

Chuck Smith:

A certain psychologist has written to me because several Calvary Chapel pastors had gone to him for counseling. 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. These pastors were willing to go and bare their hearts to the psychologist. He wrote to me and said, "There are a lot of troubled pastors that maybe you are not aware of, but I see them in my practice."

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

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. So often, holiness is defined as sort of an outward form of dress or things of that nature. Many times I feel that I am holy because of what I do not do, rather than truly understanding what holiness is. 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, my own sinful state, my worthlessness, and my total dependency upon His grace and upon His mercy. I realize that I must never presume upon the grace and the mercy of God.

I feel like a father to most of you. I feel like Paul. You are my sons, my "Timothys" in the faith. I have a heart for you, a concern for you. When one of the pastors falls, my heart breaks and I am disturbed. Unfortunately, we have had so many this past year who have fallen that we felt it was important that we talk very straight about these issues and give a warning. We cannot be there next to you day by day; but we can help set principles, as the Bible gives us certain principles. Peter said, "And if you do these things, you will never fall" (cf. 2 Peter 1:10). There are guidelines and principles that we can establish in our lives that will keep us from the edge. I do not want to live near the edge at all. I am anxious to live close to the center, just as close to God as I can.

When you are living as close to God as you possibly can, then you are not concerned about where the edge is. There are so many people who want to live next to the edge. In fact they come to me all the time with questions—"Can a Christian do this and still be a Christian? Where is the edge? How close can I get? How much can I dabble? How much can I do? How far can I go and still be on the safe side?"

A king named Asa in 2 Chronicles had a tremendous encounter in experiencing the delivering power of God and the victory that God had wrought for them. Coming back flushed with the victory, the prophet came out to meet them and said unto the king, "The Lord is with you while you will be with Him" (2 Chronicles 15:2). And yes, the Lord is with us. We have just seen God work. Oh, it is glorious to have the Lord with us. And if you seek Him He will be found of you. We sought the Lord and He gave us victory. Glory to God! You are flushed with God's working. But then the prophet went on to say, "But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). Maybe Asa was thinking, "Oh well, yes, of course. Thanks but why would I forsake God after what God has done? Are you kidding? No way! I appreciate the warning, but surely it is not necessary."

You have to be careful about that. God is faithful and God warns us. The problem is that many times we do not feel the warning is necessary. God never warns you unnecessarily, though you may think so at the time. I have to confess that whenever I have fallen, God was faithful and He

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warned me in advance of the fall. Many times I felt like saying, "Lord, thank You. It was nice of You, but really, there is no problem there, Lord. I had that area wired a long time ago. I do not need the warning; but thank You, Lord." And invariably, when I have ignored the warnings, I have fallen.

Because of what God had done and because of the excitement over seeing 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. They all made a covenant together to serve the Lord. These were great and exciting times. As a result, God blessed and prospered the kingdom under Asa. As long as he sought the Lord, God made his ways prosper. God was sought and found by Asa.

Then we read that in the later years of Asa's life, the king of Israel decided to invade the kingdom of Judah. He began to build fortified cities. The purpose was to cut off the supplies coming south and to set siege against Judah. We read in 2 Chronicles 16 that Asa took money out of the treasury and sent messengers up to the Syrian king, Ben Haddad. And he said, "We have a covenant and I want you to attack Israel from the north." Asa sent money to hire the mercenaries to invade Israel from the north so that Baasha, the king of Israel, 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. Baasha was forced to take the troops building Ramah and these fortified cities next to Jerusalem, and send them north to defend the northern borders. King Asa sent his troops out and they dismantled these fortified cities. They took the materials that were being used and they reinforced and fortified the cities of Judah. It was a successful, brilliant strategy, and it worked.

Whenever you have an idea or a brilliant strategy and it works, you feel sort of proud about yourself. The prophet Hanani came unto Asa and said,

Because you have relied on the king of Syria and not relied on the Lord your God, therefore 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 you. But now, you are not relying on the Lord. Do you not realize that God is looking throughout the whole world to find people in harmony with Him that He might bless them? (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:7-9)

Asa's response was that 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 is 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 for God to prosper our ministries. But the more prosperous your ministry becomes the greater the danger of no longer trusting and relying on God, like Asa. Instead you begin to rely upon your devices, your schemes, and the resources that God has begun to supply you with. There is no longer that sense of the necessity to rely on God. "We have to trust God. We do not know what else to do. We have written to Calvary Chapel and they cannot send us any money. What are we going to do? We are going to have to trust God." That is a good position to be in. What is so bad about trusting God? What are you telling these people to do all

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the time? It does not hurt us to trust God. It keeps us close. And that time of necessity is a good time. It is growth time.

God has such a difficult time though, blessing and prospering His people, because it seems like when the blessings and the prosperity come then we sort of feel independent. Like Asa we start thinking, "Well, I can take money out of the treasury. I will just send it up to Ben Haddad and have him send his troops. We do not have to call on the Lord for this one." Read the tragic story of Asa. In the end he became diseased in his feet and he sought the aid of physicians who did not seek the Lord. And Asa died of the diseased feet (2 Chronicles 16:12).

The intimation in the Scripture is that had he sought the Lord, the Lord would have healed him. It is 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 to feel that you would never, ever, turn away from it. You

think that because of your full, total, long commitment, God blesses you. The church grows. Things are prospering. In this period somehow we do not feel the same necessity of keeping so close to God. Somehow we think that we can now do it ourselves and we begin to forsake the Lord. Before we know it, we are doing things that we never dreamed that we would ever do. We have been caught in Satan's grip and with the prosperity and the notoriety have come groupies, hangers-on, and temptations.

There have been too many pastors who have fallen this past year because somehow, some way, that commitment to holiness, that commitment to serve God has completely diminished. Somewhere Satan made an inroad. Somehow Satan got in and destroyed their marriages, and destroyed their ministries. Thank God He loves His church. The churches are going on. These pastors have lost everything and they do not know where to go, they do not know what to do. They are wondering, "Where do I go from here?" God help us. I want to keep you from that place if possible. I am tired of these guys coming, crying, and repenting. Oh, they have to do that and I know that, but I do not want to hear it. I would rather hear, "We are just serving the Lord and God is so good. I am walking close to Him." I want to hear about continued blessings. I do not want to hear of the break-ups, of the pain, of the misery, of the hurt, of the lostness when everything has gone down the tubes.

We have to be on guard because Satan is out to destroy you and he is 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. You cannot give any foothold. You cannot open the door even slightly. Do not even give the slightest little opening because he will take it and use it as a beach hold. He will seek to expand it in your life. You must not open the web to the pornography that is available—not even out of curiosity. You do not need to know what is there. The Bible tells us to be simple concerning evil (cf. Romans 16:19). I am not even interested in what might be available to titillate my senses. That is not my desire. My desire is to live close to God, to walk with Him as closely as I possibly can.

Paul gives some good rules for a continuous walk. He said, "You are not to walk as the other gentiles walk" (cf. Ephesians 4:17). You are not to walk as the world. And he seeks to describe the way the gentiles 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? On Halloween I was watching the news on television and it gave a report about how Halloween was being celebrated in San Francisco. As you can probably imagine, in San Francisco there were strange people out in the street with crazy costumes. I saw men out there dancing with tutus and all. That is mindless. I

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mean, who in their right mind would dress up like that and parade in the streets of San Francisco? That is just mindless.

To be perfectly frank with you, I have a problem with the robes that the Pope wears and his tall hat, and the Masons who put on their little bit with the robes and costumes. It does not make sense! People do not seem to stop to consider why they are doing these things. To me it is mindless.

Isaiah said, "The problem with people is that they do not think." And that is true of the world—they do not think. Isaiah said,

They have not known or understood, for God has shut their eyes that they cannot see, their hearts that they cannot understand. And none considers in their heart, neither is there knowledge or understanding to say, "Well, I took this branch of a tree. 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.'" [Isaiah said,] They do not stop to consider that is 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. (cf. Isaiah 44:14-19.)

It is mindless. It does not make sense. When you really look at sin, it does not make sense because it is so destructive. As someone has shared, we need to stop and consider the possible consequences when we begin to even entertain sin in our thoughts. Temptation starts with the thoughts. And then when the will embraces it, you are in trouble.

We need to put up safeguards because we want to continue to be ever closer to the Lord. May you never be in that state as the Ephesians where you have left your first love or you have grown cold. May you be ever closer to the Lord.

In Ephesians 4:18, speaking of the gentiles, Paul said that they were walking in the emptiness of their minds, having their understanding darkened.

In Romans he said,

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Their foolish hearts were darkened because the god of this world blinded their eyes. Because they did not want to retain God in their mind, God gave them over to reprobate minds. (cf. Romans 1:21-22)

The world does not stop to think. Being alienated from the life of God through the mindless ignorance that is in them, they are living in that fallen state of the two-dimensional man—body and mind. The mind is absorbed only with the body and there is no awareness or consciousness of God. And thus, they are dead in their trespasses and sins.

Jesus said,
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Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both fall in the ditch. (Matthew 15:14)

Paul gives us the key:

That you put off concerning the former manner of living, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. (cf. Ephesians 4:22)

Lust is so deceitful. The mind is 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 always disappointing. You were hoping, you were dreaming, you were thinking that it was going to bring so much more than it does. Lust is a deceiving thing. To give into it is not going to bring you all that you were thinking, 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.”

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, that you might put on the new man. (cf. Ephesians 4:23-24)

So, here is the thing with holiness: it is not only what you don’t do, but it is also what you do (emphasis added). In other words, there is the negative and the positive side to holiness. Too many times we only hear the negative side of holiness emphasized. When we were kids growing up, we used to recite, “I don’t smoke and I don’t chew and I don’t go with girls that do.” That was our way of saying, “I am holy.” Holiness is far more than just what I do not do; it is what I am doing.

We put off, but then we put on. Paul said,

You put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (cf. Ephesians 4:24)

It is not true holiness until you “put on” the positive aspects.

He goes on to say, “Therefore, put away lying.” That is the negative side. What is the positive side? “Speak every man the truth with his neighbor.” The negative is put off lying, but you do not stop there. You begin to speak the truth every man with his neighbor (cf. Ephesians 4:25).

In (Ephesians 4:28), he said, “If you have been stealing, do not steal anymore” (paraphrased). That is the negative side. The positive side is: “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” (paraphrased).

It is more than just not stealing—it is getting a job so that I can help provide for those that are in need, so that I can give.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, [That is negative.] but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it might minister grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

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It is not just that I quit telling dirty jokes and corrupt communication and so forth. The positive side is that I am ministering to people when I speak to them. I seek to say those things that are going to edify them, build them up, and enrich them in the things of the Lord in order to draw them closer to Him.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31, NKJV)

That is negative. Put those things away and do not do that anymore. But the positive side is:

Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Holiness is not just what I don’t do anymore; it is what I am doing now, as I walk close to God and I seek to emulate God in all things.

We sang the lyrics, “Refiner’s fire, my heart’s one desire is to be holy.” How do we do this? We accomplish this by getting close to God. Our God is a consuming fire and the closer you get to Him, the more the junk, the dross, and the chaff will be consumed.

Draw close to God. Live close to God. Give no occasion to the enemy. Do not open the door even a crack. Make that a purpose of your heart. Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s meat. Make that the purpose of your heart. “I am not going to be defiled. I am going to live holy. I am going to live for God. I am going to live a committed life. I am not going to give any place for the enemy to come in.”

God has been good to us. I look around at the ministries and I see what God is doing, what God has done, and I am overwhelmed. I know that it has just got to be a work of God. Man could not do it. It is God’s work. We have 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 get extremely discouraged because there have been other great movements of God throughout history. What happened to Asa is a pattern of movements of God throughout history. They started 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?” (cf. Galatians 3:3). Guard yourself. Keep yourself. Satan is out to destroy you. He is

out to destroy the work of God. And Paul said, "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). Well, I think sometimes we are. He speaks about the wiles of the devil. He is a wily guy and he can come in where you are least expecting it. Keep close to God, as close as you can. God will give you the wisdom that you need. God will give you the discernment that you need. And Satan will not have a chance as long as you are close to God. It is when you begin to drift that he moves in.

I think of when the sons of God were presenting themselves to God and Satan also came with them and God said, "Oh where have you been?" Satan said, "Oh, I have been going up and down throughout the earth, to and fro through it." God said to him, "Have you considered My servant Job? He is a good man, a perfect man. He loves God; he 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

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describe a general studying a city to develop a strategy for attacking. "Have you been studying that fellow Job? Are you looking for the weakness, looking for the place to attack?" And Satan's awesome response is "Yes, I have been studying him I am sure I found the place of weakness. Does Job serve You for nothing? Look at how You have blessed him. Anybody would serve You if You blessed him like You have blessed Job" (cf. Job 1:6-9).

Satan has been studying this movement, you can be sure of that. And as God begins to bless your ministry, he is going to start studying you to develop the strategies to seek to destroy. These are the wiles of the devil. Satan has desired you that he might sift you as wheat. Stay close to Jesus. He said, "Peter, I have prayed for you" (cf. Luke 22:31-32). Stay close to Him. We do not have to go the way of all movements. We do not 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. Do not 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, we look at this past year and we see how Satan has come into the ranks. We see those who have been put on the sidelines and are sitting there just wondering what they are going to do next. How can they get back in the mainstream? Lord, it hurts to see the pain that they are going through. Lord, keep us. Help us. Lord, shake us. Do whatever is necessary. Help us, Lord, because You have told us to keep ourselves. And so, with Your help, with Your strength, with the power of Your Spirit, may we keep ourselves close to You. In the name of Jesus we pray, Father. Amen.