

# Chosen Vessel - a Commitment to Holiness

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of holiness and trust in God, and warns against the dangers of relying on self and the pitfalls of prosperity.*

**Duration:** 40:35

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 15:2, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 15:14, Ephesians 4:17-28

**Topics:** "Leadership"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of living close to God and not being influenced by the ways of the world. He refers to Paul's instructions to the Ephesians, urging them not to walk as the Gentiles do. The speaker highlights the emptiness and deceitfulness of worldly desires and urges listeners to guard against the temptations of sin. He emphasizes the need to put up safeguards and avoid even the slightest opening for Satan to exploit. The sermon emphasizes the destructive nature of sin and the importance of staying close to the Lord.

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## Transcript

His letter was written to me because of several pastors, Calvary Chapel pastors, who had gone to him for counseling. And he sought to analyze the problems that they were having and the reasons for the problems. Many of them were marriage problems.

Some of them were pornography problems. And they were willing to go and to bear their hearts to the psychologist. And he wrote and said that there are a lot of troubled pastors that maybe you're not aware of, but I see them in my practice.

And so as we got together to plan this conference, I brought a copy of the letter of the psychologist to me. And I gave it to each of the fellows who had come to help us in the planning of the conference. And we came to the realization that one of the greatest needs that we have is holiness and a real sense of holiness before the Lord.

And there is a danger when we use the term holiness because there have been holiness groups. And holiness has been defined in many different ways. And so often holiness is defined as sort of an outward form of dress or things of that nature.

And so I am holy many times I feel because of what I don't do. Rather than truly understanding what holiness is, a response of my heart to the awareness of who God is. And the closer I get to God, the greater the realization of my own sin, and my own sinful state, and my worthlessness, and my total dependency upon His grace and upon His mercy.

But never presuming on the grace and the mercy of God. Now, I feel like a father to most of you. I feel like Paul, my son's Timothy's in the faith.

I have a heart for you, a concern for you. And when one of the pastors falls, my heart breaks. I'm disturbed.

And unfortunately, we've had so many this past year who have fallen that we felt that it was important that we talk very straight about issues. Giving a warning, we can't be there next to you day by day, but we can help set principles as the Bible gives us certain principles. And if you do these things, Peter said, you will never fall.

Guidelines, principles that we can establish in our lives that will keep us from the edge as Damien so aptly described it. I don't want to live near the edge at all. I'm anxious to live close to the other edge, just as close to God as I can.

You know, when you're living as close to God as you possibly can, then you're not worried, you're not concerned about where is the edge. There are so many people that want to live next to the edge. In fact, they come to you all the time.

Can a Christian do this and still be a Christian? You know, where is the edge? How close can I live and still I want to be, but how close can I get, you know? How much can I dabble? How much can I do? How far can I go and still be on the safe side? We brought up the case of Asa the other day, 2 Chronicles, and how he had a tremendous encounter with the experiencing of the power of God, the delivering power of God, and the victory that God had wrought for them. And coming back flushed with this victory, the prophet came out to meet them. And the prophet said unto the king, the Lord is with you while you will be with him.

And yes, yes, the Lord is with us. We've just seen God work. Oh, it's glorious to have the Lord with us.

And if you seek him, he'll be found of you. Yes, we sought the Lord. He gave us victory.

Glory to God. We're, you know, you're flush with God's working. But then the prophet went on to say, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

Oh, well, yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. Thanks. But forsake God after what God has done.

Are you kidding? No way. But, you know, appreciate the warning, but surely not necessary. You know, you have to be careful about that.

God is faithful, and God warns us. The problem is that many times we don't feel the warning is necessary. But God never warned you unnecessarily, though you may think so at the time.

Now, I have to confess that whenever I have fallen, God was faithful and he warned me in advance of the fall. And many, many times I felt, Lord, thank you. But nice of you, but really, no problem there, Lord.

I've got that area wired a long time ago. Don't need the warning, but thank you, Lord. And invariably, when I've ignored the warnings, I've fallen.

Because of what God had done, because of the excitement overseeing the work of God, they decided to initiate even further spiritual reforms. Though they had gone through once and cleansed the land of the high places and the altars of the pagan gods, they went through again to remove any possible remaining idols or places of worship. And they all made a covenant together to serve the Lord great, exciting times.

And as a result, God blessed and prospered the kingdom under Asa. As long as he sought the Lord, God made his ways to prosper. God was found of him.

But then we read that in the later years of Asa's life, the king of Israel decided to invade the kingdom of Judah. And so he began to build fortified cities. And the purpose was to cut off the supplies coming south and to set sea.

Against Judah. And so we read that Asa took money out of the treasury and he sent messengers up to the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad. And he said, we have a covenant and I want you to attack Israel from the north.

And he sent money to hire the mercenaries to invade Israel from the north. So that the king of Israel, Asa, would have to stop the building of these fortified cities to defend the northern borders. So the Syrian troops attacked the city of Dan, the northern outpost of Israel.

Basha was forced to take the troops building Ramah and these fortified cities next to Jerusalem, had to take the troops and send them north to defend the northern borders. King Asa sent his troops out. They dismantled these fortified cities.

They took the materials that were being used and they reinforced and fortified the cities of Judah. It was successful. Brilliant strategy.

It worked. And you know, whenever you have an idea, a brilliant strategy, and it works, you feel sort of proud about yourself. But the prophet Hanani came unto Asa.

And he said, because you have relied on the king of Syria and not relied on the Lord your God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of your hand. And he reminded him in the beginning of your kingdom when the Ethiopians came, were they not a huge host? And you called unto the Lord and the Lord delivered them. But now you're relying not on the Lord.

He said, don't you realize God is just looking throughout the whole world to find people in harmony with him that he might bless them. Asa's response was he was angry with this prophet. He had him thrown in prison.

He was in a rage. And he began to oppress some of the people at the same time. How is it that a man starting out so well, starting out so right, can end up so wrong? It's a tragic thing, but prosperity is probably one of the most dangerous things that can happen to your ministry.

We all pray for success and God prosper our ministry. But the more prosperous your ministry becomes, the greater the danger you are in of beginning to, like Asa, no longer trust and rely on God, but begin to rely upon your devices and your schemes and the resources that God has begun to supply you with. And there is no longer that sense of necessity of we've got to rely on God.

We've got to trust God. We don't know what to do. We've written to Calvary Chapel and they can't send us any money.

What are we going to do? We're going to have to trust God. Terrible. But that's a good position to be in.

What's so bad about trusting God? What are you telling the people to do all the time? Doesn't hurt us to trust God. Keeps us close. And in that time of necessity, it's good time.

It's growth time. God has such a difficult time, though, blessing and prospering his people. Because it seems like when the blessings and the prosperity comes, then we sort of feel independent, like Asa.

Well, you know, I can take money out of the treasury now. I'll just send up to Ben-Hadad and, you know, I'll have him send his troops. And, you know, we don't have to call on the Lord for this one.

And we read the tragic story of Asa the End. He became diseased in his feet and he sought the aid of physicians and did not seek the Lord. And Asa died of the diseased feet.

The intimation in the scripture is, had he sought the Lord, the Lord would have healed him. But it's possible to work with God, to see the power of God, to experience the work and the blessing of God. To make that commitment and feel, I will never, never, never turn from this.

And because of your commitment, full, total, long commitment, God blesses you, the church grows, things are prospering. And now in this period, somehow we don't feel the same necessity of keeping so close to God. Somehow we can now do it ourselves.

And we begin to forsake the Lord. And before we know it, we are doing things that we never dreamed that we would ever do. We've been caught in Satan's grip.

With the prosperity and the notoriety has come groupies and hanger-ons and temptations. And we've had too many pastors fall this past year. Because somehow, some way, that commitment to holiness, that commitment to serve God completely, holy him.

Somewhere Satan made an inroad. Somehow Satan got in and destroyed their marriages, destroyed their ministries. Thank God, he loves his church, the churches are going on.

But their ministry, and now they're out here and they've lost everything. And they don't know where to go, they don't know what to do. Where do I go from here? And God help us, I want to keep you from that place if possible.

I'm tired of these guys coming and crying and repenting and all. Oh, they got to do that and I know that, but I don't want to hear it. I would rather hear, oh my, what, you know, we're just serving the Lord and God is so good.

Oh, I'm just, you know, walking close to him and, you know, the continued blessing. I don't want to hear of the breakups. Of the pain, of the misery, of the hurt, of the lostness.

When the thing has gone down the tubes, and so we've got to be on guard. Because Satan is out to destroy you and he's out to destroy the ministry that God has given to you. He wants to put you on the shelf.

He wants to remove you out of the loop. And so you cannot give any foothold. You can't open the door even slightly.

You've got to learn as Damien said, no, get in front of the mirror, practice it. Don't even give the slightest little opening. Because he'll take it.

And he'll use it as a beachhold. And he'll seek to expand it in your life. You don't dare open the web to the porno that's available.

Not even out of curiosity, but what's there? You don't need to know. The Bible tells us to be simple concerning evil. And I'm not even interested in what might be available to titillate my senses.

That's not my desire. My desire is to live close to God, to walk with him as close as I possibly can. Paul, when he was writing to the Ephesians in chapter 4, sort of gives some good rules for the walk and continued walk.

In verse 17, he said, you're not to walk as the other Gentiles walk. You're not to walk as the world. And he seeks to describe the way the Gentiles, what he means by Gentiles walk.

They walk in the vanity or in the emptiness of their minds. Have you ever noticed how many things of the world are just so mindless? This Halloween, I was watching the news on television and it gave, you know, one of these things about how Halloween was being celebrated in San Francisco. And as you might well realize that San Francisco, every queer was out in the street with his crazy costumes.

And you see them out there dancing with tutus and all these guys, you think, that's mindless. I mean, that's pure stupidity. I mean, who in their right mind would dress up like that and pranced in the streets of San Francisco? I mean, that is just mindless.

To be perfectly frank with you, I have a problem with the robes that the Pope wears. His tall hat. The Masonics, they put on their little bit.

Doesn't make sense. People don't seem to stop and consider though. I mean, you get, you know, you just do things because people do things.

And you know, you stop and think, what are you doing that for? I don't know, you know. Mindless. Isaiah said, you know, the problem with people is that they don't think.

And that's true of the world. They don't dare think. He said, they have not known nor understood, for God has shut their eyes, that they cannot see, their hearts that they cannot understand.

And none considers in his heart. Neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, well, I took this branch of a tree and I burned part of the branch in the fire to keep the house warm. I put part of the branch in the oven so I could bake my bread.

And then I took my knife and I carved out a little God from the rest of that branch. And I covered it with gold and I set it on the table and I bowed down to it and I said, you are my God. He said, they don't stop to consider.

That's just a branch of a tree. Part of it you burned in the oven or burned in your fireplace to keep your house warm. Part you put in the oven to bake your bread.

And with part of it you make your God. I mean, it's mindless. Doesn't make sense.

You really look at sin and it doesn't make sense because it is destructive. So destructive. As someone has shared earlier this week, we need to stop and consider possible consequences when we begin to even entertain in our thoughts.

And as Damian pointed out, you know, it starts with the thoughts, the temptation. And then when it meets our will, when the will embraces it, I thought that was very graphic. You're in trouble.

So we need to put up the safeguards because we want to continue ever closer to the Lord. Never that state of Ephesus where you've left your first love, you've grown cold. But ever closer to the Lord.

Paul speaking of the Gentiles, emptiness of their minds. Having their understanding darkened, he said. Talking in Romans, he said, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

Their foolish hearts were darkened. Again, Paul speaks of the God of this world blinding their eyes because they didn't want to retain God in their mind. God gave them over to reprobate minds.

The world doesn't stop to think. Being alienated them from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. Mindless ignorance.

They're living in that fallen state of the two-dimensional man, body and mind. The mind absorbed only with the body and no awareness or consciousness of God. And that's dead in their trespasses and sins.

Jesus said, let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, they'll both fall in the ditch. Now, as Paul is talking to the Ephesians here in verse 24, chapter 4, well, verse 22.

That you put off, and here's now the key gang, put off concerning the former manner of living, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lust. The deceitful lust. Lust is so deceitful.

This mind where things seem to start. The Genesis of sin begins so many times in the imagination. You begin to fantasize.

And the problem with fantasy is that it can never be fulfilling. Reality is never as exciting as fantasy. Fantasy is exciting, but reality is disappointing.

Always you were hoping you were dreaming. You were thinking that it was going to bring so much more than it does. The deceitfulness of lust.

It's a deceiving thing to give into. It isn't going to bring you all that you were thinking and hoping and believing that it was going to do. It was a sham.

So we put off the former manner of life, which was corrupt according to the deceitful lust. Renewed in the spirit of your mind that you might put on the new man. So here's the thing with holiness now.

It's not what you don't do only. It's what you do do. In other words, there is the negative and the positive side to holiness.

Now too many times we only hear the negative side emphasized of holiness. You know that old thing. We were kids growing up.

I don't smoke and I don't chew and I don't go with girls that do, you know, I'm holy. Holiness is far more than just what I don't do. It's what I'm doing.

So we put off, but then we put on. He said, you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. It isn't true holiness until you've put on the positive aspects.

So he goes on to say, therefore, put away lying. That's the negative side. What's the positive side? Speak every man the truth with his neighbor.

See, the negative is put off lying, but you don't stop there. You begin to speak the truth every man with his neighbor. Verse 28, he said, if you've been stealing, don't steal anymore.

That's the negative side. But the positive side, but rather let him labor, working with his hands, the things which are good that he might have to give to those who are in need. It's more than just not stealing.

It's getting a job that I can help provide for those that are in need, that I can give. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth. That's negative.

But that which is good to the use of edifying that it might make minister grace to the ears. So it's just that I, you know, quit telling dirty jokes and corrupt communication and so forth. But the positive side, I'm ministering to people.

When I speak to them, I speak to say those things. They're going to edify them, build them up and enrich them in the things of the Lord. Draw them closer to him.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking. Now, these are issues that we've been hearing about this week. That all of the bitterness and the wrath and the anger and the clamor, the evil speaking be put away from you with all malice.

That's negative. Put those things away. We don't do that anymore.

But the positive side, be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another. And we got that this morning, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. So the positive side to the holiness.

It's not just what I'm not doing, it's what I am doing now as I walk close to God and I seek to emulate God in all things. Well, we sang it this morning. Refining fire.

My heart's one desire is to be holy. How? Getting close to God. Our God is a consuming fire and the closer you get to him, the more will be consumed.

The junk, the dross, the chaff. Talk close to God. Live close to God.

Give no occasion to the enemy. Don't open the door even a crack. Purpose in your hearts, as we've been told.

Make that a purpose of your heart. Daniel purposed in his heart he wouldn't defile himself with the king's meat. Make that the purpose of your heart.

Not going to be defiled. I'm going to live holy. I'm going to live for God.

I'm going to live a committed life. I'm not going to give any place for the enemy to come in. God's been good to us, so good to us.

I look around at the ministries and I see what God is doing and what God has done and I'm overwhelmed. I know that it's just got to be a work of God. Man couldn't do it.

It's God's work. We've had the joy and the blessing of seeing God give great victories. But let's not become complacent.

Let's not begin to rest upon the prosperity that God has given. Let's not begin to look to these things for security. But may we continue to look to the Lord and trust in the Lord.

Let's not follow the pattern of other movements of God. God help us. If you look at history, you'll get extremely discouraged because there have been other great movements of God throughout history.

But even going back to Asa, just what happened to Asa is a pattern of movements of God throughout history. You start out right. You did start well.

What did hinder you? Paul said to the Galatians, oh foolish Galatians, having begun in the spirit, are you going to be made perfect in the flesh? Guard yourself, keep yourself. Satan's out to destroy you. He's out to destroy the work of God.

And Paul said we're not ignorant of his devices. Well, I think sometimes we are. He speaks about the wiles of the devil, wily guy.

And he can come in where you are least expecting it. Keep close to God, as close as you can. And God will give you the wisdom that you need.

God will give you the discernment that you need. And Satan won't have a chance as long as you're close to God. It's when you begin to drift.

I think of how when the sons of God were presenting themselves to God and Satan also came with them and God said, oh, where you been? Oh, been going up and down throughout the earth to and fro through it. Oh, well, have you considered my servant Job? Good man. Perfect man.

He loves God, hates evil. Have you considered my servant Job? The word considered in the Hebrew is a military term. It is a word that is used to describe a general studying a city to develop his strategy for attacking.

Have you been studying that fellow Job, looking for the weakness, looking for the place to attack? And the awesome thing is, yes, I've been studying him and I'm sure I've found the place of weakness. Does Job serve you for nothing? Look at how you've blessed him. Anybody would serve you if you bless him like you've blessed Job.

But Satan has been studying this movement. You can be sure of that. And as God begins to bless your ministry, he's going to start studying you to develop the strategies.

To seek to destroy the wiles of the devil. Satan has desired you that he might sift you as wheat. Stay close to Jesus.

He said, Peter, I've prayed for you. Stay close to him. We don't have to go the way of all movements.

We don't have to turn to the flesh to be perfected. We can continue in the spirit. We must continue in the spirit.

Or else the day will come when Ichabod will be written over our doors and God will look for another group to use and to bless. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Keep yourself in that place where God can continue to do what he longs to do through you and in you.

Don't let Satan put you on the ash heap wondering what happened. Father, we thank you for your word that is a guide to our lives. May we follow after it, Lord, diligently.

Lord, as we look at this past year and we see how Satan has come into the ranks and we see those who have been put on the sidelines and are sitting there just wondering what they're going to do next. How can they get back in the mainstream? Lord, it hurts to see the pain that they're going through. Lord, keep us.

Help us. Lord, shake us. Do whatever is necessary, but help us, Lord, that you've told us to keep ourselves.

And so, with your help and with your strength, with the power of your spirit, may we keep ourselves close to you. In Jesus' name, Father, amen.

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