

Personal Holiness - Part 4

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of personal holiness and integrity in Christian ethics amidst daily temptations and challenges.

Duration: 42:39

Topics: "Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where some workers were hired at different times of the day but all received the same wage. The preacher emphasizes that this parable teaches that the Lord goes by need and not by greed. He relates this to the grace of God, who sent his son to die for us and deliver us from the penalty and power of sin. The preacher also shares a story of a young Christian who refused to compromise his integrity in his job and ultimately resigned, highlighting the importance of always doing what is right and honoring God in our decisions.

Transcript

Peter Pease was a Christian, and Hillary said he was the best man he had ever met. And yet he was annoyed and challenged by him. And his one ambition was to get Peter alone and to decimate him with argument.

As far as it happened one day, they were traveling together, these two pilots, and Hillary glared at his victim, and he said, Your religion is a fake, a hereditary hangover, a useful social adjunct, and no more. And poor Peter opened his mouth and stammered out a few feeble protests, and then he just sunk back into his seat and lapsed into silence, completely overwhelmed by his opponent's argument. But Hillary knew that in reality he had lost the argument, because there was one fact he couldn't explain, and that was Peter's character.

He said Peter's character and his religion were inextricably bound up together, and it played havoc with logic. In other words, all Hillary's logic couldn't explain away Peter Pease's... But that's what the world is looking for, looking to see Christ reproduced in our lives. Today I want to speak about the subject of Christian ethics.

You know, in many ways I often think of the Christian like a minefield. And every day, I think every day in life, there are opportunities for me to cut corners, to fudge, to do the thing that isn't quite right. Life is just filled with booby traps for the Christian.

Farmer, you have those things. If you're a business person, you have them. If you're retired, you have them.

If you're a housewife, you have them. Opportunities to do the thing that isn't quite right. And I want to tell you something, that when the dollar is involved, the temptation is greater than ever.

And we're going to go over some of those things this morning. First, I'd like to read two verses of Scripture with you. And the first is in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 15.

Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 15. Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 15. It says, Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.

These temptations that come to us in life to violate Christian ethics are like little foxes. They don't seem to be much at the time, but they ruin our fruitfulness for God. They ruin our effectiveness for God.

The other verse is Acts, chapter 24, and verse 16. Acts 24, verse 16. The Apostle Paul speaking, and he says, Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.

A conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. And when we have that, when we resist these temptations to fudge, we do have that kind of a conscience, and we have the release of the Spirit in our lives. Income tax time comes due.

Now, honestly, are you tempted at a time like that? It's a time of great temptation for many to understate income or to overstate expenses. There are so many ways you think, well, the government would never know. That's true.

Those of us in the work of the Lord face this. I oftentimes receive gifts of cash. They might even come from places where I haven't even ministered recently.

The government would never know. There's absolutely no way. Although they must be terribly suspicious of me, they've audited me five times.

I think I hold the world's record. I don't know what there is. I've been audited five times by the income tax people.

I was taken in Washington, D.C. in the airport as a suspected hijacker was. Do I look like a hijacker? You know, but how could I get up and preach to others if I was dishonest in the income taxes? You might say, well, nobody would ever know, and it would steal. False weights and measures.

I've often told the story of Adam Clark, a young fellow who years ago worked in a silk merchant for a fabric house. And his boss said to him, Adam, when you're measuring out the silk, stretch it. And Adam said, Sir, your silk may stretch, but my conscience won't.

And God later used that fellow to write a commentary on the books of the Bible. It's known as the Adam Clark Commentary. But I rather think of the connection between the two incidents.

I rather think God looked down that day and saw a fellow whose conscience wouldn't stretch, and said, there's a man I can use. It's a wonderful thing to find a Christian who has enough backbone to stand for the thing that is right, no matter what the consequences may be. Sometimes in our work, we're really put

in the corner.

A young Christian is working in a men's clothing store. His boss is the deacon of one of the largest evangelical churches in the city. And they're going to have a sale.

And they take \$75 suits. Are there any more? Maybe. I just forget the figures.

They take \$75 suits. They take them upstairs. They tell him, take these upstairs, mark them \$95, and then slash through the \$95 and change them to \$85.

So the \$75 suits are on sale for \$85. And this young Christian is faced with that problem. He's told to go upstairs and change the prices.

These are actual cases I'm giving you today. What would you do? In the same business, the man would come in and buy a suit, and the tailor would mark it with chalk, you know, for all the alterations that were to be made on it. And then they'd say, come back in a week.

He'd come back in a week and absolutely nothing had been done on the suit. And they say to Bob, the young Christian, go upstairs and just brush off the chalk marks and press it and bring it down. And finally, Bob can't take it any longer.

And he goes to his boss, the deacon of one of the largest evangelical churches. He says, Mr. Bossman, you'd be happier selling peanuts out on the sidewalk than doing what you're doing in here. And he tendered his resignation, having always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.

It's hard, I suppose, for some here to realize that our whole society, the business world and the political world, is based upon bribes and kickbacks and payoffs. And it's sometimes very difficult for a Christian. Here's a man and he has a little restaurant.

He's trying to eke out an existence in a little coffee shop. And one day the city inspector comes in and he has his pencil in his pad and he goes around and he says, let's see now. You need a new meat chopping block.

And you need a new hood over the stove. And he's adding, adding, adding. And before the inspector gets through, he realizes that he's up around \$10,000.

\$10,000 that needs to be done in that restaurant. And as the inspector is leaving, he says, is it worth \$10 to you? In other words, pay me \$10 and we'll forget the whole thing. And if he says, no, I'm a Christian, I can't do that, it isn't worth \$10 to me, the inspector will say, have it done in two weeks or close the shop.

And if you think these things aren't happening, you're naive. Two young Christian fellows driving along in their car. They're in an unfamiliar district and they start down a one-way street the wrong way and they hear the siren behind them.

The policeman pulls them over and says, can I see your license? They pull out the license. And he says, you realize you were going down a one-way street? Yes, sir, we realize that. We realize it now, it's too late.

And he says, how much money do you have on you? And the fellow gropes in his pocket and he says, \$2.85. And the policeman talks about some other things for a while and then he comes back to the main

subject. He says, how much money did you say you have on you? And Howard says, \$2.85. But he doesn't offer to pay it. And the policeman says, well, I guess I'll just have to take you in.

The policeman takes them down to the local police station and they're up the front stairs and the policeman says the third time, how much money did you say you had? He bluffs them all the way inside the door and then he turns around and says, you know what I'm going to do with you? And he says, no, we don't deserve. We've broken, you can feel what's coming. We have to pay the penalty of the broken law.

In grace, you're letting us go. And you know, officer, that we had broken his law. We were guilty and we were condemned to death and we deserve to die.

But God in wonderful grace sent his son to die for us on Calvary's cross. And by faith in him to be delivered from the penalty and power and presence, he had tears in his eyes and he says, I'm glad I took it. A time when the refusal to buckle to that demand created a wonderful opportunity to witness for the Lord Jesus.

Having always a conscience void of offense toward God, toward man. There's a young Christian and his work involves selling sewer pipes. If from all my illustrations you get the impression that our society is a sewer.

He's selling sewer pipe and he goes to the purchasing agent of one of the largest cities here in the Midwest. He has a good product. It's a product that would serve the city well.

And he presents his case to the purchasing agent. The purchasing agent opens a large book and he says, I don't see that you've made any contribution to my boss's political campaign. He hadn't made any contribution to the boss and of course he doesn't get the order either.

And it would have been a good order to make that contribution and that sale would have done him for quite a long time. You know, in some ways it would be good if this weren't a lecture, if it were a discussion group and some of you could be sharing some of these problems that you face today, every day of your life in business. Lying to get a sale.

I told you last night about selling that gray lemon that I had, that automobile. When the fellow bought it from me, he said, are you going to give me a break? I paid for it. He said, make it a smaller figure so my sales tax.

You probably think that in the work of the Lord we don't have those. Using inferior merchandise. For instance, in the building trade, how common this is.

After all, it's all going to be covered up anyway. It's going to be underneath. Nobody will see it.

You can increase your profits that way. Here's a tender area. Government regulations, building codes, inspectors, permits and all the rest.

There's a man, a Christian man, he has a factory. And the fire inspector comes in to inspect the factory. Actually, it's a fire trap, which is bad enough in itself.

And he takes the inspector aside and he says, I'm so glad you came here today. He said, you know, my men are so careless. My men are so careless about this whole thing.

And he said, I just wish you'd take time to give them a lecture. And he said, I'll make it worth your while if you give them a lecture on fire prevention. Now, that sounds quite, you know, respectable in itself.

A man's going to get paid for doing something. That isn't the point at all. The point is, it's going to deflect him from his duty.

It's perverting judgment, as the book of Proverbs says, by the use of money. And money does that. It blinds the eyes to justice.

And it's used all the time for that purpose. A very common violation of ethics today is in padding expense accounts. Padding expense accounts.

There's a young fellow that takes a job with a well-known company. And his first week, he's put out with another man servicing their equipment. At the end of the week, the man sits down, the trainer sits down and writes out his expense account.

So much for bus fares. So much for this and that. And then he turns to the young Christian.

He says, OK, now you make out your expense account that way. Because they were together all week. One traveled on the bus, the other traveled on the bus, too.

And the Christian fellow says, I'm sorry, I can't do that, he says. He said, I'm a Christian, and I can't do it. He said, I didn't travel on a bus.

I can't put that down in my expense account. And, of course, his trainer is furious. Puts on a tremendous scene.

Second week, replay. Same thing. End of the week, he makes out his expense account.

Says to Dick, now you do the same thing. Dick said, sir, I can't do that. I'm a Christian.

If my job depends on doing that, I'll have to give up my job. And the man's lips begin to pucker. And he says, you do what you think is right.

It's tough. It's tough in the world today to maintain that stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. And to show to the world that Christ really does make a difference in the life.

Now, I'm sure your minds are working over time. And you're thinking of many, many areas in your own experience where this has been true. Even little things like the secretary is there in the office.

And the boss is in. But he doesn't want to be disturbed. If anybody calls, tell them I'm not in.

A lot of Christian girls are put in that situation. What are they going to do? Are they going to lie over the phone? Are they going to say the boss isn't in when he is in? Fraud in business. Sometimes you think that a doctor wouldn't face this because everything would be up and up in the medical profession.

But you know, a lot of people have injuries, supposed injuries, mental injuries. And they go to their doctor and they want him to sign a form to the insurance company certifying that they had this injury and they didn't have it at all. And you know, it really puts a Christian doctor behind the eight ball sometimes.

These people have temper. They fly into furies if he refuses to do it. I often think of the insurance agent who got the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

I'm sure some of you have heard this story. They built this huge bridge up there some years ago in Washington, the state of Washington. And this insurance agent landed the job.

He wasn't a Christian, of course. And he was so confident that nothing could ever happen to that bridge that he never bothered to turn the premiums into the company. He just pocketed the premiums himself.

And one day a wind arose and it hit that bridge just right. And the bridge started vibrating. And pretty soon the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapsed into the water below.

And there wasn't a cent of insurance on it. Be sure that your sins will find you out. He knew, at least he thought he knew, that nothing could ever happen to that bridge.

But the hound of heaven was after him. And he's cooling off in a slammer today. Kiting checks.

That's a temptation for people. My bank account is down. I want to write a check.

I don't have that amount of money in the checking account, but I hope that by the time it clears that I'll be able to make a deposit and make it up. It's known as kiting checks. I hope I'm not teaching you bad tricks today.

Don't try it today, because with all the electronic equipment, the computers and all the rest, checks can clear very, very fast. And a lot of people who tried this for many, many years, they're being caught today on this very thing. Bookkeeping fraud.

I received a letter from a servant of the Lord not too long ago. Actually, he had been invited to another country to minister the word of God, and these are the words he wrote to me. He said, most of the brethren here are in business, and that means, I am told, that they engage in corrupt practices.

One brother told me that is why he will not minister the word in the assembly. He said they can't survive in business if they're straight. This was in response to some messages I gave.

He said, yesterday a young lady came to me about changing her job because of tension causing backache in her present one. A few minutes questioning revealed the problem is corruption. She's an accountant working for a Christian brother.

She's under conviction, and I believe is willing to yield to the Lord. She seems so weak and small. Why should it be a sister who has to be the first to challenge the system? There are elders who are just as guilty.

All I can do is pray for her, but oh, how my heart aches. Well, here's a young girl, bookkeeper in a company, and she's engaging in bookkeeping fraud because her employer is demanding that she does it. Now she has backache and headaches caused by tension, and she's going to have to get out of the job.

I like that sentence. He said, why should it be a sister who has to be the first to challenge the system? And I'm really impressed by that sentence. One brother told me that is why he will not minister the word in the assembly.

Now, I don't think that's the only reason why some of our brothers don't minister the word in the assembly, but it's sure an insight on life, isn't it? There's nothing that seals the lips like the life, but that's a very good reason why our consciences should be tender before the Lord. Riding roughshod over employees or underpaying employees. You know, I think it's so easy for us as Christians to adopt the thinking of the world and to think that the bottom line is the profit line.

In fact, we have an expression. We say, well, that's the bottom line, you know, and that means that the important thing that counts is the profit to make. Wouldn't it be nice to see some Christians moving into business and deciding that the bottom line isn't the profit? The bottom line is the welfare of employees.

After all, those employees have never dying souls. They're going to be somewhere in eternity, either everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I'm often impressed by that parable the Lord Jesus told about the workers that went out to the vineyard at six o'clock in the morning.

Then the master hired more at nine and at twelve and at three and at five. And he came to the end of the day and he gave them all a day's work, a day's wage. And that seems very funny to us.

We think it isn't fair because some of those men worked all day and got a day's wage and some of the rest worked only an hour and got a day's wage. Very innovative, very innovative in business. And what it teaches is that the Lord goes by need and not by greed.

And he knew that those people wanted to get out of the Safeway store and fill their grocery baskets and feed their families. So he gave them all what they earned, but he gave some more to meet their needs. It would be wonderful if we could have some original thinking in the marketplace like this today.

Some do. Some have profit-sharing plans and consider the lives of their employees more important than the bottom line. Cheating on examinations.

How easy it is to do. How easy it is for the eyes to wander over to the next page. I remember when I was in school, in a certain school, that we had the opportunity, if we wanted, of buying the exams in advance.

Not the answers necessarily, but just to have the exam in advance was tremendous, wasn't it? It would really take gumption for a Christian to say, No, I'm not going to do that. Not going to engage in that. I'd rather take an F and be honest about it than get an A in that manner.

Somebody has said that if all the diplomas and degrees that were earned dishonestly were returned to the schools, the school buildings wouldn't be big enough to hold them. Do you think that's true? Well, it's rather convicting. If all of the exams and diplomas that were earned dishonestly were returned to the schools, the schools wouldn't be big enough to hold them.

Traffic laws. I'm really preaching to myself now. I have a very heavy foot on the accelerator, and I even get nervous when there's a car behind me with a ski rack on it.

But just the same, seriously, these are the little foxes, aren't they, that spoil the vines? And if I can solve my conscience that it's okay to do that, that solve is transferable to other areas of the Christian life. And I want to be sensitive before the Lord. If that's the law, 55 is the law, 55 is what I should do.

And I want to tell you that's awfully hard traveling through Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming to keep it down to 55. But our conscience must be tender. I talked to a young man out in California recently.

He works for one of the computer companies. You'd know the name of it if I mentioned it. And he told me something amazing.

He said that almost every employee of that company has at least one of the computers at home. I said, they bought them. He said, oh, no, they didn't buy them.

I said, how many do you have at home? He said, I have one at home. I said, everybody's got them. I said, what are you going to do about it? You know, it was awfully hard for that fellow to take that computer back to the company and talk to his boss about it.

It's scalding, really, the shame connected with it. The fact that everybody was doing it didn't help him a bit. But when he came back and told me, he said it was just like a tongue removed from his shoulders.

And since then, that fellow has been enjoying something of what I call the release of the spirit. He's a free man. And he thought he was happy having that computer at home.

Hard for us to realize how our society is shot through with all kinds of dishonesty like this. A young Christian fellow goes to apply for a job. He's going to work for a potato chip company.

I was thinking of this yesterday with our humidity. And he's trained for the job. His job is to take these paper bags with potato chips and go into the supermarkets.

And they have racks, and they clip these bags of potato chips onto the rack. And they said to him, now, when you go in, always carry a sharp pencil with you and puncture the bags of our competitors. And of course, you know, talk about a wet noodle.

The only thing worse than a wet noodle is a damp potato chip. What do you say? He said, I can't do that. He said, I'm a Christian.

My loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I can't do that. And he kept his job in that particular case.

They didn't force the point. He not only kept his job, he kept his character too, didn't he? And that's even more important. A young person is selling.

A customer comes in and urges him to compromise, to do something dishonest. And says, go ahead, your boss isn't looking. And he said, my boss is always looking.

And that's the way we should live, with a sense that the Lord Jesus Christ is watching everything that we do. There's a problem with purchasing agents, isn't it? Purchasing agents for large corporations. They have salesmen coming in to them all the time with their wares.

And at Christmas time, the gifts start flowing in. Big boxes of oranges from Florida. Jars of preserves from Oregon.

Sometimes bottles of liquor from who knows where. I know there's a question among businesses today about the ethics of this. But I know certain companies that would fire a purchasing agent on the spot if he ever accepted any of those things.

Why? Because it's a gift that perverts judgment. There are no conditions attached to the gift. But the idea is, when you have to order glass for these automobiles, you'll be thinking of us because of that box of

oranges.

But you do have an ethical situation arising there. What would you do if you were a Christian lawyer? Would you defend a criminal whom you know to be guilty? Would you handle a divorce case between Christians who aren't supposed to go to law against one another? What would you do if you were an airline stewardess serving liquor? Is it worse to be a drunkard or to make drunkards? I've always felt that it's worse to make drunkards than to be a drunkard. I don't know how you feel about it.

What would you ever do if you were a used car dealer? And you know cars, but your victims don't. What would you do if you were a baseball player, if you were an athlete playing on the Lord's Day? When the big games are on Lord's Day morning, and the temptation to keep people away from the meetings of the church in order to watch the game. To me, that was what was amazing about the whole story of in Chariots of Fire, of a young fellow who wouldn't run in the Olympics on the Lord's Day.

That happened in 1924. And all these years later, God resurrects that story, and it becomes popular in our country. A most astounding thing.

Them that honor me, I will honor. What if you were an architect, and somebody came along and they wanted to build a nightclub. Would you design it? I always say no, I wouldn't design a nightclub.

How about a modernistic church? I don't know which is worse. A nightclub or a liberal church, spewing out all the doubts and denials about the word of God. How about if you were the business manager of a Christian institution, and you desperately needed money at the time, and a brewery came along and offered to help you.

And so it goes. We could go down through the list. I had this situation come close to me in life, where people were ordering oil from a local oil dealer to heat their house, and he was on the board of assessors.

If you bought oil from him, you could get a certain abatement on the assessment, the value of your house. You didn't buy oil from him, you didn't get it. There was no way you could get it.

I say, whenever the dollar is involved, the temptation is all the greater, isn't it? Voltaire once said, When it comes to money, all men are of the same religion. That's a low blow. And I think you and I have to disprove that.

And you know, it could very well be that the Lord is speaking to some of our hearts today. It could very well be that some of us have been cutting corners. Some of us have been doing things that haven't been quite right.

And now we've come to Corona, and maybe the Lord is speaking to us. Maybe there's been a chill. Maybe we've succumbed to the chill of our environment, because everybody was doing it, we go along and do it.

And now God is speaking to us. And our hearts are tender before him. I wonder if some of us are going to go back from Corona and make things right.

Return that computer to the company. Return that software to the company, or return those paperclips to the company. It really doesn't make any difference, does it? Whether I help myself to any of the stationary, or to something larger.

Is God speaking to our hearts today? Is he calling us back to a life of a tender conscience toward him and toward all men? I believe this is what gives power in our lives. And I believe that failure to be tender before the Lord in this area is what oftentimes seals our lips. You might think nobody will ever know, but it makes a difference just the same.

It makes a difference to me, it makes a difference to those I come in contact. There isn't that power in my life. The little foxes spoil the vines.

So we look to the Lord in prayer, and while our heads are bowed, let's all search our own hearts this morning. Maybe you're a farmer, and there have been problems come up. Difficult, you're trying to make a living.

You want to make an honest living, and yet there have been temptations to shortcut that you want to make it right. Maybe you're a businessman, maybe you're a housewife. None of us escapes these temptations.

God is speaking to you this morning. Will you determine before him in prayer to stop these practices and to make restitution for any wrong that has been made? And may I make a plea while our heads are bowed to our young people to always do the thing that's right, to always honor God when these decisions come up. When you have to make these decisions, God will honor you.

If you want to make history for God, and I hope you do, always maintain a conscience that's void of offense toward God and men. Father, we've been reminded this morning of the very corrupt society we live in. We've known how corrupt it is politically with all its water gates and all the rest.

Sometimes the business world seems so respectable outwardly with business suits and ties and all the rest. And yet, Lord, we know that inside it's the world with all its corruption. Father, we pray that we might indeed be a separated people.

We pray that we might be a holy people. We pray that we might dare to be different. We pray that we might dare to swim against the tide.

Oh, God, put starch in our characters. Then we'll be able to stand fast for you amid the encircling gloom. We do pray.

And if we have been remiss, if there are areas in which we have not done the thing that pleases your heart, oh, God, give us grace to go back, to make things right, and to make a new start for you and for your kingdom. Lord Jesus, unseal the lips that have been sealed by engaging in corrupt practices, we pray. And help us always to do the thing that is right, no matter what the cost may be.

Father, may each of us prefer to go home to heaven with a good conscience than stay on earth with a bad one. We ask in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

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