

Holiness in Romans

by Zac Poonen

Genuine holiness involves recognizing one's own sinfulness and pursuing a life of thankfulness and obedience to God.

Duration: 59:46

Scripture: Joshua 13:1, Romans 5:1-6, Philippians 3:14, Hebrews 3:13, Hebrews 12:2, James 4:17, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Christian Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine holiness, starting with acknowledging the sin in our lives and striving to live in alignment with Romans chapters 6, 7, and 8. It highlights the need for leaders in churches to be godly examples, focusing on living out the principles of grace and truth seen in Jesus Christ. The message challenges individuals to continually seek God's light on their lives, repent daily, and press on towards the standard of Christ-like holiness without comparing themselves to others.

Transcript

That is Romans. Paul was a very clever man who could think in a systematic way. And so God used him to explain the gospel in a very clear way in Romans.

And particularly Romans chapter 6 and chapter 7 are not at all understood by most Christians. And those who don't understand those two chapters can never never become holy. They can attain a certain amount of holiness which is on the outside.

But if you are an elder brother, you cannot lead your church into godliness if you yourself are not living in Romans 6, 7 and 8. The reason why many problems arise in many churches is because the leader is not a godly man. You read in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3 that even the churches planted by the apostles, the elders, many of them were ungodly. The apostles planted those churches because no man can make another person godly.

And just because you are associated with Paul or John, so in one church the Lord told the people in Revelation 3, Remember this was a church planted by the apostles. And we think that every church planted by the apostles is a godly church. But see the Corinthian church where Paul spent one and a half years.

Paul went away and the church went down. In Ephesus Paul was there for three years. But he went away and the church went down.

He told them, I know that after I go all the wolves will come inside. So why couldn't the wolves come in when Paul was there? Because he was a very godly man and the wolves were scared of him. But these other elders there, they were all compromisers and the wolves were not scared of them.

You have a name that you are alive but you are dead. Is it possible for an elder today to have a name that he is alive and be dead? Yeah, a person can say, I am associated with CFC. The Pharisees came and said to John the Baptist, we are children of Abraham.

John the Baptist said, don't glory in that, that's no use. God can raise children from these stones. So we have to recognize that as time goes on, compromise comes in every church.

Many elders begin to seek their own and they draw away disciples after them. Or they compromise in their own standards. And then the church goes down.

The Bible says, if a man cannot bring up his own children in a godly way, how can he bring up a church? That's impossible. So what I have said to people when they go away from Bangalore, I say, if there is a CFC church there, you go and join that. But if you find that's not a godly church and the leader is not a godly man, and you find another Pentecostal church which is more spiritual with a godly pastor, leave the CFC church and join that Pentecostal church.

Because my loyalty is not to CFC, my loyalty is to Jesus Christ. And if a CFC elder is not a godly man, I will never support him. I would rather support a godly Pentecostal pastor.

See, we must not be narrow-minded and think that all the godly people in India are in CFC. It's not true. Because not everyone in our churches obeys and understands the truth we preach.

So make sure your loyalty is always to Jesus Christ. That's how it will be for me till the end of time. So let me turn to Romans 1. My desire is to lead you to a godly life.

Romans 1 begins with the description of ungodly sinners, worldly sinners. And they are described in verse 29 to 32. Filled with unrighteousness, wickedness, evil, deceit, murder, strife, slanders, haters of God and many things like that.

If you read those three verses 29 to 31, you see wicked worldly sinners. And three times it says, God gave them up, God gave them up. Verse 24, God gave them up.

Verse 26, God gave them up. Verse 28, God gave them up. It's when God keeps on giving up people that they fall into sin.

See nowadays in western countries, men are marrying men. And that is also a result of God giving them up. See verse 26, God gave them to degrading passions.

And verse 27, the men abandoned the natural function of the women and burned in their desire for other men. That's a result of God giving them up. Many Christians don't realize that.

God has put a restraining influence all over the world. That's why even among non-Christians, you don't find so many men going after men. It's a normal desire is men with women.

But when God removes that restraining influence, then men go after men. And now there's a teaching, they say that people are born that way. That's a lie.

When God gives them up, they go that way. And now I want to show you where this downward fall begins. Where does it all begin? Romans chapter 1 and verse 21.

When they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks. So, what is the first sin that leads people downward into all these terrible things mentioned in verse 29 to 31? The first sin. Listen carefully because many of you may have this sin.

Unthankfulness. Verse 21, they knew God, they did not honor him and were not thankful. When you're not thankful for what God has given you, when you complain about your parents, when you complain about the size of your house, when you complain about the food you get, when you're always complaining, complaining, complaining, you're already started going downwards.

Compare yourself with millions of people in India who are much less than you. I want to say to all of you one thing, be thankful. Be thankful for your wife.

You think your wife is bad? There are a million wives in India who are worse than your wife. You think your husband is bad? There are a million husbands in India worse than yours. Don't look for perfection.

You don't deserve a perfect wife because you're not a perfect husband. You don't deserve a perfect husband because you're not a perfect wife. This is the foolishness of man.

They are imperfect themselves but they expect their partner to be perfect. They are imperfect themselves but they expect their elders to be perfect. They are unthankful and unthankful is the first step downwards into this pit.

They are unthankful and unthankful is the first step downwards into this pit. So remember, this is a very serious sin to be unthankful. Don't take anything for granted that you deserve it.

Your parents serve you but they don't have to serve you. You don't have to say, of course they have to do it, I'm their child. Be thankful.

Husbands, be thankful for your wives. Husbands, be thankful for your wives. Even today when my wife brings me a cup of coffee, I say, thank you.

I don't say, well, you're my wife, you have to do that. I have thanked people who did some favors to me 20 years ago. I say, I remember you gave me a ride from one place to another 20 years ago.

Why do I do that? Jesus said, if a person gives even a cup of cold water, I will not forget it. One of my disciples. So I can remember, I can imagine in the day of judgment, Jesus saying to someone, 2000 years ago you gave a cup of cold water to my servant Peter.

Here's your reward. I want to follow Jesus. I want to be thankful for people who have even given me a cup of cold water.

Many of you say in CFC, we want to be like Jesus. Start being like Jesus in this area of thankfulness. And don't be thankful just to those who are older than you and senior to you.

I would say thank you to a little child if he does something for me. I don't believe I'm senior to anybody. A little child is probably closer to heaven than me.

That's what Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is like these children. So I want to treat little children with respect and be thankful. If you don't know how to smile and talk kindly to a little child, you are not like Jesus Christ.

If you go to a home and you are only interested in talking to the adults, you are not like Jesus Christ. But I've seen many believers like that. They only talk to the older people in the house.

They are not like Jesus Christ, even if they belong to CFC. Because Jesus loved little children. Start being like Jesus, not in preaching, but in loving little children.

Many years ago, I had a great passion in my life to be like Jesus Christ. That is holiness. So as I looked through the scriptures, I found different things about Jesus.

One, he loved children. Not like the disciples who were like the Pharisees. Those who don't love children are Pharisees.

So I said, I want to be like Jesus. I want to talk to little children. Particularly when I visit a home.

Be thankful. That's the first lesson we can all learn. In Romans chapter 2, it speaks of the religious sinner.

The other was a worldly sinner in chapter 1. In chapter 1, we read about worldly sinners. In chapter 2, we read about religious sinners. And verse 19, you are confident that you can guide others and lead others.

And you are confident that you are at verse 20, a corrector and a teacher of others. But you are just as guilty of the others. So, in the end, he says, therefore there is no difference.

Romans 3, 22, last part. There is no distinction. All have sinned.

The wicked worldly sinner and the religious sinner. The thief and the other brother in the church. All are sinners.

And all fall short of the glory of God, verse 23. Verse 11, there is no one who seeks for God. Some of you may say, no, I sought after God.

I believe Romans 3, 11. I don't believe you. No, verse 11.

There is no one who seeks after God. So, if you say you seek after God, I won't believe you. I believe the word of God, there is no one seeks after God.

God sought after me. That's how I found Him. If you think that you seek after God, you will become proud.

Because you think you are better than some of those other people who didn't seek after God. Believe what the Bible says. There is no fear of God in their eyes, verse 18.

You may say, no, from childhood I had the fear of God. My parents brought me up that way. You may say that, but I don't believe you.

I believe what the Bible says, there is no fear of God in anybody's eyes. Whatever people call fear of God is external good behavior. That's all.

Verse 10, there is nobody righteous, not even one. You cannot enter genuine holiness unless you believe these verses. I have seen through many years, many in CFC churches, even many elder brothers, because they did not start with Romans 3, verses 10-18.

You read Romans 3, verses 10-18 sometimes, and ask yourself, is this true of me? Or do you believe that you were a little different child when you grew up? I was brought up in a very God-fearing family. My father never took me once to a cinema. We had no television at home.

He never took us to any worldly place. He used to send us to Sunday school every Sunday. Outwardly, I was a very good boy.

I didn't commit adultery or murder or steal a bank or anything like that. But shall I describe my life to you? I'll read from verse 10. I was not righteous.

I did not understand. I did not seek after God. I turned aside.

I became useless. Verse 12, I did not do good. My throat was an open grave.

My tongue kept on deceiving. The poison of asps was under my lips. My mouth was full of cursing and bitterness, even if I did not always express it.

My feet were swift to shed blood. That means to hurt others. Destruction and misery was in my path.

The path of peace, I did not know because I would fight with my brother and others. There was no fear of God in my eyes. That was a perfect description of me as an unconverted so-called God-fearing child.

And I'll tell you how that has helped me today. There is not a single sinner I have met whom I can look down on and despise. That preserves me in the path of holiness.

But I'm not saying that is the description of my life today. From there He has lifted me up to Romans chapter 8 and to Romans 12. But I started here.

If you want genuine holiness, acknowledge these things and start here. I have told the Lord, Lord, I'm not better than any suicide bomber. I'm not better than a terrorist who blows up a plane.

He was born of Adam, I was born of Adam. If I think I'm better than him, I'll never be holy. You know why Paul became the holiest man of his time? Because he recognized in the presence of God.

In 1 Timothy 1.15, I am the chief of sinners. If he were living today, I'd say, Paul, are you worse than the terrorists and the suicide bombers? Aren't they the chief of sinners? He'd say, no, I am the chief of sinners. Anyone of you who really pursues holiness, you will get this revelation from God that you feel you are the greatest sinner on the face of the earth.

At the time when you may be the holiest man on earth, that is what is called the paradox of genuine holiness. It's important to understand that. There are many times when I'm in the presence of God, I get a flash of light to see myself as the worst sinner on earth.

At a time when I'm not aware of any conscious sin in my life, because the light of God is so bright that you see things you never see otherwise. When you're far away from the light, you can think your shirt is clean. But the closer you come to God, you discover many little little spots which you didn't see otherwise.

And the brighter the light, the more you feel what a sinner you are in God's eyes. There's no room for pride. When Paul was about 50 years old, he said in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 9, I am the least of the apostles.

Ten years later, when he was about 60 years old, he goes down even lower. Ephesians 3, verse 8. Now he doesn't say I'm the least of the apostles. He says now I'm the least of all the believers in the world.

See how he's gone down? Another 5 years later, in 1 Timothy 1.15, he goes down even further. He says I'm the chief of all the sinners in the world. So what is progression in holiness? Being more aware of sin in your life which you never knew before.

It's the immature believer who thinks he's very holy. It's like the child in the first standard. He thinks he's known everything about mathematics because he can multiply 2 into 2 is 4. He's understood mathematics.

He also knows 3 into 3 is 9. But you go to the person who's studying PhD in mathematics. He says I know so little about mathematics. When you're in kindergarten spiritually, you think you're very holy.

And you look down on others. The closer you come to God, you see so much little little little spots which you never even knew when you were in kindergarten. I'll give you one example.

How many of you know that to expect thankfulness from another person is a sin? When you say, oh my children are so unthankful. Or somebody else, you did something, he's not thankful. Is he a sinner? Yes.

To be unthankful is a sin. But do you see that you're also a sinner in expecting that thankfulness? I never realized this for many years till I came a little closer to God. There was a brother whom we had helped tremendously when the church was in our home.

He often stayed in our house, ate in our house. And he grew up and lived a good life. We blessed him.

And then he went away and got a good job in some other place. Never heard from him for years. No letter, nothing.

And I thought in my mind, what an unthankful man. How many times he stayed in our house, he doesn't even write to us, tell us how he's getting on. And the Lord said to me, the problem is with you, not with him.

I said, me Lord, we did him good all the time he was with us. And the Lord said, you know that verse, inasmuch as you've done it to the least of these my brothers, you've done it unto me. And the Lord said, you did it as unto him, you did not do it as unto me.

But you must realize, when you serve my children, you're serving me. So don't expect thanks from them. Expect thanks from me.

If you have a complaint, the Lord says, have a complaint against me. I got light. I said, Lord, what a sinner I have been for so long, expecting thanks from people.

I got this light many years ago. And from that time, I never expected thanks from anybody for anything I've done for them. I've never expected thanks for any message that helped people or any money I gave to people, nothing.

Because I'm never serving people anymore. I'm serving my Lord. And that liberated me.

So I don't have a complaint now against anyone. That's just one example of how you can get light on yourself, where you think the problem is with the other person and it is with you. That is one example.

I can give you other examples which I discovered as I came closer to God. So you say, Brother Zak, give us some more examples. No, I won't.

Learn it from God, not from me. You get close to God, He'll show you the same thing. It's much better to get it first-hand from God than second-hand from me.

So, the closer you get to God, the more you see what a sinner you are. But we don't get condemned. Because as soon as I'm aware of a sin, I confess it and the blood of Jesus cleanses me.

So, what is your definition of sin? There are two definitions of sin in 1 John and in James. 1 John, here is how sin is mentioned in 1 John 3 verse 4. Sin is going against the law. Oh, next part of that verse.

Verse 4, last part. That means going against God's law. God says, don't do that and you go and do it.

That's one type of sin. You commit a sin. The other sin described is James 4 verse 17.

That is where God says, do it and you don't do it. One is God says, don't do it and you do it. That's 1 John 3. Here, God says, do it and you don't do it.

There are two types of sins. One is committing and the other is omitting. There are many more sins of omitting which we don't do.

Example, Hebrews 3.13 says, we must encourage one another daily. If you get angry with your wife, I am sure he has confessed it. Because God says, don't be angry.

And you did it. But here is another verse. Encourage one another daily.

When did you confess to the Lord? Lord, I did not encourage my wife. Have you ever confessed that sin to God? See, that is a sin but we don't confess it. It's not something you did.

Hebrews 3.13 says, encourage one another daily. You did not do it. Hebrews 3.13 says, why do I say wife because she is the one you see daily.

I am just giving you one example. Many of us think we are very holy but there are many sins of omitting which we are not doing. Many of us think we are very holy but there are many sins of omitting which we are not doing.

Genuine holiness is not, I don't do this, I don't do this, I don't do this, I don't do this, I don't do this. In the time of Elijah, there were 7000 people who had this negative testimony. What is their testimony? I don't bow down to Dayal.

That's good. But none of them could bring the fire from heaven. With a negative testimony you cannot bring the fire of God.

I don't do this, I don't worship idols, I don't go to cinemas, I don't slap my wife, I don't do this, I don't do that, I don't do the other thing. You are like those 7000 people who did not bow to Dayal, who could not bring the fire down from heaven. What was Elijah's testimony? He told, Ahab, as the Lord God lives before whom I stand, his testimony is positive.

I don't bow to Dayal. But I stand before God. That is true holiness.

Not the 101 things I don't do. What are the things you do? What are the things you do? So, let's turn to Romans 3.23 now. Here is the best definition of sin I have seen in the whole Bible.

You can't come to genuine holiness without getting this definition of sin. Sin is to come short of the glory of God. That's like saying in the Christian life, pass marks is not 40% but 100%.

Do you know that pass marks in the Christian life is 100%? Anytime you come short of that, you are sinning. And it's good to recognize that as the standard. So, what is this phrase, glory of God? First, when I was young and I read that, I thought it was some bright light, glory of God.

But as I compared scripture with scripture, I found glory of God is not some bright light. Glory of God, John 1.14 says, was seen in Jesus Christ in his life. John 1.14, we saw the glory of God in him, full of grace and truth.

So, the glory is not some bright light. The glory of God is the life of Jesus, full of grace and truth. The perfect balance of grace and truth.

Who could speak with compassion to an adulterous woman, you are forgiven, don't sin again. Who could forgive a life long murderer on the cross saying, today you will walk with me in paradise. Who could touch the leper with his hands and comfort them and heal them.

And with the same hands take a whip and chase all the money changers out of the temple. Who could say to one person, your sins are forgiven you. And to a group of Pharisees, you generation of vipers, how will you escape the damnation of hell.

That is grace and truth. Very few people have it. Lot of people have truth.

But no grace. Some people have lot of grace but no truth. That's why we need grace and truth.

And because we are imbalanced, God gives us other brothers who are the opposite of us so that there can be a balance in the church. So, their emphasis is the opposite of ours and there is a balance. None of us is perfect.

Only Jesus was perfectly balanced in grace and truth. We all are short of that glory. We don't have to consciously commit sin.

When you come short of grace and truth, you are sinning. That's why everyday we have to pray, forgive us our sins. Even if I have not consciously sinned in a single way for 24 hours, I have to say, Lord forgive my sins.

Sins that I am not even aware of. Because I did not behave perfectly like Jesus Christ yesterday. And you say, where was that? I say, I don't know.

But unconsciously. There must have been something in my behavior or speech which was not Christ like. When I am aware of it, I can confess it.

But if I am not aware of it, how can I confess it or get rid of it? Our body is like the land of Canaan with many giants ruling it. Many sins that rule this body. And the Israelites could not kill all the giants in one day.

The Egyptian soldiers were all buried in a moment in the Red Sea. One moment. God did it.

That is a picture of the old man being crucified in one moment. But the lusts of the flesh are not finished in one moment. The flesh and old man are different.

The lusts of the flesh are like the giants in Canaan. They have to be killed not by God but by the Israelites one by one. So as I get light on, my old man was crucified with Christ long ago.

God did that. Those are the Egyptian soldiers. But these Canaanite giants, I have to kill one by one in God's power.

But I can kill only the ones I see. How can I kill the giants in the north of Canaan I have not even seen yet? The Israelites could see some giants and many giants they have not yet seen. Same way in our life.

There are sins that I see, I can kill them. But there are unconscious sins which I don't even know. But if I kill some giants and make progress, I will see those other giants which I don't see now.

And little by little by little I can conquer the whole land. The Lord told Joshua at the end of his life, there still remains a lot of land to be possessed. That's a great verse to remember all our life that there's a lot of land still to be possessed in our life.

Joshua 13 verse 1. Joshua 13 verse 1. The Lord said to Joshua, you are old and advanced in years and very much of the land remains to be possessed. There are still regions of the Philistines and the Jesuits and all still the giants are ruling there. It's like that in our life.

If you are lazy and you conquered one or two sins and you are satisfied there, you will never see the other giants. The Lord wants the whole of Canaan to be possessed but you are lazily sitting congratulating yourself that you conquered one or two sins. That's the trouble with a lot of people in CFC.

They have conquered one or two sins and they are sitting back. I am happy. Other people don't see me losing my temper.

Praise the Lord. What about those secret sins other people don't see? And what about other sins which you don't even know? The giants in the northern part of Canaan. You don't even know that they exist.

You foolishly think that you got rid of sin in your life. There are 100 sins that you still haven't conquered in your life and you are sitting back comfortably. You are not weeping at night saying, Lord show me, give me light on myself.

You are not praying, Lord I have not yet become like Christ. Give me light on myself. If you are really serious about holiness, you will say, Lord I have still come short of the glory of God.

I haven't got 100% yet. Paul said, I have not yet reached but I am pressing on. This is the only thing I do in life.

But until then, do I condemn myself? No. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Because Romans 5.1, we have been justified by faith.

Romans 5.9, we are justified by His blood. So the blood of Christ not only cleanses me, blocks out my sin, but justifies me means, makes me look as if I have never sinned at all in my life. It deals with my past 100%.

God looks at me as if all my 76 years I have never sinned. The blood of Christ has justified me. I am clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

But that doesn't mean I have conquered all the lusts in my flesh. The ones I have seen, I have conquered. But there are these unseen giants in the north of the land which I still have to see.

So like Paul, I say, I am pressing on. And I will never stop pressing on until Christ comes again. The great danger is when you are holier than everybody else in your church.

You can sit back comfortably. I don't do that. Because I never, never, never compare myself with other believers.

God is my witness that I never compare myself with any other believer. So there is zero danger of pride. But I always compare myself with Jesus Christ.

I run my race looking unto Jesus. And then every day I find something to repent in my life. Every day.

And I judge myself every day. You want to go this way? You will become genuinely holy. But never be proud of it.

Because you never compare yourself with anybody else. And you will always be humble because you are always comparing yourself with Jesus Christ. The only people who have problem with pride are the ones who compare themselves with others.

You got 25%. And you are proud. Because all the others in your church got 10, 15, 5 and all that.

But you have failed. Pass marks is 100% and you got only 25. Let's pray.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, help us never to deceive ourselves. Lead us into that holiness which is genuine.

The one that Jesus had. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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