give. Whether or not Bildad is just ridiculing Job is not that important, but the question he asks is. What about you, on what grounds do you stand before God? Take some time and think about it. Is it based on your merits or do you really know what you are and why you can stand before God?

In the presence of a holy God I stand
I have been justified
A child of Abraham through
Faith to life

In the presence of a loving God I stand
I have been made holy
A child of God by Jesus blood
Death to life

Thought 18

Job 26:4

To whom have uttered these words?

When we speak and express our opinion, whom are we speaking to? The obvious answer would be to whoever is listening to you at that moment. But Job, as the object of their discussion, is not who they are speaking to, they are trying to convince themselves. They must or their whole world will collapse around them. Job sees this and puts his finger on it. What about us? Are we so right that we have to continually convince ourselves of the correctness of our doctrine? Shouldn't it rather be the idea or doctrine speaking for and defending itself? The evidence will tell the story and I have to be willing to listen. Job listened, even challenge them to prove what they were saying. They couldn't, so he refused to listen and instead he cried out to God.

Your words and the truth are not the same
I think you're playing a game
You tear my world apart
You tell me what I should do
Then you fail to prove what you say
God help me find the truth I pray

Thought 19

Job 27:6

So long as I live I will not change.

Job wanted to change his friend's ideas and yet he was as stubborn as they. When all this began it was said he had done no wrong in spite of the pressure and tension. Now we begin to see the core of Job. In the verse before, Job says he will maintain the rightness of his cause. He has begun to crusade for his position. The interesting point is he doesn't know if its is any better than his friends position. Job is not the picture of patience we usually paint. No more than any one of us. When God finally comes, take note of what questions, if any, he answers or who he defends? Beware of taking a stand on some issue without God's validation, lest you become in need of correction by God.

Here I stand

I will make my defense

The wind blew it away

Here I stand

I will wait for God's word

The rock stands forever

Thought 20

Job 28:12

Where can wisdom be found?

The question of the ages was immortalized by Solomon. Lord, give me wisdom. Men have studied written and literally talked themselves into the grave trying to be smarter than the next guy. It makes little difference what IQ you have as long as you know something better than someone else. It is the measure of a man's worth. But wait, that's not what wisdom is. True, Job paints a glorious picture of knowledge and what man has done; only to conclude by saying the fear of the Lord is wisdom. This point is also made in Proverbs and in the concluding remarks of Ecclesiastes. When you have learned to fear God then you will be wise. Job's friends felt they were wise and Job did too but it wasn't until Job's last statement that he truly became wise. "I knew of thee only by report, but now I see thee with my own eyes. Therefore I melt away. I repent in dust and ashes."

I have sought wisdom
I gained great knowledge
Yet I knew nothing of life

I have sought God
I gained His presence
And I knew the source of life

Thought 21

Job 29:2

If I could only go back to the old days.

All the things a man could fear happening have happened. His family is gone, his possessions stolen, his friends have turned away and the prestige he once had is gone. Many a soul has cried for the good old days as a means of escape because they couldn't face the problems of the present. If any man had the right, Job did, and with this discourse it would appear that is just what he is doing. Somehow I cannot accept this, for in verses 24-25 of chapter 30 he says he never turned away a beggar, that he grieved with the poor and wept for those whose life was hard. Job didn't cop out by talking of the past. Rather he tried to set his friends on the right track again. Job was trying to show them where they had failed and help them correct the error. True he wished for the past but he doesn't stop living in the present.

Escape to the world of yesterday
A world you have survived
A world that is friendly

Escape from living in the world
To living in your dreams
A world of make believe

Escape from today and be free
To escape from your problems
A world that is forever dead

Thought 22

Job 31:28

...for I should have been unfaithful to God on high.

Job was accused of having sinned and here defends himself. The noteworthy point is that he didn't defend himself on the basis of keeping the law. His purpose or reason for being a righteous man was fear of God and being unfaithful to God in some way. Job was not worried about impressing men and because of it he was righteous in God's eyes and respected in the eyes of man. So when things went wrong his question about suffering was not "why is there suffering," but what is God trying to do. Job's friends set up a straw dog as God and tried to defend it and their concept of suffering. By bypassing that and seeing righteousness as faithfulness to God Job short-circuited their entire line of reasoning. By allowing him to defend himself anew, we no longer have a discussion of suffering but of who God is and what righteousness really means.

I came down with a case of suffering
My friends treated the result
God treated the cause

I came down with a case of suffering
Their god was a straw dog
God defined by man

Thought 23

Job 33:16

...his correction strikes them with terror

Here begins a new philosophy of suffering. It is a means of scaring the sinful man back to God; to snatch him from the jaws of hell. Elihu sees in suffering a redemptive character. God's purpose is to turn a man from his reckless conduct to convert the man of sinfulness and save him from the pit. There is an element of truth in this idea. Man people in a time of great suffering have turned to god and have been saved. One catch though; Job is already convinced of the need for a relationship with God. What Elihu has is only a part of the total truth; he fails to continue to the next step. The result is God has to step in and do His own thing. Elihu got somewhere but he didn't go far enough. He stopped short of God and settled for what his own intelligence told him. How often do we do the same thing; settle for half the truth or only part of God and what He has for us? Let's be like Job and wait too, so we can get all of what God has for us.

I opened my eyes part way
And saw part of the picture
But I wasn't curious enough to see it all

I opened my eyes part way
And asked God to finish the job
So that I could see the picture's
total beauty

Thought 24

Job 35:6

How does it touch Him if you sinned?

Why do we constantly place God outside of our existence? Always we place Him in a position of unaffected disinterest. The friends had a mechanistic God who only performed. Elihu's God isn't much better, but at least his God sees what is going on and does something, i.e. chapter 33, tries to save man. Still it just isn't much. If that's who my God is, then phooey, eat, drink and be merry, God really isn't affected by my life, He just doesn't care. How it hurts Him I don't know, but that He is affected is shown by what He has done to correct the situation. Job waits for God's fellowship. Job may feel he is without error. But still he knows something is wrong and he wants God to come and show him. Elihu is right in asking the question, but his answer is all wrong. Though sin cannot come into God's presence it has nonetheless affected Him. It has resulted in the separation of God from His special creation, man, and requires another special act of God to correct it. Think about it; your sin has hurt God and He had to do something about it to remove the sin and thus the hurt.

I sinned and thought nothing of it.

God cried

The pain unbearable

I sinned and thought nothing of it

God died

The pain removable.

Thought 26

Job 38:3

Brace yourself and stand up like a man.

God speaks. In most instances when a man is confronted by God he cringes and falls on his face. Usually he confesses his sinful state and then God goes on. Here Job doesn't have a chance to cringe. God speaks and the second thing He says is, "Be a man and answer my questions." God, knowing the need for vindication in front of the friends, responds by showing Job that he is important, for he is a man, a creation of God and of great value in God's eyes. On the other hand Job has been speaking for 37 chapters about his woe and practically daring God to show himself.

Job has been attacked and now God is Job's only hope to prove that he isn't totally wrong in his belief in God. So God challenges Job, both to vindicate him and to put Job in his place, so to speak. Think about it; God challenges Job to answer Him. When were you close enough to God that He challenged you to answer Him?

God challenged me
To be alive
To give Him an answer to
His challenge

God challenged me
To be a man
To be what He created me to be
His image

Thought 27

Job 40:2

Should he that argues with God answer back?

God has challenged Job to be a man and to answer His questions. God proceeds to ask a series of questions and in the meantime describes His creation. Many of the questions deal with man's comprehension of the world and his understanding of how things operate. Others are whether or not man has the power to control various animals. Over time man had discovered many things about creation and how to control many animals. Yet the how and whys behind the discoveries are still unanswered even today. In the light of this, dare we or even Job, who was called righteous by God, attempt to give an answer? God often asks us important questions; what kind of answers do we give Him or do we refuse to answer?

I am a stubborn man

I will not answer

God's questions are too hard

I am a stubborn man

I will not answer

God asks the wrong questions

I will not admit my error

Thought 28

Job 40:4

What reply can I give thee, I who carry no weight?

Job challenged God to come. God comes and now Job tries to back out. He says that he's already spoken and will say no more.

Many people challenge God to give an answer and when He does they don't reply. When God confronts us we act as though we never meant what we said. Job has done just that, he refuses to answer God and as a result becomes even more stubborn about his ideas. Job backs out rather than defends himself. How quickly we forget that God created us for fellowship with Himself when He actually reveals himself.

I hear your word
But I cannot answer you
So I won't speak
Besides
Who am I to tell you anything
You know my thoughts
Why should I repeat them
I hear your words
I refuse to speak
To admit you really are there

Thought 29

Job 40:7

You shall answer.

We've asked the question, dare I speak to God and try to answer His questions? God makes it imperative; you shall answer. Why is it that when we are confronted with God Himself we are no longer as brave as before? God gave us minds to comprehend with, isn't it also then possible to answer at least some of the questions? At least for ourselves. Well God didn't wait for Job to reply; He kept on asking questions. God questioned Job's very concept of God. His descriptions were just as awesome as the questions and when He finished Job answered. To be truthful I don't think he had a choice. Note Job's answer; not filled with pride but with a realization of man's limited perspective when it comes to explaining God.

When you last met God

Who was in control

Who dictated right and wrong

Who was wiser

The Master or the master

Was God your pet programmer

Or you His favorite child

Thought 30

Job 42:7

When the Lord had finished....

Many times we feel we are the ones who decide when the goal has been accomplished. We decide what it is God wants to get done. Most would say that with Job's confession the objective God had in mind was completed. Well it's not true; God wasn't done, He kept on going. He judged the friends and gave back all that Job had lost and more. Why God follows the theology of the friends and blesses Job for being faithful is difficult to understand. I have no answer. One thing I do know though is that often we stop before God is through. If we would but continue a little further in our trust in God the greater blessings would be ours. We are too easily satisfied. Paul says desire the greater gifts from God. Let's not stop too soon. Let's expect and wait for the complete blessing and vindication of God, whatever form in may take.

I had a thousand
And they were taken
My life was all but destroyed.

But I trusted God
And they were returned
My life my wealth and my God

Reflections on Holiness

Thought 01

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Be holy because I am holy

The question is always, where do I begin? How do I obtain holiness as part of my life? This is a crucial question to the young Christian and often for the older Christian who never learned to desire the better gifts of God.

Here I think is the point of beginning. It is a straight-forward command encircled by several directions on how to follow the command. It is simple and direct, be holy because I am holy. In Leviticus 11:44,45 the same command was given to the Israelites in the middle of the rules concerning unclean animals. The Israelites did not understand the why of the commands but simply knew that to be pure and holy meant to obey. However today we know of bacteriology and medicine; and the why of those commands is clear – the good health of the nation.

The same is true here. The directions are clear, to keep ourselves pure for the spiritual health of the individual. This does not mean avoiding the world and hiding from it. The animals the Israelites were to avoid involved rules prohibiting them from eating them in most cases. They still passed among them and had contact with them. We, also, must live in the world, but not take into our lives the things of the world. At first we may not understand why, but someday we will – if we obey.

The first step then is simple obedience and then we will begin to crave pure spiritual milk (2:2) so that we may begin to grow up in our salvation.

Unclean was defined
It was not explained
Obedience was the command
Holiness to be the blessing

Thought 02

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Simply obey. I can hear it now, the questions: How do I do it? What do I obey? And the statements: Its too hard, or you make it too simple; there has to be more. Does there? Does there have to be more than faith and simple obedience?

Man's wisdom and intelligence would tell us that to be pure we must clean up our act. We hear such ideas often. Do this, do that, you have to follow this; you must believe it this way. I'm sure you could add to such a list of statements and make up a tally sheet of how to go about being holy for God.

My friend, you'll never make it. God in his wisdom does not think or plan in the way Satan or man does. Nor is His ability to perceive the truth about us clouded as our own vision is. He alone is truly objective. He knows the right way, the only way, and is not affected by whether we think it is wise or intelligent by man's standards.

God knew that man could not be holy of his own power so He sent his Son. Jesus has become for us wisdom from God. He gives us what we lack to be wise as God is – righteousness, holiness, and redemption. God has provided holiness by His own wisdom – in Christ. With such love and provision, is obedience too much to ask or too simple a thing to do?

truly lost or given up; save a sinful nature and the inability to truly love, both God and others and self.

Let no one discourage you from seeking such a valuable and wonderful gift from God. It is not a negative lifestyle of sacrifices, but an exciting relationship with God that creates endless possibilities.

Majestic in holiness
Not proud in boasting
Blessed by God in abundance
Able to gain all that God offers.

Thought 04

Isaiah 35:1-10

And a highway will be there; it will be called the way of holiness

So much is vague and uncertain in our lives and in our world. We walk in a maze called life trying to get from point A to point B. It's a lot like a prospector desperate for water. He knows there is water in the desert available but doesn't have a map showing how to find it.

How many times we treat our Christian life the same way – like a desert – and we walk in it searching for water without a map. The sad thing is we already possess the map and it tells us the name and location of the water, yet we fail to use it. The map is the Bible, God's Word. It is a map that will show us some pretty remarkable things.

In the desert, there is a stream of water gushing out for us and a highway leading us straight to it. The water is the well of life, Jesus himself. He will quench our thirst and guide us.

The name of the highway is clear as well. It is called the way of holiness.

This highway is clearly marked out for us in the scriptures for us to see and to follow. It is not some footpath which is poorly marked, causing us to vaguely wander. No, we are to travel on a highway; a well-kept and well marked highway. It is there to be used by those willing to study the map, the Bible.

It is a highway
Which takes us to life
Through deserts and destruction
To streams of living water
In Him named Jesus Christ

Thought 05

Romans 8:28-30

...conformed to the likeness of His Son...

Here is step one of God's will for us who have been saved; to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, Jesus, who is also our Lord. In seeking out holiness in our lives this is exactly what is to be occurring within us. We are to be reshaped in the inner man into the likeness of Jesus.

You may ask how this includes holiness, since holiness is not used in the above scripture. The answer is easy. Who is Jesus and who does He represent? Jesus' own reply to His disciples was that He who had seen Him, had seen the Father, for He and the Father were one. Jesus was the image of the Father, if you prefer the Father's likeness. Part of that image or likeness is holiness, for God is holy.

And most importantly, this was not something arbitrary for man to think about. No, rather God in His infinite knowledge decided that being conformed in His Son's likeness was to be part of His call to those who He knew would come.

Seeking after holiness then is not optional but a necessary part of our being conformed to the likeness of His Son, Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

There is an image of God
It is called Adam
But it was lost
Then God's own image came
He was called Jesus
He came to restore

There is an image of God
It can be our own
If we are conformed

Thought 06

Philippians 3:12-14

...I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Our Christian life is one of seeking after God, and in that seeking, to restore the fellowship which we once had in Adam. Even as we seek, we are being sought after by God in the person of Jesus Christ. Think about it as two parties seeking after each other and having the same goal in mind.

Let's be precise – this is not just a simple game of hide and seek, or some kind of treasure hunt with a map where we try to guess where to find the hidden treasure. No, both parties

are involved – the seekers (us) and Christ-working together to gain what is being sought after. It is a passionate, earnest effort to get a hold of, or a firm grip on, our goal – and it should become part of daily lives – just as Paul was doing.

The object here is given in the previous verse, the desire to be perfect even as He who called us is perfect. Paul said he hadn't attained all of what is part of being perfect yet. But he says he is seeking after what he was sought for, that he might be again as he once were - perfect. It is a prize to be desired. Obtained in part now, in full in heaven.

What do you seek my friend
Mediocre existence in
Meaningless prizes
Or
God's perfection
And the heavenly prize

Thought 07

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
...to live a holy life...

Let us digress for a bit. Holiness is not an option that we choose, rather it is a requirement placed upon us. God picked us so that we might live holy lives and thus please Him. Consider again verse seven in its entirety. "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

This is to be a day-to-day lifestyle, not a Sunday to Sunday existence. Jesus warned the Pharisees to stop cleaning only their hands but to start cleaning up their hearts as well. Trying to live for the Lord on Sundays and for ourselves the rest of the week is like using Sunday as the outer container of our lives. As long as no one looks inside and only sees the

container, we look pretty nice. But if they look inside, the stench of and sight of what is inside would be sickening.

We are exhorted by Paul to live a holy life – singular – not two lives, one with the appearance of holiness, the other impure. We are to live one consistent life which is pleasing to God.

These are not a man's thoughts and ideas; they are God's own, given by the Holy Spirit. Verse eight tells us the rejection is of God not man. Consider again holiness in your life, when do you allow God to make it real? It is exciting for those who seek holiness, for those who don't it will result in judgment.

A vessel was made to contain
Things safe and refreshing
or
Things dangerous and poisonous
Cleaning the outside does not change
The contents

Thought 08

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...

To be holy, that is an incredible thought. To be holy like you are, Father. It seems so unattainable and beyond even my comprehension of what is possible. How, Father, is such a thing possible? You make it sound as though it should be a common thing for us. I don't see how I could even begin. In fact, as I think about it, it's easy for me to become discouraged.

My friends, to seek holiness and not be a little discouraged would be unusual. But when you want something as great and wonderful as holiness, is a little discouragement so bad a thing? Be encouraged, holiness is possible; it is something that can be obtained. Hear Peter's words, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness..."

We can be holy, but not by our own strength. Rather it is by getting to know Him who called us to be holy- that makes it possible. For as we get to know our God, we will learn about the power He has provided us. We will learn of the Spirit and how to yield to His control and direction. Then we will have power and we will be holy. Not by our strength, but by God's presence in us.

There are many promises for us to use, so that, as it says in verse four, "you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world..." Holiness is possible – God has provided promises and power to help us attain it.

Divine power
A multitude of great promises
To help us become Holy
The key
Knowledge of the Giver

Thought 09

Luke 1:67-80
...to enable us to serve...in holiness

We are to serve. Serve our brothers, our neighbors, even our enemies. And most importantly, serve our God. It is a key element in our new life in God. So important that in prophesying about Jesus before he was born, Zechariah says "he will make it possible to serve God in holiness."

Serving God – the highest calling which is given to the child of God. To do it without fear and concern about what others think. Without fear – serving and loving God – this is part of holiness. The consequences of such a life are eternal, even as God is. It is in serving God that others will see and believe, opening the door of eternity to them as well.

Yet the consequences of not serving also have eternal results. We may seek to get along with those who do not know God and then watch them pass into eternity without God. We may enjoy the bounty of our present life and sacrifice only for ourselves, while others are suffering, starving, and in pain, and then pass into eternity never knowing God. We enjoy living as we please, believing we will be blessed and saved and so it may be, but in the end all that we enjoyed will be destroyed in judgment. We choose easy path out of fear of suffering, pain, and ridicule.

Learning to serve God is a blessing that removes the fears of what the world may do to one who seeks God. Serving God means knowing God’s promises and the fact that what God promises He will do. Holiness is knowing God and knowing that I can serve Him without fear.

Knowledge removes fear
Service brings familiarity
To be familiar with God removes fear
And I serve without fear in holiness

Thought 10

Ephesians 4:17-24

Put on the new self created to be like God in...holiness

“I can change myself, it’s not so hard. I’ll just quit doing this and start doing that. I’ll change, just you wait and see. This

time is different, I'll change for sure." And man does change for a while and even sometimes for good. But what has he really changed, if anything? Why did he change?

You see when such an approach is made to change or improve; there is usually a cause or a goal; something we want to have or something we want to hang on to, so we make concessions and promises. We will even tell God the same thing – we try and alter what we are and what we do – and hope that it is sufficient to impress God.

The plain truth is, it is not sufficient. There is no amount of personally changing the old self – me – that will satisfy God's desires for what He wants me to become. And if I were to really examine my motives, when I make such promises, I would discover them to be truly selfish. I'm usually trying to keep what I have or gain something for myself. It is not that I don't care about what God wants it's just that what I want is more important to me.

This is the thinking of the world. Rather than deal with the need, man simply alters the need so the world will still have a place in his life. The fact is, you cannot make holy by making alterations in it. Holiness comes when we submit to God to let Him make us holy by changing us. God's desire is to create a new self in us that is like Him in its holiness. God will create holiness in us if we allow Him.

I would make myself holy
And I find myself wholly wrong
God too would make me holy
And He does it by making me wholly new

Thought 11

2 Chronicles 20:20-21

...praise Him for the splendor of His holiness...

What would you say if I told you that this was the battle cry of the Israelites as they went into battle? You would say, even as I did, that it doesn't fit; rather it sounds more like a Psalm from David. The fact is, it is the battle cry given by Jehoshaphat for the men to sing as then went into battle.

That battle cry was very effective. So effective that they never fought the battle, but the Lord went ahead of them and set an ambush and the enemy fought themselves. The enemy killed each other even before the army of Israel arrived.

We too need a battle cry to sing today. A song to prepare our hearts and strengthen us as we march out to do battle for the Lord. A song of victory and power for all to hear. A song that will put fear in the heart of Satan. My friends, there is just such a song. It is the same as the one Jehoshaphat gave his men, the song is the holiness of God and we need to proclaim it loud and clear.

To sing and shout holiness will change us, strengthen us, and will cast fear into the heart of any foe. To sing such praise of God and also live it in our lives will give God a reason to act and so win the battle even before we arrive. There is such a song and we can sing it.

Let not your voice be silent

Let not your tongue be still

Proclaim His holiness where you will

Proclaim His victory and be jubilant

Thought 12

Romans 1:1-6

Who through the Spirit of Holiness was declared...with power to be the Son of God...

Declared Son of God. He, who always was, is and always will be the Son of God, was pronounced Son of God in power. What was the key element of this exaltation He received via the resurrection? He lived His life by the Spirit of Holiness. All that Jesus did was endued with this special quality – holiness - which meant that all He did was stamped with perfection, with God's very being. Philippians lays it out in chapter two. Jesus by His life and obedience was exalted – given a name above all else. The key? His life was filled with and lived through holiness. The result to us? We, by grace, are also called to obedience to belong to Jesus even as he belongs to the Father.

What does this mean; this high and lofty reality of Jesus life? How does it relate to me? For me it is clear. By seeking holiness and the desire to live my life in holiness, I too will be declared son of God in power. My life will flow with God's power and grace. For Paul, such power meant apostleship and the grace to call out the Gentiles to faith in Jesus. The effect? In a few hundred years a whole empire was changed. The Spirit of Holiness brought Jesus to the resurrection and our salvation. The Spirit of Holiness in us will make possible God's work in the world in mighty ways through our lives.

The Spirit of Holiness

 Taps the vast resources
 Of God

Open the wide

 And be filled with power

Thought 13

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

...perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Clean yourself from everything that contaminates body and spirit. Not just clean but purify, which means to keep on cleaning until you are pure. But from what are we doing this? From anything that binds us to unbelievers and their way of life.

To the couple entering marriage this is obvious. Your partner must be a Christian. Without that special support the struggle to be pure and holy will be even more difficult. There is no like-mindedness.

But there is much more. Business partnerships with nonbelievers may tie you to unacceptable practices, or may lead to unethical handling of personnel and property. Non-Christian friendships can result in conflict of interest leading one away from Christian fellowship into the habits and practices of the world.

The deepest, the most powerful and dangerous association, is binding us to the world's concept of acceptance and success. Physical appearance, activities, and achievements now govern our lives instead of the one relationship that should. The world leads us instead of the desire to be holy out of reverence to God. The result – we worship the world and its standard, which is often so elusive it is unable to satisfy fully, instead of God and His clear standard which is Holiness.

We have to work hard to meet the world's standard. To meet God's standard we must simply be submitted to God and let Him change us.

Reverence for God
Or for the world
One will make you perfect
The other perfectly awful

Thought 14

1 Thessalonians 3:13

...so that you will be blameless and holy...

This is the prayer of one brother for another.

It is easy to think of holiness as an individual's personal quest, one to seek after on one's own. A private seeking after God and His inner blessing in our life. We spend time alone in prayer seeking. We spend time alone in the word searching. The result – we are alone in our search for God's greatest blessing for our earthly existence.

But here is a prayer of one man for others. A prayer that they will be holy and blameless. He knows of their desire to grow and encourages them to seek to be holy. That prayer is preceded by a prayer that the Lord would make their love for each other and everyone else increase.

Holiness is total love of God, which is the Lord's greatest commandment. This, in turn, means total love for others. The highest expression of love for another – to see them love God totally, to be holy. Holiness is an individual task for we each must seek God for ourselves. Yet it is also a joint effort. We need the encouragement and support of others who are like-minded.

Here, Paul is one who knows holiness and is encouraging others to seek after it. He prays that they will be strengthened by two ideas. One, that the Lord would make their love

increase, and two, that He would strengthen them so that they would be blameless and holy.

Each seeks holiness

Together we pray for it

Each desires to be holy

Together our love will strengthen it

So that we will be holy.

Thought 15

Hebrews 12:7-13

...that we may share in holiness

Discipline is a necessity in our world. It is necessary for our survival and for our continued growth. Discipline provides many things in our life. Initially it shows us, through error and correction, the way to do something. Later as one matures, discipline becomes a means of directed control. We have a goal and aim ourselves at it. The nature of our discipline will determine whether or not we will reach that goal.

Discipline is applied from within and without. From without it is the action of another (a parent, a teacher, a pastor), whose vision is much greater than ours and who is or accepts some measure of responsibility for what happens to us. The discipline of others often involves correction and teaching, trying to show us best way to accomplish the desired end. The key to this is that to be effective it is necessary that at some point those involved will agree that the end result is what both want. Otherwise the disciplining will have negative effect and results.

As agreement grows, the disciplining will begin to come from within. The vision will not be your own the teachers, but yours combined. Then change and growth proceed

rapidly so that all will desire the same goal. In our relationship with God that vision or desire is holiness.

First disciplined
 Then disciplining
 Finally disciplined
Result holiness

Thought 16

Romans 6:4-23

...offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

Because of sin in this world we will be slaves. It sounds horrible but true. The laws, though good and beneficial, are our masters. To break them means punishment. Our friends become our task masters; failure means loss of them. Our jobs demand our loyalties, a lack of which could cause our unemployment. One could go on to show how true this is around us. Rather, it is sufficient to repeat Paul's words, "you are slaves to the one you obey."

Now stop a moment and read that phrase again. It says slaves to the one you obey. In this life, in this world, we are slaves and always will be. Yet such slavery does bring choices. We can decide who to be a slave to sin which ends in death, or to righteousness which leads to holiness and eternal life.

Slavery – it's an awful thought yet it is truly a part of our world. It is both ugly and obvious, and attractive and subtle. We usually think of it in terms of one race enslaved to another, yet it is more commonplace than that. It is sin enslaving people. The ugly is prostitution, drugs, liquor and more. The subtle are those things that are not bad but are allowed to demand of us and control us, - jobs, hobbies, sports, and more. Either form keeps us from God, obedience, and thus holiness.

Holiness is a direct result of obedience to God, which means we become slaves of God and He is allowed to guide us. The beauty is that God makes slaves free if we are willing to surrender to Him.

Enslavement – two forms

To sin yielding death

To righteousness yielding holiness

Both are obedience

One to self and sin

One to God

This yields life

Thought 17

1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5

Christ has become for us...our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Paul came not with eloquence but in simplicity to proclaim truth clearly. The truth is that Christ has become everything for us.

Tonight I saw this clearly in a very simple way. My wife's parents live in northern Minnesota where on a clear night, when things are just right; you can see the northern lights (aurora borealis) clearly. Now if you travel to southern Minnesota you will not see them. You must travel far enough north and you will eventually see the northern lights.

It is simple. You must go in the right direction and be in the right place long enough and then you will see them. It's not done any other way – no gimmicks or special equipment will

change this fact. It's the same with holiness. God has made it clear. He, through His Son, has provided the means for us to become holy. It's not what we do or how much we do, but where we are and how willing we are to wait and receive what Christ will do in our life.

Even as we must go to the right place to see the northern lights, we must go to God's right place to receive holiness. We cannot create holiness in our lives anymore that we can see the northern lights from the equator. The northern lights belong to the north, and you must go north to see them. Holiness belongs to God and one must go where He directs to receive what He has promised.

In the north shines a light
 To the north you must go
 If you would see
In the Son Jesus Christ
 Is the provision for holiness
 To him one goes to receive
 His gift of light

Thought 18

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
For this is God's will, your sanctification...

Each man in every place deals with particular choices or matters that are in contradiction to that which is morally pure. For the Thessalonians their particular problems were sexual impurity and unethical business practices.

We too have conflicts in our lives with what is morally pure. For the person without God there is no escape and unfortunately, they often desire no escape. But for the children of God, a way out of this conflict should be desired. Here we see that such a goal is God's goal for us also. He

desires us to be holy, to learn control and to learn to live lives that are morally pure, that are holy.

Verse three says, “For this is God’s will, your sanctification.” The sanctification here is a passive submission on our part to God’s will. God’s desire is to make us holy, the process is called sanctification. We need to submit to God for this to happen. The result of such submission and its consequent action is that the changes God desires will occur. God does not make empty promises that yield no results. Control will be learned, concern for others will develop, knowledge of what to avoid and what to seek will be gained, so that our lives will be lived in a manner that would please God.

It is His will

It will terminate impurity

If we allow

What is His will

And we will be holy

Thought 19

1 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

At all points in my life as a Christian I am deciding to allow or not to allow God, by His Holy Spirit, to act in my life. This process began when I first approached God to receive forgiveness.

When I came to God the first time, I was more than a filthy rag. I was outright blackened. There was no place on the rag where you could see the original color or texture of it because of the filth. Here the Spirit first acted on my behalf towards being sanctified. He took the rag that I was and made it pure, He cleaned it so that it’s very fabric and color

could be seen. I was now fit for use again, but I was still a rag, a piece of material ripped out of the whole. A rag not fit for noble uses. But I was a rag cleaned and set apart for God – available for His use. The beauty is this, God’s use for dedicated rags is to return them to their original garments and make them whole and beautiful again.

The first sanctifying work cleanses me and allows me to be available for the next step, being remade into what God has for me. That is completed at entire sanctification. This occurs in my life now and is finally perfected at our glorification. These are the actions of God. They are completed realities of His Spirit with no continuous attempts or efforts on my part. Try as we might we cannot take the rag, as clean as it may be, and make it into the garment it once was. But God can do that and does so when we submit to the sanctifying action of the Spirit.

A filthy rag
 Visible only is dirt
Spirit’s action cleansing
 A clean rag, then
Later, a full robe

Thought 20

Hebrews 12:14
Without holiness no one shall see the Lord.

This statement makes it painfully clear that salvation is not salvation if the forgiveness of sins is all that is accomplished. We cannot come to God and merely have our sins forgiven and stop there. The promise is to those that believe they would be granted eternal life, they would be granted the right to be called the sons of God, and they would be forgiven.

Believing as God intends is a soul-searching step which results in a total yielding of body, soul and life into God's hands. It is complete. But today the way in which we use the word "believe" is mere assent to that which is said. Such believing is possible for anyone, even Satan. But to believe to the point of yielding our lives to the action of God through the Spirit to change us, this is something man cannot do and a thing impossible for Satan to do.

To merely give assent to a fact is not proof that you believe it. It's like listening to a commercial and agreeing that they are telling the truth about a product, but you refuse to buy the product and use it. You really don't believe and are unwilling to commit yourself and your resources to it. Again if you buy the product but never use it, what good is your belief? You will never gain any benefit from it. But buy the product and then use it – that is the key.

The writer makes it clear that to believe in God means a change, it means that holiness should and must accompany our decision to be forgiven and become His child.

An item purchased
 But not used
Is worse than not
 Even buying

Thought 21

1 Peter 1:1, 2
By the sanctifying work of the Spirit

The phrase is part of a larger statement. Without that whole statement, its whole truth will not be seen or understood. We understand that the Spirit is the agent of sanctification working in us to make us pure. We have no doubts about needing His presence in order to have the power to become

what God wants us to be. These are easily seen in this statement.

Yet there are two other truths that are critical to the Holy Spirit's that make it possible to occur, and then show that His work has occurred.

We often desire the Spirit to work in us to change us, but just as often we do not desire such change. Left to our desire and strength, this wonderful blessing would not occur. God, though, has chosen that this should occur. And when God chooses that something should be, it will be. Here is the power – the desire which is consistent and strong enough to bring about the Spirit's action. The only thing that will prevent it is if one continually and forcefully rejects the desire of the Father.

Finally sanctifying has a purpose. Even as forgiveness now leads to sanctification, sanctification will lead to perfection. Part of that process is occurs through obedience to Jesus Christ. We are now able to submit fully to our Lord and here lies true freedom.

I am changed

Because my Father desires it
Though my desires are feeble
But then when I am changed

My obedience will be strong

Thought 22

Matthew 23:16-22

Makes the gift sacred

The Pharisees –legalistic in so many ways, working law and life into an incredibly intricate web. They dealt with spiritual materials and yet could only grasp physical realities. To

them the gift was more sacred than that which made the gift sacred. They were tied to acts and pride; visible things which brought them honor, not God. To swear by the temple or the altar brought them no glory for they had nothing to do with its creation or importance. But swear by the gold or the gift – here was honor to them for they could bring gold and other gifts which showed the world their piety.

Jesus was not patient with such self-righteous attitudes. They ignored the fact that God was the key; for He made the temple and the altar holy for they were tied to His name, which is in itself holy. The gifts were not holy because they were given but because God received them and thus made them holy.

Our lives cannot be made holy by our actions any more than the Pharisees could make their gifts holy. We are not a holy people but God can make us holy if we are willing to take the temple we call self and lay it on God's altar to be sacrificed. That then is the only action God requires of us, to put our lives on the altar. Romans 2:1 says, to give our lives as... "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing, this is your spiritual or reasonable service." It is God who makes us holy; not the giving of our lives; that is expected of us.

Who
Makes the gift sacred
 The one giving
The one who receives
 Decide so God can decide

Thought 23

John 10:34-39

The one whom the Father set apart.

Here I have found one of the clearest statements regarding the idea of sanctification. Jesus, standing before the Jews who are about to stone Him, asks why. They say because He blasphemes, claiming to be God. Jesus quotes a Psalm where men who received the word of God are called gods, sons of the most high. Then He defines sanctification as:

First, as being set apart by the Father.

Are we truly set apart by the Father? Are we guided and directed by His will or by our own sense of what is right and good? Jesus' status as set apart by God resulted in the desire of one group to stone Him for His faithfulness to the Father. It did cost His life eventually. What is the cost to you for being set apart by the Father? Note, though, that Jesus didn't mention the cost but pointed to the Father and asked them to believe His words because of the actions tied to them so that they would understand how He and the Father were related. When it comes to cost do we parade the cost or the beauty of knowing the Father?

Secondly, as seen in our actions.

He said believe because I do as the Father would do. Jesus saw the Father's actions and copied them. Do we see ourselves or Jesus when we act? Do we analyze what people think of us or whether they can see Jesus in our lives? For Jesus, being set apart meant acting on behalf of the Father so that others would know the Father. Are you one whom the Father has set apart? Can people see the Father or only what it cost you?

He was set apart
 His actions were miraculous
The reaction
 They tried to stone Him
Will you throw a stone too
 Or will you be the target
So the world may see the Father

Thought 24

Matthew 6:9
Hallowed be thy name.

This phrase has caused me to truly stop and ponder the nature of God. It means more than just your name is holy or special. It is “your name Father was made to be consecrated.” One other thing is added to this that our English is just not capable of saying and that is the fact that this statement is a command. Now it becomes “Your name Father, it was commanded that it would be made sanctified and set apart as holy.”

It was commanded. To us a name is a name – it merely identifies a person, but tells us nothing about them. Yet to the Jews, names were also intended to tell you about the person. Jesus’ name was given to Him for He would save His people. To that was added the name Christ, to state that He was the anointed One who had come. Yet Jesus was called by many names in scripture, all adding to the process of identifying the person, who he was and who he is.

Here we have God’s name being discussed. The third command adds to the weight of what is said here. You shall not (a command) use God’s name in vain. No other name is commanded to be set apart as holy. God is holy and His name carries the impact of that truth. The name is not merely

a name, it is part of God's very being. It is holy even as God is holy and to use His name is a significant act. For in using it, I invoke or call on God Himself.

What's in a name

Depends on whose it is

What's in God's name

More than a man dare abuse

Thought 25

John 17:13-19

For them I sanctify myself.

Picture if you would a starving mass of people. They are crowded into waiting areas, hoping for a little bit of porridge.

Into their midst walks a well-dressed and well-fed man and with him several others who are as healthy as he. They bring food but it is less than what is needed; it is always less than what is needed.

One might ask why those men don't eat a little less so there would be more. The response is that they are eating less than they normally would. But is that good? What if they keep reducing the amount they eat so that others can have more? How long would it be before they would be like those they are feeding? Even more important, if they did this it would soon affect their health severely and then who would bring the food? No, eat they must if they are to continue to help those in need.

Jesus did the same for us. He set himself apart, in a way we are unable to do, so that we could be set apart, sanctified too. There are some significant differences to be noted. Because of His death and resurrection, there is provided an unlimited supply of strength and power for us. Once present within, it

becomes a well, springing up with life. It is not an external source to go to, rather an internal presence that remains with us.

We have hope of true spiritual health because Jesus fed Himself that we might be fed. That is, He sanctified himself so that we might be sanctified.

Feeder and food
The feeder must be strong
 If adequate food
 Is to be available

Thought 26

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

May God Himself...sanctify you through and through.

We know that the work of sanctifying is God's work. The Holy Spirit acts in our life to make us pure and blameless. It is futile for us to attempt such a clean-up operation on our own. Also it is not a joint operation where each shares the load – again we are unable to carry our share. It is joint only in that we must be willing for God to act and purify us. Our part is to present ourselves as willing participants.

Even our willingness is a faltering thing. It is susceptible to so many outside influences and interruptions. We are unable to maintain a constant vigil. David knew that and rather than try to do his own remembering he implored God to try him and show him the areas of lack and error. The phrase of Paul in Romans is “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again, even our part in the joint venture is unstable and uncertain.

Yet one thing is stable and certain. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Though we are weak, He is not.

Though we may waiver in our desire, He does not. We can trust God to carry it out when we are unable. We can be certain that when we are weak, He remains strong.

Have confidence. What God desires for us is possible because He will do it. He only desires for us to be willing to let Him do it.

Willing and weak

God's strength is manifested

On my knees I come

Willing and weak

God is faithful, He will do it

If and when I come

Thought 27

Romans 15:14-16

...offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit...

If one would read this phrase as is they might think of Romans 12:1, the living sacrifice and the giving of our lives over to God to be sanctified. While that is good a thought, it is not what is being dealt with here.

Paul is talking about his ministry to the Gentiles and the sacrifice he desires to bring to God. In the same verse the phrase is "serving in a priestly manner." (Lenski)

Let us regress to the Old Testament and an area of little understanding. The priests had very strict rules and laws governing their lives. They were the ones who stood before God to offer the people's sacrifices. Failure to keep the rules prevented them from serving in that capacity and if they did so the sacrifice also would be unholy. For the High Priest this was even more critical.

The Levites were set apart and given a high standard by God. If they lowered the standard, judgment came and often quite swiftly. Paul saw himself as a priest handling a sacrifice which had been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He was, by God's grace, to minister as a priest to the Gentiles so that their offering, themselves, would be acceptable. One with which God would be pleased.

Being sanctified affects not only our lives but should affect the kind of offerings we bring.

I got him saved
 And left him with God
 He spoiled
I let God save him
 And set myself apart for him
 He blossomed

Thought 28

Ephesians 5:25-27

...to make her (the church) holy, cleansing her...

We all wonder how our sanctification affects us in practical ways. Here in Ephesians we have a very practical application and it is aimed at husbands.

Jesus, out of love for His own, gave His life so that they could be cleansed, sanctified. His goal was to present them to Himself as a radiant church without stain, holy. In John 17:19 we remember Jesus set Himself apart for this task and then died showing how great that love is and the depth of His desire to make us holy.

Here this example is applied to husbands and wives. Husbands are to set themselves apart for their wives, to desire that they be holy and blameless and to exert all

possible effort to make this a possibility. He desires that we be perfect even as Christ desired the church to be perfect, putting no stumbling block in the way. This is a great responsibility and in our own strength not possible.

Take it the next step. By our lives we are to strive to encourage others not only to seek after sanctification but by its presence in our lives make it possible in others.

The body working together can achieve so much more than one part of it working alone. Paul states it clearly in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 “everything is permissible but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” And the greatest good is our brother’s sanctification, being perfect as God is perfect.

I would be holy
 To encourage you
To be holy too

Thought 29

2 Timothy 2:20-21
...made holy, useful to the master...

I remember on my grandfather’s farm a certain container that was part of the kitchen. It was called the slop pail. Into it went the scraps and leftovers from cooking and eating. It was a dirty looking bucket which sat next to the stove. I’m sure my grandmother would never have used this bucket to mix bread dough in, or store milk or flour in, or if she needed a lot of Kool-Aid for a meal to mix a drink it. But if you take the bucket, scrape it clean, paint it or metal-plate it to make it like new, then such uses would be possible. All that cleaning takes work and most of it hard work, scraping and cleaning and plating. But in the end it is being made clean again and now usable.

That bucket is a lot like our lives. It collects the garbage of sin and is of little use for anything else.

But Paul tells us to clean up our lives, to desire that we may be used for purposes other than as a place to throw the garbage. We must submit ourselves to be cleaned and then be set apart; to be not only useful but used by the Master. We are then ready for any good work He asks of us.

Cleaning is a constant job and one we can't do for ourselves. Have you ever seen a dish wash itself?

A slop pail

Ugly dirty filled

With garbage

Used only for garbage

A slop pail

Is that what you want to be

Thought 30

Hebrews 2:5-12

“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.”

The picture is whole and complete here. The status of man as intended is present. The coming of one who would reinstate man to a the new position of brother to the one who came.

Man was made a little lower than the angels, the crowning glory of creation, for he had the capacity for a relationship with God. He alone could be holy for he alone had the image of God. Everything was his and he lost it. He was to rule creation, now in many ways it rules him. In fact, man himself cannot rule over his own life.

But Jesus came – one higher than came to be lower than – to reestablish control in the lives of chaos. He came, setting himself apart that men again might be holy and regain what was lost. Jesus became one of us so that after the resurrection we could become like Him and again be God’s true children.

Read the passage again. We are to be made holy by one who calls us brother and understands us. He tasted our life and our death to make it possible.

One family

 With many children

 All prodigals

One brother comes

 Obedient to the Father

 Desiring to call me brother

One family

 With God as my Father

 Jesus as my brother

Thought 31

Hebrews 9:11-14

The ashes...sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean sanctify them.

The Levites who stood in the temple serving had to be cleansed, made at least outwardly clean, so they could stand before God to serve. It was an act that needed to be repeated, for sin is ever present in our lives. It was also for the specified time of service in the temple. These duties were rotated among the various families of the Levites. Thus each time an individual’s turn came; he was sprinkled and cleansed for service.

Now we have the blood of Christ shed for us. It will cleanse not only externally but even our conscience will be changed,

purified. We are all to be servants of the living God. Before, only a few had that privilege, now we all through Christ may be set apart to serve. Before, it was for a certain period of time at a certain specific place. Now we serve at all times and in all places.

The prior system was very restrictive and binding on the people, requiring continual sacrifice. Sin is expensive and paying for it quite binding.

Now Christ has fulfilled the requirements of that time. He has paid the price in full, freeing God's Spirit to work in us, cleansing us wholly. Freeing us to serve wholly. Can there be a greater fool than the one who refuses to go on to holiness knowing the incredible freedom and blessing that is now available in serving the living God?

Sprinkled over and over
 And over again
 To work at a certain time
Cleansed once by the Son's blood
 Free to serve
 Always and everywhere

Thought 32

Hebrews 10:1-18

By one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Sacrifice. They did it. They had done it. They would do it again. Over and over the ceremonies would be repeated. As early as Cain and Abel, up to the time of Jesus and quite possibly beyond, people have been making efforts at regaining favor with God. To once again be made acceptable; and then to maintain that highly desirable status.

The people were flawed by sin and desired something perfect but never were able to gain the end they desired.

Altar calls and commitments. We do it. We have done it. We often are still doing it. Trying to get something – the same something the people tried to get - acceptance. And like them we are flawed by sin, so that our attempts are as futile and endless as theirs.

But Jesus came. One sacrifice. No longer is it a do, doing, and will-be-doing situation. It is finished. Those are Jesus' own words. He gave the one sacrifice that makes possible our holiness, our return to a perfect relation with the Father. God will now make us perfect and holy if we are willing and He will continue to do the work if we are willing.

“Have been made holy,” is the phrase. A past reality to be lived in the present. That is what Christ made possible by His sacrifice.

A multitude of sacrifices

Representing a multitude of attempts

And failures

One sacrifice

No failures

Thought 33

Hebrews 13:11-14

...suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy...

Jerusalem – center of the Jewish world, center of their religious practice; center of their faith. And within Jerusalem is the temple, where the sacrifices and offerings of a chosen people were offered. In the temple in Jerusalem acts of holiness and consecration were to be common, to be the norm.

Jesus came there after Palm Sunday and found much that was not holy, such that his anger grew and he chased out the moneychangers and others. The temple had become the center of much that was not holy in God's eyes. Jerusalem was not the pure city showing its love for God.

Think of it. The world's greatest and final sacrifice was not in the temple – not even in the city – but outside the city. All that the temple and city stood for were temporary. The people, though, thought of it as permanent, thinking more of their present life than the one to come. They became bound to their earthly existence and sought to do the acceptable as was defined by the standards and practices of their day and as established by other men, the Pharisees.

Today we too must come out of the city, “not of this world,” as Paul puts it. Its standards and practices are not acceptable. They are destructive of holiness. Let us then come out of the world and go to Christ that we may be made holy.

Within the gates

 People attempt to

 Make themselves holy in the world

 And they go on trying, failing

Outside Christ dies

 Outside the world He makes us holy

Thought 34

1 Peter 3:1-22

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Are you willing to do good to those who insult you? That is not easy, is it? Yet the next question is harder still. Are you willing to suffer for doing what is right, even eager to do it?

The answer is, “well, how much will I have to suffer?” We are quick to want to know how much pain, insult, or malice we will be required to tolerate. The bible doesn’t say, but it does give an example. Christ the righteous one, God’s son, died. And not of old age but He was put to death, for us, the unrighteous.

In Romans 5 Paul says the same thing. Christ died for the ungodly. He also says it is rare that one would die for a righteous man, though for a good man some might dare to. But Christ died for the ungodly, the sinner, the unrighteous. He died to make us alive, to bring us to God.

Now we are, to in turn to endure pain, suffering and malice for the good we do, and the truth that we uphold. For caring as Christ cared, daring as He dared, in order to guide others to His salvation.

The way we do this is given to us. If we would be strong, with the fear of the Lord, we are commanded to set apart in our hearts Christ as Lord. He then has the right to rule and direct and to change us so that all of our being is then set apart for God. Set apart Christ for He set Himself apart in John 17 so that He could help us be strong, be able to serve, be able to stand, as God’s own in this world.

Set apart Christ
 Make him Lord
And soon I will find
 I myself am
 Set apart for God

Thought 35

Jude 1, 2

To those who have been called...

This is an introduction to a short book and a short prayer of blessing and a wonderful statement of power available to the one who has been called, set apart, by God.

These people are loved by the Father. He cares for them in a special way. That special way is to give them to the Son who then keeps them for the Father. In John 17 when Jesus prays we understand what such keeping means. Jesus prays that while He has been with the disciples, he has protected them and kept them safe. None of them were lost except the one who was doomed to destruction. Jesus once before told Peter that Satan had desired to sift them. Even so the twelve remained, minus one, and so it would stay through the time of trial, crucifixion and resurrection. They were kept by Jesus.

We are now in the keeping power of Jesus' care. Being protected – held by His mighty love. Those who are called are loved by the Father and they are kept by the Son. For these Jude prays that mercy, peace, and love be abundantly expressed in their lives.

Set apart for God

To be loved by Him

To be kept by His Son

Set apart for God

To be filled with love

To be full of mercy

And peace

For I am set apart for God

Thought 36

Revelation 22:10-11

Let him who is holy continue to be holy.

Do not seal up the truth, this book and its words. Its message has meaning – encouragement for some, with help to endure; and judgment for others, impending doom. There is an instruction to be gleaned for both.

For those of you who think nothing is going to happen, that all these warnings are nonsense, it says “Go head, live your life as you please, continue in your vile, sinful ways. You fool no one but yourself.” Besides, no matter what you say, judgment and punishment are near. And even if the Lord delays His return, judgment and punishment are still as near as your death which is always only a moment away.

For those of you who are doing what is right and have sanctified your life, continue in it. Your desires and efforts are not futile attempts to catch the wind. For the wind, who is the Spirit within you, has caught you and fills you with life and hope. Hear these words; They are to be an encouragement to you for the strengthening of your faith. The Lord is near. Your life is filled with His presence and eternity with Him is always as near as death. So if He delays what does it matter, be holy and continue to be holy. That is the way to live – expectantly – for our Lord is coming.

For one judgment

For the other hope

To help him live a life

Worthy of the one who comes

Thought 37

Acts 21:17-26

...give notice when the days of purification would end.

Two things are important in this passage. The first is the taking of a vow and the second is the need for purification to make the vow complete.

A vow is not a casual thing; it is a pledge of honor. It involves more than mere consent, but a whole-hearted willingness to meet the terms and requirements placed on the one taking the vow. We are not told the vow of the men in this passage, but we are told they had yet to perform their purification rights.

Certain vows require of us a level of commitment we don't have because of our sinfulness, and likewise because of our sinfulness, certain vows cannot be made. We need to be pure and holy to serve God wholly, so the need to be purified is apparent.

In this setting the individual's head was to be shaved, a price paid, and an offering given after a specified period of time. This physical act was to bring about spiritual change. This would be repeated each time a vow was taken.

In becoming Christians we too take a vow. We vow to make Jesus, Lord and Savior and to become children of God. Such a vow is impossible to keep for a sinner, but God has provided through His Spirit a means to be made pure. If we are serious about our vow we will seek out the Holy Spirit that He would make us pure, so that we can keep this vow wholly and earnestly.

A vow

A set of words promising

More than I am capable of

Unless I am made spiritually pure

Thought 38

John 11:55

...up...to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing...

Once every year, year after year, people who could afford it went to Jerusalem to be cleansed. They went to perform the required cleansing ceremony and offer their sacrifice for their sins. If one couldn't afford it, the goal was to go at least once in one's lifetime. It was a difficult journey and very costly, and done to obtain a temporary cure for a killing disease. It probably made one feel good for awhile but then left feelings of wonder and worry about one's purity and forgiveness.

Once every week, at least, if you're not too lazy or don't have something else to do, you get up on Sunday and perform a very similar ritual. It's called going to church to pay your dues and feel good for another week. Right? Wrong!! Even as the Jews ritual was inadequate so is our modern day version.

We too easily have made the celebration of Jesus' resurrection into a means of getting something for completing a ritual activity. The Passover was to be a celebration of God's saving act in which He brought the people of Israel out and made them His own. Sunday is the same. It was originally a day of celebrating the forgiveness given and of the Holy Spirit's power made available to live a holy life.

The question is then; do we come for temporary cleansing or to celebrate the fact of our cleansing and the resulting holiness given to us by God?

Passover and Sunday

A

Ritual – endless futility

Or

Celebration – endless hope

What is it for you?

Thought 39

Titus 2:3

...that (they be) in behavior as becomes holiness...

When in a temple, or cathedral, or sanctuary of a church we think of ourselves as being in the house of God. And because we are in the house of God we behave in certain ways. We do this because God is holy and we consider His house to be a holy place. It is easy to alter our behavior to match what is expected of us when in the house of God.

But this is not the only place or structure that is called the house of the Lord. Paul says to the Corinthians “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit,” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Our very lives and bodies are temples which go with us everywhere we go.

It's easy to behave in a certain way when I only have to do so during the time I am in that place. The instruction to these women in this passage is to behave as though they were continually in a holy place.

Holiness and the Christian life were never intended to be a part-time lifestyle. It is and always shall be a total lifestyle, because the temple, our body goes with us everywhere. It

was intended to alter and affect every portion of our existence.

Do you enter the temple?
Once a week and change
Or
Have you been made the temple?
And been changed by it

Thought 40

James 4:8

Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Wash your hands. This phrase and its related meaning appear many times in the New Testament. The Pharisees were very concerned about washing before eating, especially the hands, even up to the elbows. When they saw Jesus' disciples not washing, they got upset. Jesus then asked them why they willingly broke one of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 15:1-9).

Pilate, desperate to escape responsibility for Jesus' death, washed his hands. It was not enough to clean away his weakness of will and inability to stand up for justice. He may have washed his hands but he never would be able to wash his actions from his conscience.

Today when we are around one who is sick, we are very conscious about washing our hands so as not to contract the disease or pass it on to others. But for the one who is sick, this washing of hands only helps prevent others from being infected by their touch. It will not heal them, they are already sick. In like manner washing our hands may protect us from

a particular disease but will not protect us from death. We will eventually die.

So the verse continues, not only wash your hands but go further, purify your hearts. The Pharisees problem was within them not on their skin. Pilate's need was for a sense of forgiveness within, the one who is diseased needs healing within, as does the one trying to protect themselves from disease. And so we sinners cannot be purified by means of external actions, but need the inward cleansing of our heart by God.

Draw near to God
And you will see your sin
Submit my friend

He will draw near to you
And you will be purified
But you must submit
My friend

Thought 41

1 Peter 1:22-25
Purify yourselves by obeying the truth.

One of the key elements of holiness is the presence of purity and the obtaining of that quality. Earlier in this chapter the command to be holy is given and here the process of being pure is explained.

Being pure or having purity is a state of existence, much like being married is a state of existence. But it is an active one where there is input and life. We are part of it. Simply being married does not create a marriage. It is two people actively engaged in bringing the legal fact to life – sharing, listening, and living out life as one entity instead of two.

Being made pure or forgiven is a legal result of Christ's death, but the experiencing of that state of purity is found in our active obedience of the truth. When you are married you don't continue to live as though you aren't married. Rather you live as a married person. In the same way, there is a change that should occur in our life and it is called obedience.

Marriage becomes more complete as the two people extend its meaning and effect into more and more of their life. Our purity is complete in Christ but our obedience to and experience of that will expand in relation to our willingness to be obedient. Being holy means being pure. Being pure means being obedient. We are to be engaged not in a static existence but in an active state of life. We have been chosen and we must choose how much that choice will be allowed to affect our lives.

Into a state I enter
 By God's redeeming grace
Its bounty, blessing and beauty
 I may experience
 By choosing to actively obey

Thought 42

1 John 3:3
...He purifies himself...

Who is in control of my life anyway? Who has the last word as to what I will do with my life? I mean whose life is it anyhow? Mine – right?

Yes and no. Yes we were given life; and could choose what to do with it. But we failed to choose wisely early on and each failure made the next one easier. Soon it was apparent

that we were out of control. Our thoughts did whatever they felt like; our eyes looked where they wanted to. Our ears teamed up with our mouth to listen to and spread what they were most interested in, and usually that wasn't good. Well, it soon became obvious we were out of control. It was as if we were running on automatic pilot and someone hid the switch and we couldn't change course.

How then can anyone purify himself? How can anyone change their course? Back up a couple of verses, my friend. It says, "How great is God's love that we should be called the children of God." God, when we called on His Son Jesus, (John 1:12) got a hold of the automatic pilot and shut it off. He restored our life to us again. We have the hope of, and possibility of, controlling our life again. But it will take help. For if we messed it up once we can mess it up again.

He who would remain in control gives up control to the Father. Take time to read the entire book of 1 John. Take time to purify yourself by learning obedience and submission to the Father. Purify yourself by yielding in total submission to God's control, and then you will learn what it means to be in control, to purify yourself.

A charted course
By the automatic Pilot
Or by the Almighty
Who charts all courses?

Thought 43

Acts 3:12
...as if by our own power and godliness

Here is humility and reality at its best. Here we see the limits of man and the power of God. A man is healed and God is

praised. And for all who are willing to see, godliness is defined.

There is a godliness that is manmade. It is a visible effort by the individual to be and act a certain way. Such a life requires great effort, sacrifice and determination. It is very definable for it is often build upon a set of rules. The need for the rules is so others will know that I am a godly person. Such godliness doesn't always bring us into contact with God but merely shows an external relation to those things that are related to God. The best example of this is attending church on Sunday because that is what one should do.

There is another form of godliness which is an unconditional commitment to God. It means a yielding of myself to God to be filled by Him. God becomes the center, not the things of God. It requires much less effort on my part for I have allowed God to take control. It may involved effort and struggle but it is not the effort involved in maintaining a set of actions, but rather to maintain God at the center of my life.

Peter and the others had just experienced the complete filling of the Spirit. They were filled by God and displayed His godliness. The people were awed and Peter quickly clears the air. It is not my godliness, but God in me that does this work.

Who does the work in us?
Our will making us yield
Or God
As we yield
To His working in us

Thought 44

1 Timothy 3:16

The mystery of godliness is great...

Here are contained the words that answer, or at least summarize, for us the cause of a large collection of questions the world always ask. How could God become a man? How could he be born of a virgin? How could he not sin and still be like us? How could God die? How could Jesus go to hell? And last, how could he be brought back from the dead? Truly, as Paul puts it, the mystery of godliness is great.

Yet we often to be caught try to explain how to live a life of godliness. We try to teach others how to live their life with a list of do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs, as we see them. We try to press man into an external mold while having little or no effect on what is contained within. We make the mystery of godliness a collection of simple facts we can learn and apply by our own strength. (Check and see if you are doing it.) Such pressing into a mold will not last, in time it will explode, and then what?

What we are talking about is not the outward effects that you and I can, by force of will, bring about to create an appearance of godliness. No, we are talking about a mystery of God. It involves a remaking, not a reshaping, of the inner man so that the recasting will last. This changing from within will change what is seen.

The mystery is answered by seeing the hand of God at work. In the same way, holiness, which shows itself outwardly as godliness, is God at work within us.

A mystery

Find a fake answer

Or

Find the creator of the mystery

Both will change you

Which do you desire?

Thought 45

1 Timothy 2:2; 3:16; 4:7; 5:4; 6:3, 5, 12

Train yourself to be godly.

I would like to bring together several references from the letter to Timothy. They relate to the word godliness.

There are two terms in scripture that define a God-centered life - godliness and holiness. To look at them one might think they are related, even interchangeable, words. I, until now, thought so myself.

Yet they are not. The one is not possible without the other and to have the second will result in the first. Sound like a tongue twister or mind bender? Let me explain then. One time I got my car stuck in a mud hole and worked for a long time to try and get it out with a jack and some wood. A tractor and chain would have had me out in minutes. In the same way, godliness relates to our efforts and energies to be God-like. Holiness is God acting in us. His holiness will result in godliness in our life on a new level.

Godliness comes in two forms – the ineffective and the effective. The ineffective is based on our efforts to be godly; thus being godly becomes our goal and we will never succeed because we are not God. Effective godliness is learning to lean on God to change us; the first step being our salvation, then more completely at sanctification and then the final step, glorification (when we enter heaven). Ineffective

godliness is based on our effort – true godliness is based on God’s ability to change us.

Where are you

Using godliness

To be godly

Seeking holiness

Letting God

Teach you godliness

And so make you holy

Thought 46

2 Peter 3:11

You ought to live holy and godly lives

Here is a classic cart and horse illustration. The relationship of holiness and godliness placed in its proper order.

In chapter one verse three, it is stated that all we need for life and godliness has been given to us by God through His divine power. Sanctification, the act of God to make us holy, makes possible our being godly. It is not our godliness that brings about God’s sanctifying activity.

The cart then is godliness, being pulled by and following after the horse, or God’s holiness affecting our lives through sanctification. God provides for us, by his power, the holiness we desperately need in order to live life and to be godly in that life.

Another interesting point is that if you attempt godliness (the cart) with holiness (the horse) following behind you, you now have the road in front of you instead of the horse. As a result the horse cannot see clearly and could as easily push you off of the road as keep you on it. Steering becomes a most difficult operation. But if the horse is in front pulling

the cart along then the cart follows and is more easily steered and kept on the right path.

Think about your life, is it a godly one? If it is by whose power and direction is that life maintained? Are you guided by the holiness of God or by your own sense of godliness? Your humbleness will give the answer.

Horse and cart

Always in that order

One's life is more difficult otherwise

Holiness and godliness

Always in that order

His life is impossible otherwise

Thought 47

Titus 1:1

Knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

Paul, a servant. Many times we see this phrase – Paul a servant, followed by who he is a servant to. He is a servant of God. And the reason he is a servant – for the sake of the elect and the knowledge of the truth. And it is not just any old truth, but truth which leads to godliness.

Paul is a servant of God so that the elect may have faith and knowledge which will lead them into godliness. Faith is the key. It is our ability to trust God to carry out his promises to save, to justify, and to sanctify. Godliness is one's conduct in relation to God. It is affected by God carrying out His promises, not promises that result from my being good.

Look at Titus 1:1, knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. It does not say godliness which leads to knowledge of the truth. We must learn something before it can be used or before it can affect us. Knowledge that is true is not merely facts and information learned. It is even more –

it is a learning which changes our lives. When we allow what we know, especially what we know of God, to change us, we will live differently. God has declared that we should be sanctified, that we should be holy. Such truth, when it truly becomes our own knowledge, will change us so that we will be lead into purity and godliness. But attempting to be godly of our own accord could easily prevent us from learning God's knowledge of the truth.

Knowledge is a tool which changes
 It can as easily bring us to the truth
 As it could keep us away
Let your faith bring you into God's knowledge
 And find the truth that leads to godliness

Thought 48

Hebrews 5:11-6:3
And go on to maturity.

In maturity there is wholeness to life; a completeness of person; a balance in approaching life. Another word used to define this state of existence is perfection.

In every day life maturity means the basics of life have been learned and they are now brought together. The person remains stable and in control in all of life's situations. Much like a properly designed boat will maintain itself upright in a storm, even though there is motion moving it off a level line, it neither capsizes, nor sinks, nor breaks up in heavy weather.

The Christian life has the same pattern. There are many basics and truths to be explored and incorporated into it. Growth occurs and at some point all of the pieces begin to fall in place. It is a point of yielding oneself to all that has been learned, of yielding to the realization of one's limits, and the power of God to give strength. Maturity. There is a

sense of balance and God is the ship carrying us through the calms and through the storms.

Go on to maturity: go on to perfection; go on to a complete and whole life – a life found in God. For God has not only commanded it but also provided the means.

Are you enjoying and loving what you are right now? Happy with inner conflicts and contraction, the lack of control? If not then go on to maturity, yield control to God and he will sanctify.

Caught in a storm

On a raft

And smashed

Or a boat

And kept whole

Thought 49

Hebrews 10:1-18

...by one sacrifice he has been made perfect forever those being made holy.

This phrase is so important and yet so deep that I almost didn't see how simple and clear its truth is.

One sacrifice: the greatest ever given, to show us the greatest love ever shown, from the greatest being, God.

Makes perfect: brings everything to completion, sums it up for all to see, and for all eternity.

Being made holy: actively changing a person into the whole and complete image of God.

Pretty heavy material for thought and yet if we get a hold of it, its truth is clear.

Here's how I finally understood it. At some point in time a person he organized the Boy Scouts of America. Now I come along and want to join. So within a few sessions I am made a member of the clubs. I am a Boy Scout, yet I still have much to learn, about being a Boy Scout, so I begin working on my merit badges, earning points and awards toward becoming an Eagle Scout, the highest level of Boy Scouts. Never in that time did my status of Boy Scout change. Rather what kind of Boy Scout I was changed, and that was related to my desire to go farther and be taught more.

Christ, by one sacrifice brought into being the family of God. We, by accepting His sacrifice, are made members. Within that family we will grow if we desire to, but we are still members, whether we are children or mature adults.

We are completely a member
Yet always learning
What a member is
And does

Thought 50

Matthew 5:43-46

Be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect.

This phrase is set in the context of defining who we are to love. Then after defining that Jesus follows with the pronouncement, Be perfect as...

Jesus did not die only for those who loved Him, at least not for them alone. The disciples in fact were not willing to let Him die. Peter, at one point, desired to prevent Christ from sacrificing Himself and Christ replied, "get behind me

Satan.” No, even the disciples at the point of Jesus’ death deserted Him or watched from afar.

Christ died for those who hated Him, and those who killed Him, and those who abandoned Him. He loved His enemies and forgave them even as He died. He loved those who refused to love Him.

Loving those who love you and do good to you requires no special talent or ability. One rather expects that to happen quite naturally. But to love an enemy, the one who doesn’t like me, even hates me; that is hard. Not only that but we are to do good to them, to be kind and help them.

The concluding thought is to be perfect. The one who is perfect does the whole will of God, not just what suits him and when it suits him. He who is perfect seeks to do what God expects of him at all times with no excuses.

Perfect

Doing the whole will
Loving those who love me
And then not to stop loving
Until
I LOVE THOSE WHO HATE ME
As God did when they killed his Son

Thought 51

Matthew 19:16-22

If you want to be perfect...

A young man once desired to be a great basketball player. He worked on shooting and dribbling until he became quite good at it. Then he concentrated on jumping and rebounding so that he learned how to position himself and get the ball on

a missed shot. But one thing he decided never to do was to pass the ball to another player.

He could dribble and shoot better than any of his team members. He could out jump them and out rebound them, but he would not pass the ball. You see once he got the ball he would dribble until he took a shot or lost the ball. At first the other team members didn't mind because he made the points, but then some of the defenders began to understand what he was doing. They changed their defense which caused him to take bad shots and lose the ball more and more. His teammates stopped passing to him because when had the ball he was surrounded by the opponent. In the end he was not allowed to play at all.

We are to be perfect, not just in some areas so that the other areas hinder us as stated in Hebrews 12:1-2. We are to get rid of anything that restricts us, lest we become like the basketball player who wouldn't let go of the basketball and ended up as a failure.

What do you cling to that prevents God from making you perfect?

A simple pass

Not that hard to do

Without it all else is ruined

To be perfect

Can be ruined by what

We cling to

Thought 52

Romans 12:2

His good, pleasing, and perfect will...

Today we produce many types of machinery and chemicals that require a constant checking of dimensions and quality to be sure that what is being produced will work, be safe and work effectively. For services needing precise measurements, the more precise the equipment needs to be.

The type of measurements needed will determine what is used to do the measuring. You would not use a yardstick to measure something as thin as paper to determine its thickness.

In the same way, to measure the things of God by something less than God or belonging to God is foolish. Often we try to measure God and His Word, and the way we are to live, by others who are not close to God. Or worse yet, by what we think it should be. We become the yardstick, and are unable to tell when there is a difference because we are not accurate enough or too general.

Paul shows us the importance of yielding ourselves to an external measure and being gauged by it. Not only that, but to allow that which is measuring us to change us to make us more measurable. Transformed and perfected is the goal being aimed for so that we may be able to see and measure God's Word and will in our life; to be able to see how we measure up to His standard.

Yardstick to measure
 Thickness of paper
It will never be accurate

What measure do you use

Your own – which is false
His word – which will change you

Be measured my friend
And then be changed
Then you will be able to see
God's perfect will

Thought 53

Ephesians 4:1-16

...until we all reach unity in the faith...and become mature
(perfect)

Perfection is an incredible goal. To be perfect as our heavenly Father is. To finally be made whole, to exist as I was created to be, to exist as the image of God.

I do believe that this is possible; God's word says it and commands it of us. But for some reason I hear of few who are actively seeking after it. One would begin to believe that most don't think of it as possible for themselves and so have settled for what they have. A little more than nothing at all. Or others feel that it is the goal or possession of a certain few who are truly spiritual.

We are not spiritual of ourselves but only as we receive grace from God, and that only as we seek it. It is ours to have – God never put restrictions on this so that some may have and some may not. In fact in this passage we are told the reason for apostles, teachers, prophets, evangelists, and pastors. They are given so that the whole body of Christ may be built to 1) Reach unity, 2) Be built up in the knowledge of Christ, and 3) Become mature. Being mature is defined as attaining or reaching the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. To become perfect as Christ was.

Do not decide to remain
 An infant
It is such a waste of
 A life
Seek after that which will make you
 An adult
Then you will have all God wants in
 A life

Thought 54

Philippians 3:12-4:1

All of us who are mature (perfect) should take such a view...

Often I have wondered about this statement and how it applies to my life and the disagreements I might have with others. Does it always apply or is it limited in its meaning? Also I have wondered about its potential use by one to get another to agree with and support their particular understanding of an issue? Something like this, “when you are mature you will understand that what I am saying is right.”

Today I have seen a little light in this statement. I moved back in the passage to see what Paul had been discussing. I found ideas like “put no confidence in the flesh,” and “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” And then there are these two phrases which are central, “not having a righteousness of my own...but that which comes through faith in Christ,” and “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize...”

It is our awareness of our value and the value of the life we create by our own strength, as compared to that which God desires to give us. He who is mature – made whole and

complete – is perfect and sees no value in the life he creates. Paul called his life rubbish. He sees only one object and goal for his life, to get a hold of God, to forget about all else in order to seek after God. This is the gauge of whether we have been made perfect in Christ.

Perfect agreement

A certain view of certain things

Nothing I do is of value

Only seeking after God has value

A mature view

Evidencing God's perfection

Thought 55

Colossians 1:24-2:5

So that we may present you perfect in Christ

Have you ever had someone work hard at; teaching, training, and correcting you? Helping you to get better and better to become the best you can be? While you were going through this did you wonder such things as: Who do they think they are telling me what to do? Why are they doing this? Or what will they get out of it?

It's no party to be disciplined by a coach in sports or by a parent when you are a child. It's not easy if your friend corrects you. In fact it's barely tolerable at times.

Well, Paul is one who went about correcting and admonishing and encouraging others in their Christian life. It wasn't easy and at times he was misunderstood. Yet because he loved them, he didn't quit. He persistently and consistently kept after them so that he could present them perfect in Christ. There were a lot of Christians around because Paul cared and wasn't afraid to correct as well as encourage.

How do you respond when another Christian comes to you and you feel rebuked? Do you become offended? Or do you ask questions and thank God there is someone who desires that you be perfect in Christ, just as Paul desired for those he taught.

My friend My Christian brother loves me
 He corrected me
 And then encouraged me

I saw his love for me
 In his desire that I be perfect
 In Christ
 And so he corrected and encouraged

Thought 56

Colossians 4:10-15

He is always wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

We do not take long trips by car without planning to put additional gas in the car. We watch the gas gauge and the distances between towns to be sure we have enough to get us to the next possible place for gas. If we don't think we can make it, we will stop where we are to fill up. Where there are only a few stations along the road we make plans to bring extra gas along.

Likewise on the road to Christian perfection we need the prayer of others to keep us going, and not just once but many times until we experience sanctification.

Titus prayed frequently for the Colossians so that they would reach maturity or perfection. He was concerned that they reach their destination. Paul shares this simple but beautiful

relationship with the Colossians, encouraging them continue seeking until they reach the goal ahead.

On road trips, no matter how far you travel or how close you get to the destination, if you run out of gas before you get there you have never arrived. It is the same with perfection. Until you are sanctified you will not make it. And it will require your diligence as well as the prayers of others who desire it for you, for you to make it.

Fueling stops

The prayer closets

Of Christian brothers

Who desire for you

The sanctifying work

Of the Holy Spirit

So you may reach God's destination

Perfection

Thought 57

Hebrews 5:11-14

But solid food is for the mature.

The separation of milk and meat.

For many months after birth a baby cannot handle meat or solid food. It has no teeth for such food. It requires milk – fluids that simply need to be swallowed to gain the benefit needed.

New Christians cannot chew meat either. But in time, as they grow and are nourished, and most important and as their teeth appear, they can chew up and digest meat, solid food.

Righteousness is a piece of meat to chew on. It involves the inspection of our lives in relation to God and the reality that

we cannot obtain such a goal on our own. Yet the writer indicates that there are mature individuals for whom such things are their food.

Righteousness comes from God, even as salvation does, and both are given at His appointed time. The question to all of us is are we still drinking milk, struggling with the issues of self, or are we striving to go forward to grow and get some teeth so that God will grant to us meat to eat in our spiritual lives? Are we willing to submit to God and be made perfect so that we can really experience God's life for us?

Will you drink milk?

Daily regaining your
Salvation

Or be changed by God

And then eat meat
To learn such things as
Righteousness

Thought 58

Hebrews 7:11-17

If perfection could have been attained

It is a fact that all hard working individuals do not receive raises or advancement. Very few ever become President of the company or Chairman of the board, and those who do often receive those positions because of family ties. Thus to work hard and do your best guarantees only certain rewards.

In terms of the Jews, though they sacrificed and made offerings to God, they would never become priests unless they were of the tribe of Levi. Nor would they become a high priest save they were of Aaron's seed. All their work and effect never truly brought them into the presence of God. And nothing the priests did could change that fact.

As for the Levites and high priests they too, though so close, often failed. They at one point stole from the offerings (Eli's sons 1 Sa 2:22) and during the time of Josiah they found the books of the law which had been lost by the previous generation of priests and Levites (2 Ki 22:8). Today no one is able to decide for sure if any is eligible to be high priest.

The fact is, the whole system was not designed to make its participants perfect but rather point to the One who could make them perfect. A few saw this fact and knew their God and learned of the laws future fulfillment in Christ, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. One who is able to make one perfect by the power that is His.

Where do you go to gain your perfection
In books and buildings
Attendance and study

With anguish of countenance
Striving and struggling
To capture that which is God
Or do you go to the Lord to be captured

Thought 59

Hebrews 12:1-11

Fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

Many say "I have faith" and "I believe" as though to convince another that they truly do have faith and belief. As if by the mere saying of such words they create it in themselves. We are not capable of such action. It says here Jesus the author of our faith. What we have in terms of faith is created by him for us to use. It is sad but true that we are quite impotent in this area without his aide.

Yet even after receiving faith we are quite at a loss as to how to proceed in using such a gift.

The illustration of a parent and child is so appropriate. The child has so much potential yet needs so much help from the parent to learn who he is. The child begins to learn how to use his abilities and talents. He will make mistakes yet the parents are there both to comfort and to scold, teaching this young one to grow and improve until he becomes a mature adult. In the same way Christ brings us into the world and strives to help us reach maturity in our faith. He would perfect us. He would bring us to God's goal of holiness and discipline us toward that end.

A spanking from my father

Painful

But a sign of love nonetheless

Discipling by my Heavenly Father

Difficult

But the value it brings to life

Perfect.

Thought 60

Hebrews 7:1-28

The law made nothing perfect

Hebrews 10:1-18

By one sacrifice made perfect forever those being made holy

There are two ways to go about obtaining perfection. At least that is the way we act.

One group looks into the Word and sees all the regulations, rules and laws given as a guide for life. They begin to change themselves bit by bit trying to bring their life into line with all these statements. They experience exhilaration

and pride when they manage to overcome in some area. Thus they learn not to depend on God but to depend on self. Failure, for this group, is crushing and results in self-punishment, storage of guilt, and fear that they aren't good enough and so God may not accept them. The truth is God will accept them but only by fire with all their hard work destroyed. They forget that they are sinful by nature and have no power to truly change such reality.

The other group has experienced the joy of knowing God. They have seen the rules but also realized that they are not able to perfect themselves. Yet they are not dismayed for they have also seen the promises of help and the promise of God that he will change them. In this lies their hope of attaining that which is not attainable; to be holy even as God is holy. All this is a result of Christ's sacrifices which has power to save and makes possible the Spirit's work of cleansing and perfecting us.

Fire it both destroys
 And it cleanses
 Is your life lived
 To provide it with more fuel
Or is your life submitted
 Cleansed to experience more life

Thought 61

Philippians 1:3-6

He who began a good work...carry to completion

Time has passed. You have studied holiness until you believe it to be true and that you too should seek after it. Yet there is a gnawing emptiness. A feeling of frustration and desperation for that which you desire has not. At least you don't feel that it has.

You experience a struggle to pray and to study. This worries you. You know what to do yet it is hard to be motivated. There doesn't seem to be anyone to talk with about it.

There is still much with which to be encouraged. First of all, you have not given up and that's important. Second, you are not the first or only one to experience such concerns. Many have been here ahead of you and others will follow. Third, and most important, your attaining holiness does not depend solely on how you feel you are doing. Paul puts it so clearly here, "I thank God for you and I always pray for you...being confident that he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion..." You see it is also in God's hands – this new life and its continued growth. He is the master gardener watching over His plants, fertilizing and watering them until they bring forth their fruit in their time.

Worry not. God hasn't quit working just because you feel lost and empty, rather believe and know that he is probably working harder than ever.

The seed planted
 Seemed to take forever to sprout
 Yet it was only days
And then it was weeks before
 The harvest came
But came it did and it was exciting

