

END-TIMES ISSUES



#134 Is following Jesus a "realistic" option? (1)

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

A N D B E Y O N D I

We've already looked at some of the requirements that Jesus gave us for following him.

- We won't repeat everything here, but some of the basic concepts are:

✓ **Deny** yourself. ✓ **"Hate"** your family and yourself.
 ✓ Carry your **cross**. ✓ **Lose** your life for Jesus' sake.
 ✓ **Give up** everything. ✓ Etc.

- Most people seem to think that such requirements are too "extreme" to be obeyed. So they decide that they are *not mandatory* – even though they are given in *command form*.
 - These people think we can be saved *without* doing what Jesus says we *must* do.
 - Some go so far as to claim that we *shouldn't* do these things, because – according to them – that would be "works salvation"!
 - They deny the effects of the New Covenant on the heart, which *always* results in a desire to obey – not for salvation, but because of God's love that is within them.

Holiness – An obligation found in both Old and New Testaments.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the whole congregation of Israel and tell them: **Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.**"

Leviticus 19:1-2 (BSB)

But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: "**Be holy, because I am holy.**"

1 Peter 1:15-16 (BSB)

- When you see a command like this, how do you respond?
 - Ignore it? Call it a "pep talk" that doesn't really mean much?
 - Treat it as an "ideal" that we cannot attain, so God needs to lower his "standard"?
 - Consider it something that only "super-spiritual" Christians need to worry about (not "normal" Christians).
 - Recognize it as a command that we need to obey?

Scripture teaches us that we must be *blameless* and *perfect*.

- When preparing the people for entering the land of Canaan, Moses warned them:

You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 18:13 (BSB)

- Centuries later, when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, a word was chosen for "blameless," which would later be translated (into English) as "perfect."

You must be perfect before the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 18:13 (from the Greek translation, LXX)

- Jesus would later refer to this verse, in his "Sermon on the Mount," using the Greek translation.

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48 (BSB)

- When you read about obligations like this, how do you respond?

We also read that sinning is *not* an option.

- We *cannot* keep on sinning, because "God's seed" is now in us. We are now "born of God." It's like having a new set of "spiritual genetics"!

No one who lives in [Christ] keeps on sinning.

1 John 3:6a (NIV)

No one who is **born of God** will **continue to sin**, because **God's seed** remains in them; they **cannot go on sinning**, because they have been **born of God**.

1 John 3:9 (NIV)

We know that anyone **born of God** does not continue to sin ...

1 John 5:18a (NIV)

Shall we **continue in sin** ... ?

Certainly not! How can we who **died to sin** live in it any longer?

Romans 6:1b, 2 (BSB)

At the same time, there are verses that seem to tell us we can *never stop* sinning in this present life!

Indeed, there is **no one** on earth who is **righteous**, **no one** who does what is right and **never sins**.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NIV)

When I want to do good, **evil is right there with me**.

Romans 7:21b (BSB)

We all stumble in many ways.

James 3:2a (BSB)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 1:8, 10 (BSB)

Other verses contain warnings that (according to some) teach us we can lose our salvation.

- Can I experience all these things and then fall away, unable to repent?

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age— and then have fallen away—to be restored to repentance, because they themselves are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:4-6 (BSB)

- Demas – He first helped Paul, but later returned to the world.

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas send you greetings.
... Demas, in his love of this world, has deserted me ...

Colossians 4:14; 2 Ti 4:10a (BSB)

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- People can receive the truth... then go to hell?

If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume all adversaries.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (BSB)

- Does this mean they were saved... then abandoned the truth?

If indeed they have escaped the corruption of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, only to be entangled and overcome by it again, their final condition is worse than it was at first. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn away from the holy commandment passed on to them.

Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

2 Peter 2:20-22 (BSB)

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- What if we stumble?

... but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Matthew 24:13 (NIV)

- Is it possible to have grace... and then lose it?

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Galatians 5:4 (NIV)

- The people who left... was it because they became "unsaved"?

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their departure made it clear that none of them belonged to us.

1 John 2:19 (BSB)

We have presented a number of verses related to salvation, which sometimes bother people.

We are NOT claiming that these interpretations are correct.

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HOW do all these things fit together??



- HOW can we be perfect/blameless and holy, if we can't stop sinning?

- If we can't stop sinning, why do other verses tell us we can't go on sinning!

- How do we interpret all those warnings?

- HOW can we know we are saved?

Is salvation even possible???

Our goal here isn't to provide ALL the answers to all the questions a person might have. We intend to illustrate that answers *can* be found, and that we can trust what God says, whether or not we have all the answers.

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>> THERE ARE ANSWERS! <<

WE MAY DISCOVER SOME OF THEM, IF WE ARE CAREFUL WHEN LOOKING!

- Observe what Scripture says, neither adding nor subtracting.

- Recognize that what God says is true; it's our understanding that is weak and prone to being false.
- Learn to recognize the difference between what Scripture says, and the assumptions we superimpose into the text.
- Look for similar or contrasting concepts in other passages.

- We need the right attitude.

- Humility, accepting what God says, rather than arrogantly thinking we know better than him.
- A willingness to take the time needed for genuine learning.

- Realize that there are two types of contrasting concepts.

- Some things are "incompatible opposites." An example of this is the issue of good vs. evil. The two are always in conflict.
- Other things are "complementary opposites." These always work together – though the world often treats them as incompatible. →

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EXAMPLES of contrasting concepts that complement each other.

- Issues that focus on God's perspective vs. our perspective.

- Example: God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

- A concept or word may have many dimensions or be used in different ways.

- Example: "Salvation": Different verses tell us: ① we are saved (accomplished in the past), ② we are being saved (a present-day process), and ③ we will be saved (what we look forward to).

- Example: "Righteousness" may refer to external conduct (not implying salvation) or an internal condition (the result of salvation).

In each group, all of the concepts are true.

The world has taught us a perspective that treats them as incompatible, and insists that either: ① one of them can't be true, or ② we have to "reconcile" them in some way.

In reality, God describes them all as 100% true, "as is."

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WHERE SHOULD WE START? HOW ABOUT WITH THE ISSUE OF:

BEING BLAMELESS/PERFECT.

- This is an obligation, but it does *not* mean "sinless"!
 - ✓ This concept is *never* used as a synonym for "sinless." (*This idea is a misconception on our part, since we sometimes use the word that way.*)
 - ✓ This word focuses on integrity in one's actions – wholeness, being upright in conduct, not lacking in any moral quality; fulfilling the purpose for which God made us. In some passages, the emphasis is on maturity.
 - » When referring to Old Testament sacrifices, it was used to describe an animal that did not have defects.
 - ✓ In Matthew 5:48, the context is about the nature of our love. Is God our Father? If so, then our love must be patterned after his – extending to those who do not "pay us back" with love. This is God's love in action, guiding how we live. On our part, accomplishing this is a *growing* process.

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WHAT ABOUT HOLINESS?

- This concept is used two ways.
 - ✓ The ultimate focus of this word is on God's "transcendence" – the absolute "differentness" between him and creation. It is also used to describe God's moral character. He is the standard for all moral excellence, and is *separate* and *different* from anything that falls short of this standard.
 - ✓ We, as humans, cannot become uncreated deity (entities that are different from creation). However, we *are* called to be holy in the sense of aligning ourselves with God's moral character. Morally, we must be like him.
 - ✓ In the Old Testament, holiness was *physically* represented by the separation of what is holy from what is unholy. Many of the ceremonial practices emphasized this. In the New Testament, holiness – as an inner moral quality – has this primary emphasis: the moral conformity to God's character.

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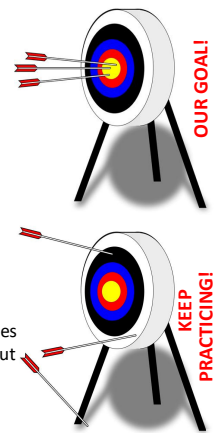
HOLINESS – It's NOT A VAGUE, NEBULOUS CONCEPT!

- Holiness shapes how we live!
 - ✓ Holiness is God's fundamental attribute, from which truth and love flow.
 - ✓ We are called to reflect God's holiness—his moral perfection and separation from sin.
 - ✓ This moral conformity to God's character is expressed through a love that mirrors his holiness. This is a self-giving love – not sentimental or permissive, but constrained and shaped by truth.
 - ✓ God's nature defines both truth and love. This means that genuine love (which is from God) always acts in accordance with his moral character and the ultimate good of those he loves.
 - ✓ Truth and love and holiness will *never* contradict.

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AN ILLUSTRATION:

- **Holiness:** It's like the bull's-eye. It's the *permanent standard* – the goal we must aim for.
- **Perfection:** It's like the *ongoing practice* of aiming and shooting for that bull's-eye.
- **When we are saved,** God gives us the desire to aim for the "target" of holiness.
 - ✓ This involves a dissatisfaction with sin and a striving for holiness, and is evidence of God's saving work.
 - ✓ As we grow in our spiritual life, God enables us to improve in our aim. (We may start out quite sloppy.) In this present life, our aim will improve; but we will not consistently hit the goal until Jesus returns.



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[We plan to continue this next time.]

Done:

- ☒ Perfection and holiness.

Yet to be done:

- ☐ Sin vs. no sin.
☐ Concerning passages.

OUR MISSION!

IF God has changed you ⇒ you will desire to be holy.

✚ So strive for the God-given "perfection" – the integrity, moral character and spiritual maturity – that enables you to pursue holiness, the *true* foundation for truth and love!

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