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Holiness: God's Character In Us



Cultivating Christian Character - Steve Gregg

In "Holiness: God's Character In Us", Steve Gregg defines holiness as sharing God's character. He argues that holiness is not just about external behaviors, such as abstaining from certain things, but about having God's joy and disgust towards certain things. He emphasizes that holiness is not just a religious thing or a matter of performing certain rituals, but about developing the character of Christ. Gregg believes that God entrusts his glory and reputation to believers, and expects them to become holy as He is holy.

Transcript

That's what I'm going to define holiness as, is God's character in us. Most Christians are familiar with the word holiness. Primarily in the Bible, the word holiness applies to God Himself.

But because God does not wish to remain alone holy in His universe, He has called us to holiness as well. And this holiness, I think, is important for us to understand. We need to define it.

Because there are many caricatures of holiness that Christians have held to and presented at various times. For example, some people think of holiness as a certain manner of dressing. That women should wear only long dresses, and men should wear old-fashioned clothing, and so forth.

I've been acquainted over the years with certain holiness groups. Not all holiness groups believe this way, but I have encountered some holiness groups that seem to feel that holiness consisted in dressing in styles that were in style in the 40s. Must have been a holy decade.

And essentially, holiness was a matter of outward appearance. There are some holiness groups that treat holiness as if it is a matter of abstaining from certain things. Abstaining from movies, dances, drinking, smoking, and things like that.

Chewing tobacco. That's what holiness is. Abstaining from those kinds of things.

And at least, if that isn't how they would define holiness, that is nonetheless the focus of holiness teaching in some sectors. Now, I'm not saying that you'll never find good biblical teaching on holiness. I'm sure you will in many places.

But there's also wrong ideas of holiness. So much so that holiness has often gotten the reputation of being boring, being out of step. And of course, by the way, it's good to be out of step in many respects with our society.

There's nothing wrong with being out of step with the world. But being out of step with the world doesn't mean you're necessarily holy. You can be very unholy and still be weird in the world's eyes.

Actually, people who are holy, in the sense that Jesus is holy, probably won't seem real weird in the world's eyes. Because all the sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes and those types felt quite comfortable around Jesus. And he was about as holy as anyone could ever possibly be.

And holiness, therefore, isn't comprised of dressing differently or simply abstaining from certain things that are worldly. Although, I will say this, if a person is concerned about holiness, they will abstain from worldly things. But you can abstain from worldly things and not have a lick of holiness in you.

And you can dress old-fashioned or modestly and not have a bit of holiness in you. Holiness is a positive thing. It is not the absence of something.

Holiness isn't just the absence of wrong behavior. It's not the absence of worldliness. Holiness is a positive attribute which is possessed, first of all, in God.

And is intended to exist in us as well. And we are to live, in all respects, holy. Let me first of all share with you some scriptures that accentuate the absolute necessity of being holy if one wishes to fellowship with God.

In Psalm 24, David asks this question in verse 3, Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? Now, where God lives is a holy place. The hill of the Lord is holy ground. In order to live in the presence of God, you have to approach into the holy place.

In fact, if we take the language of the book of Hebrews, we have to enter not only into the holy place, but into the holy of holies. The holiest of all. Now, in order to enter and to stand in the holy place, what must one do or be? Well, David asks that question and the answer comes in verse 4. He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Now, this business of having clean hands and a pure heart, this is, I think, part of what

comprises holiness, as we shall explore. In order to dwell in a holy place, you must be, at least in measure, you must be holy. In order to commune with a holy God, you must be holy.

In order to know or relate meaningfully with another being, you must share some characteristics with that being. There are people, no doubt, who become attached to such a thing as a goldfish. But they don't share very many characteristics with a goldfish.

And therefore, they can't become very intimate. They can't become very close to a goldfish. They may become fond of their goldfish.

In fact, they can probably sense that they have much more of an attachment to their goldfish than, say, a pet rock. Because a pet rock has nothing in common with you except that it's made of atoms and so are you. But a fish, at least, has this in common.

It has eyes. You have eyes. It has eyes.

I guess about there the similarity ends. It is alive. You're alive.

But, obviously, you can have very limited fellowship and communion with a goldfish because it lives in an entirely different environment. It can't even breathe where you live. And you can't breathe where it lives.

It can't communicate with you, and you can't communicate with it. You have so little in common with it that you could never really claim that your relationship with it is meaningful. Now, you move up the scale to higher beings like, say, a dog or a horse.

Now, although a dog or a horse is not a human and can't relate with you on a human basis, it shares much more in common with you than a fish does. And for that reason, your relationship with it can be more meaningful, believe it or not. I mean, anyone who's had a dog or a horse that they've been affectionate toward knows this.

Partly because these animals live in the same environment we do. They breathe the same air we do. We can interact with them much more.

They're more intelligent. They can respond to us. They can even be taught to do things so that we communicate with them and they respond.

You can even sense that they share some of the same emotions we do. But when you move from horses and dogs up to the scale of human beings, of course, the capacity for meaningful relationship is amplified, you know, many-fold. And the reason for that is because when you come to the point of talking about human beings instead of animals, you're talking about rational beings that can communicate verbally with you and that can share many of the same interests you have.

May have read some of the same books. May have some of the same hobbies. And even

among human beings, those that share more in common with you than others are likely to relate more meaningfully or more enjoyably with you than those with whom you have very little in common.

What I'm saying is the more there is likeness between two beings, the greater the capacity for meaningful relationship and fellowship between those two beings. Now, we wish to relate with God. We wish to approach God, to stand in His holy place, to commune with God.

David said, one thing I desire to the Lord, that will I seek that I may abide, that I may remain in the tabernacle, to meditate in the tabernacle, that I might behold the beauty of the Lord. How can I do that? Well, in order for me to do that, there must be some measure of likeness to Him. And that is why He calls us to become like Him.

If we would stand in His holy place, there must be something of holiness about us too. We must have clean hands and a pure heart. And the more we are like Him, the deeper the level, I think, of communion that we can enjoy with Him.

The more holy you truly will be, the more you will share God's joy in certain things and God's disgust with certain things. I mean, the more you share His sentiments, the more you are like Him in your perception of things, the more you and He will have regular and unfettered and unobstructed communion. Because that's just the nature of relationships.

The more like another being you are, the more the potential for you to have a relationship. Certainly we will never relate with God on an equal level, nor do we desire to. Our relationship with God will always be hierarchical.

He is always above us and we below Him. But the more we can become like Him, the more we can appreciate Him, the more we can understand why He thinks the way He does, says the things He says, reacts the way He does. God is a reactive God.

A lot of people don't like that. In a discussion I was having with a brother who is a Calvinist on the radio, he didn't like my theology because he said, that makes God responding to us. You know, if we have faith and then God saves us because we have faith, he says, that can't be true because that makes God respond to us.

I said, what's so heretical about that? Throughout the Bible I say a responsive God. Those who honor me, I will honor. Those who despise me, I shall lightly esteem.

God says, isn't that Him responding to them? He doesn't say, those that I honor will honor me, as if He honors us first and then we honor Him back. Now that could be true too, but He doesn't say that. He says that He responds.

If you honor God, you'll experience more of God. If you dishonor God, God will remain more aloof. To fellowship with God, you must enter into His holy place, and to enter into

a holy place, you must be, in measure, holy.

And I would say, as Christians, in increasing measure, as we grow and progress in the Christian life, we desire to become more and more holy, in the true sense of that word, in the sense that God is holy. In Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 14, it says, Pursue peace with all men and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. Now Christians are commanded, this is not an exhortation to non-Christians, this is not a command to non-Christians to get saved, this is talking to people who are saved, who are Christians, that's who the book is addressed to, people who have already come to Christ, and it says that they, we, should pursue after peace and after holiness, and if we do not seek after holiness, without holiness, no one shall see the Lord.

Now I don't know whether that means, in the end, whether we'll gaze upon him in heaven, as we are in the condition of the saved, or whether he means it in the sense that Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God. Pure in heart? Who shall ascend to your holy hill? He that is pure in heart? Clean hands and pure heart? The pure in heart shall see God. Without holiness, no one will see God.

I want to see God. I don't know whether it means in some sense now, in the same sense that the writer of Hebrews says, earlier in the same chapter, he says that we see Jesus, or he says, excuse me, in verse 2, he says we're looking unto Jesus. There's a sense in which we see him by faith, but of course we anticipate the time when we'll see him with our very eyes, but not without holiness, it won't happen.

Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. So we better pursue after holiness, and in order to do that, we better have an idea of what holiness is. Now, holiness is a concept that is fully developed in the Old Testament, and probably nowhere in the Old Testament so much as in the book of Leviticus, because Leviticus is the book of regulations for the priests, and basically laws of holiness, how to remain holy unto the Lord.

The priests, you might remember, a couple of the first priests were not very good at this, at being holy unto the Lord, and they got themselves burned up. But there's two ways to define holiness, both of them biblical, and both of them in Leviticus. One of them would be what I would call the objective definition of holiness.

Now, if you don't understand the difference between objective defined definition and subjective definition, I'll try to explain that in just a moment, the difference. But what I would call holiness objectively defined, I would find for you in Leviticus 20, in verse 26, where God said, and you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the peoples that you should be Mine. The word holy in the original language in Hebrew here, and in the Greek in the New Testament, literally means to be set apart.

Something is holy when it has been set apart for God, for divine use. The tabernacle was a tent. It was a holy building.

Now see, when we think of being holy, perhaps the first thing we think of is a way of acting, a way of dressing, a way of abstaining from certain things. That's what we call being holy. But first and foremost, the word holy means set apart for God.

This is an objective thing that is sort of independent of anything that you actually do. The tabernacle didn't do anything, but it was holy. The cups and the bowls and the snuffers and the candlesticks and the tabernacle, they were holy things.

The priests were holy. In fact, they were holy even when they behaved in an unholy way because they were set apart for God. And what set apart for God means is they were not to be used for anything except for God's purposes.

The tabernacle could not be used, for instance, for a tent meeting. They couldn't preach in the tabernacle. That's not what it was for.

It wasn't set apart for that. They couldn't use it for anything. They couldn't house homeless people in it because that's not what the tabernacle was for.

It was set apart for divine service of a certain kind. The priests were holy unto the Lord. That means they were set apart for God and they couldn't do anything else with their life but what God called them to do for Him.

The priests, for example, couldn't... If you were born a son of Aaron, in those days you couldn't just decide to become a carpenter or a fisherman or go into some other trade because you were set apart for one thing. Set apart for the service of God. That's what the priests were.

That's what being holy means. And what God says about Israel here is they are holy because He has separated them from other peoples to be His. Now, this is true of Israel in the Old Testament.

This is true of us in the New Testament, as we shall see, that God has set us apart for Him. In that sense, we are holy. That's why the Bible calls us saints.

The word saint comes from the very same Greek root as the word holy. Hagios. Saint means a holy one.

One who is holy. Now, you are a saint if you are a Christian. You might not always act like a saint.

That's what we're coming to next. You're supposed to. But whether or not you are acting as a saint or like a saint at this given moment, you are a saint in the sense that God has set you apart for Him.

And that is an objective reality that exists whether or not you are aware of it, whether or not you're living up to it. It is something that when you are born again, when you are

redeemed by Christ, you've been redeemed for something, and you've been set apart by God for that thing, whatever that may be. And having been set apart for God, it means that you cannot legitimately use your life for anything other than what God has set you apart for, whatever that may turn out to be.

You are not your own. You've been bought with a price. You now are owned by Him, and He has set you apart for something, and your task is to discover what it is He's set you apart for, and to do that, and nothing else but that, because you're holy unto the Lord.

You've been set apart for God. Hopefully, you're already doing the thing He's set you apart for, and I would assume that many of you are in the very vocation that you feel that God has called you to. And the next part, then, is a subjective definition of holiness that has to do with behavior.

This means that when we're called to be holy, we are called to behave as if we've been set apart for God. Now, we have been. We are holy in the sense that He has set us apart for Himself, but we are called upon to behave in a holy way.

And that behavior of holiness is defined in broad terms simply as this, being like God Himself. In Leviticus 11, verses 44 and 45, God says, I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy.

Also in verse 45, at the end of that verse, it says, You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. What is holy? It's what God is. You should be holy because I'm holy.

And you shall sanctify yourselves. Now, God has sanctified you. He has set you apart.

He has separated you from other people so that you would be holy and uniquely His. Now, what are you supposed to do about that? You're supposed to sanctify yourself. Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 3, Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

But in 1 Peter 1, and I have this in your notes there, 1 Peter 1, 14 and 15, Peter says, As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as He who has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of behavior, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy. That's 1 Peter 1, verses 14 and 15. He says, We are not to fashion our lives according to the former lusts, as Peter puts it, the former lusts in our ignorance.

When we were ignorant of God, what was there to fashion your life by? By the way, this presumes or presupposes, I should say, presumption is the wrong word, but this presupposes that our lives are being fashioned by us. We are commanded not to fashion ourselves a certain way, but to fashion ourselves another way. So, this indicates that in addition to God's work in us, there are things we are doing that contribute to the shape of our life, the spiritual shape and condition we are fashioning ourselves into.

Now, before we were Christians, the decisions we made that gave shape to our spiritual being had no higher basis for making such decisions than just what we desired. That's what it means, our lusts. When we were ignorant of God, we just did what we wanted to.

Lust means desire. We just did what we desired to do. We aimed at something we desired and took what steps we thought it would take to achieve what we desired.

And that's the best we could do. We didn't have any other higher basis for fashioning our lives or making decisions. But Peter says now that we are no longer ignorant, we should not fashion our lives according to the former lusts as in our ignorance, but we should fashion our lives according to the call of God, which is to be holy.

He says, but as he who has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of behavior. Now, this makes it very clear that being holy to the Christian doesn't just mean that objectively I stand in some kind of a position of separatedness in the mind of God. That God has not simply said, okay, as far as I'm concerned, you're different from other people.

I mean, when you got saved, you're in a totally different category than everyone else, and that's what it means to be holy. Well, it does mean that, but that's not all it means. That's the primary definition.

It means set apart for God. But there's more to it than that. Since I am set apart for God, I'm called to behave as one who is set apart for God.

I am to be holy in all my behavior. I'm supposed to fashion my life according to this call to be holy as He is holy. Now, what I'm going to suggest to you is that holiness takes in the whole, the whole character of God.

Because when He says, be holy like I am holy, it's clear that holy is what He is, and we're supposed to be like that. Now, there are some ways in which we can never be like God. When we talk about God's characteristics, when we talk about the nature of God, the attributes of God, there's really two categories that we need to consider.

There are, once again, I'll go for the word objective. There are the objective attributes of God. They tell the kind of being He is.

He's invisible. That's an objective attribute. It doesn't tell you anything about His character, because the devil's invisible too.

To say that God is invisible hasn't told you one thing about His character. It doesn't tell you what kind of person He is, only what kind of being He is. That's why I'm calling an objective attribute.

It's something that just tells what kind of a being God is. He's an invisible being. He's

also, as we read in Scripture, He's omniscient.

That means He knows everything. He's also omnipresent. That means He's everywhere at once.

He's also omnipotent, which means He has all power. He can do everything. These are what we would call objective attributes of God.

Once you know all these attributes, you still don't know what kind of person He is. Because there could be a being who's invisible, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and devilish in character. But God isn't.

What I'm saying is the objective attributes of God tell what order of being He is, what kind of being He is. Now, there's another class of attributes of God that I would call the character of God. And that tells what kind of a person He is.

Is He a good person or a bad person? Is He loving or is He vindictive? Is He just or unjust? Is He proud or is He humble? What kind of a person are we talking about when we talk about God? This other category of attributes of God are what I would call the personal attributes of God. He's got objective attributes that tell us what kind of a being He is. He's got personal attributes that tell us what kind of a person He is.

Now, I hope you understand the difference, because when I say we need to become like God, and God calls us to become like Himself, it's not talking about His objective attributes. We can never become invisible by trying. We can never become omnipresent, omnipotent, or omniscient.

That's just not going to happen. We are not of that order of being. We are human beings.

That's a different kind of being than God is. But when we talk about the personal attributes of God, we're talking about the character of God, His justice, His mercy, His faithfulness, His whatever, these personal attributes, these are the attributes of God that we are called to become ourselves. We are called to become like Him in these things.

And so the Bible exhorts us all the time to move in the direction of God's character. Now, it is possible for us to make mistakes in deciding whether we are holy or not, or even whether other people are holy or not. I don't think we should be spending as much time trying to decide if other people are as looking at ourselves, but sometimes we need to make judgments about people too.

You know, is this person spiritual or unspiritual? Is this person someone I can look to as a role model? Is he holy or is he not holy? And there are a lot of false standards by which people sometimes measure holiness or spirituality in other Christians or in themselves. And these standards will not help us to reach conclusions, but it will help us to recognize that these standards are to be, that we need to be aware of them so we don't make

wrong judgments. One of the things that holiness isn't necessarily is religious regularity.

Going to church all the time, paying your tithes, singing in the choir, teaching Sunday school or going to Sunday school regularly, never missing a Sunday in church. This is what I would call religious regularity. Now, a holy person may be extremely regular in all these things.

I'm not trying to draw some kind of a bold dichotomy between being religious and being holy because a holy person is very likely to be religious as well. But it's also possible for a person to be exceedingly religious and not at all holy. Holiness and religiosity are not the same thing.

And that is where a lot of people make mistakes. The Pharisees, for example, made this very mistake. They certainly saw themselves as among the holiest ones.

In Isaiah, talking about the attitude of Jews who are like the Pharisees, he said, they say stay away from me because I'm holier than thou. You might have thought that term holier than thou came from somewhere other than the Bible. It actually comes from the book of Isaiah, describing the attitude of certain Jews who were, this is before the Pharisees existed, but they certainly had the same mind as the Pharisees.

They thought themselves to be holier than other people. But on what basis? They were more religious. In Isaiah, God makes it very clear.

These people are holy only in terms of external things. They are regular in their temple service. They offer sacrifices.

They do many religious things. But they are not holy in the sense that God is looking for holiness. Jesus said to his disciples not to be religious in the same way that the Pharisees or the hypocrites were religious.

We're probably very familiar with the Sermon on the Mount's passage on this. In Matthew 6, verses 1-18, Jesus gives three examples of how the Pharisees or the hypocrites are religious, but not holy. He says, when you give alms, don't be like the hypocrites who sound a trumpet before themselves before they give so that they may be seen of men to be generous.

He said, when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites. They think with their many words they will be heard. And they pray on the street corners for all to see so they might appear to men to be religious.

He said, when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites. Giving alms, praying, fasting, religious activity for the Jew. He said, you can do all those things and you should.

By the way, Jesus said, when you do these things, He was talking to His disciples, it was

assumed you would. His disciples should do these religious things, but they should not do them the way the hypocrites do because, as Jesus said, they have their reward. Because they did them with unholy motives.

They did it to be seen by men. That was their whole motivation. They did not have a Godward motivation.

They had a self-centered motivation. And so you can be very religious and regular in religious activity and not be very spiritual or very holy at all. In Matthew 23, Jesus outlined a number of complaints He had against the Pharisees.

It's that chapter where repeatedly He says, Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees! And then He tells what He has against them. A few of those things are found in the verses I put in your notes. In Matthew 23, 14 He says, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. They made long prayers to pretend to be holy, but they were also exploiting, financially, apparently, exploiting widows. In the same chapter, verses 23 through 28, Jesus said, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith.

These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish and inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

Blind Pharisees! First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish and the outside that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly but inside are full of dead men's bones. Even so you are outwardly, you appear to be righteous to men but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Now, these people paid their tithes and in all other religious externals they were exact. They did not neglect anything that the law said to do except the more important things. They focused on things like paying tithes, offering sacrifices, abstaining from unclean things but they neglected what Jesus called the weightier matters of the law.

What are those? Justice, mercy, faithfulness, character things, holiness things. They were religious externally but nonetheless offensive to God. They were like a whitewashed tomb.

You know a tomb, the reason he gives this example is because dead bodies in the Jewish religion were an unclean thing. If you came into contact with a dead body you would be unclean for a week. You couldn't have contact with your family.

You couldn't go to the tabernacle. You couldn't do anything normal for a week until the defilement period was over. So people didn't want to come into contact with dead bodies.

Now, there are many pilgrims who came to Jerusalem from all over the area and there were a lot of caves around Jerusalem that were tombs. But they looked like ordinary caves and the average person who came from far away wouldn't know which caves were just caves and which ones were tombs and if they would actually go into a cave like Saul did for various necessary purposes and it turns out there's a dead body in there they'd be defiled for a week and they couldn't participate in the festivities at the Passover. So when the festival seasons were coming the local Jews would go out and they'd whitewash those caves that were tombs.

On the outside they'd paint them white to set them off as a tomb so people would know. And Jesus says these whitewashed tombs they remind me a lot of the people who whitewash them because now they look very clean and pretty on the outside but inside they have defilements. They have dead bones in there.

Contact with them will defile people. That's how it is with the Pharisees. Outwardly they're very religious but contact with them will defile you and they're full of defilement.

He likened them also to a cup full of swill full of something unclean but washed on the outside. Similar idea. The inside matters to God.

The outside can be cleaned up by religiosity but if the inside is not pure then there's no holiness there. You can be very religious very regular in religious activity but entirely unholy and not pleasing to God and never see God. Now another thing that should not be mistaken for holiness and only certain Christians would be inclined to make this mistake.

Others would not. Charismatic manifestations the ability to work wonders or do healings or prophesy or speak in tongues. By the way, I believe in all those things.

Some of you don't. Some of you do. I believe all those things are biblical but one thing I don't believe is that the ability to do those things means that a person who does them is holy.

In fact, it seems to me like some of the greatest moral scandals that have been publicized in my lifetime have been scandals associated with people who were involved with this kind of charismatic manifestation. I haven't heard as many scandals coming from the Baptist or the Presbyterian or the Methodist sector as I've heard coming from the Pentecostal and charismatic sector which I name only because I belong to that sector. And what it illustrates, of course, is that being charismatically gifted is no guarantee of being holy before God.

You may recall that Balaam was charismatically gifted but he was not saved. Saul, the

king, when he was pursuing David was in rebellion against God and died a lost man. But on occasion he fell in among the prophets and he prophesied.

It's so uncharacteristic for him that a saying went around, is Saul also among the prophets? Because it seems so weird that he would prophesy. He was such a bad guy. Caiaphas, in the very act of plotting to kill Jesus, prophesied according to John chapter 11, verse 50 and 51.

He prophesied without knowing he was prophesying but John says he prophesied being the high priest that year. Bad people can prophesy. Good people can too.

I'm not saying that everyone who prophesies is a bad person. I'm saying don't make the mistake of thinking that because someone exhibits charismatic gifts that they are necessarily a holy person. But don't make the mistake of thinking they're necessarily not a holy person either.

I'm saying that holiness is gauged on a different scale than this. Jesus made that so clear in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 7, verses 21 through 23, where he says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? Those are things that we would attribute to the charismatic sector of the church today. I mean, you're hearing a lot about people in the Baptist churches prophesying and working wonders and so forth. That's kind of a charismatic kind of thing to do.

Frankly, I must say, I'm glad to be acquainted with and in charismatic circles, although sometimes I'm embarrassed by them too. But the point of the matter is here, Jesus said on the Day of Judgment, Many who have prophesied in Jesus' name and cast out demons in Jesus' name and worked wonders in Jesus' name, what's he saying? Verse 23, Then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Obviously, prophesying, which Paul said is one of the greater gifts. Paul said, Desire the best gifts, especially that you may prophesy. Well, should we conclude then that if someone prophesies, they've got one of the greatest gifts and they must be holy? Well, these people prophesied and Jesus never even knew them.

So, obviously, to have charismatic gifts is no guarantee that a person is holy. In Deuteronomy 13, verses 1-3, God warned the Israelites not to be taken in by a prophet or a dreamer of dreams who gives them a sign or a wonder and it comes to pass. But through it, they try to lead you to worship other gods.

That person is a false prophet. He's not holy unto the Lord. He's leading you off to other gods.

But he does signs and wonders. He prophesies. It is possible for charismatic gifts to be in manifestation in a person who has no holiness at all.

Just this week, I didn't hear the name and I don't care to, but I heard through the grapevine of another case of a charismatic worship leader. Just this week, I guess, or last week, or sometime very recently, confessed to living in sin, stepped down from ministry. And, you know, this happens every once in a while.

But the man was very gifted. Wrote a lot of the worship songs that are sung in certain circles. But there's no guarantee that a man is holy just because he has gifts from God.

Even charismatic, supernatural gifts. Another thing we need to be careful about, and I don't know how many of you would be taken in by this, but I know some who are. Asceticism is not necessarily to be confused with holiness.

In the Middle Ages, because the church was so corrupt, people who wanted to distance themselves from the corruption of the church went off, in many cases, to live in caves and in monasteries and separated themselves physically from the corrupt society and adopted what's called a monastic lifestyle. And in order to really be holy, they not only did not associate with the corrupt society, but they punished themselves. They punished their bodies.

They thought this was a spiritual thing to do. They would flog themselves with whips. They would lay on uncomfortable beds.

They would eat only bland foods. They would wear uncomfortable clothing, rough garments against their skin, and so forth. This is called asceticism.

Asceticism is when, and it doesn't only come in, it wasn't just the monastics and Christianity, Greeks and pagans of all sorts have practiced asceticism, too. Holy men of all religions have been known to practice asceticism. Asceticism is where you punish your body with discomforts in order to be more spiritual.

And in the Middle Ages, one of the best Old Testament verses to summarize what holiness looks like is Micah 6.8, which I'm sure many of you can quote. It's been set to music a number of ways, too. It says, He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? Here it comes.

What does the Lord require of you? Well, He said to do justly, or to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Three things the prophet says this is what God requires of you. Now, we know what God required of Israel.

In other terms, He said, Be holy, be holy, be holy, for I am holy. And now He puts it into... He subdivides holiness into components. Be just, be merciful, be humble.

Why? Because God is just. Because God is merciful. Because God is humble.

Did you know God is humble? That's maybe one attribute. You don't usually think of God being humble, especially when He's always saying that we should praise Him and glorify Him and He's jealous over His glory and won't share it with another and so forth. It might not sound like He's very humble.

But it actually says in the Psalms that God humbles Himself even to behold the sons of men. For God to even know we exist and pay attention to us on a daily basis is for God to humble Himself. Why should He bother? Remember David said in Psalm 8, When I consider the stars and the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you've made, He says, what is man that you would be mindful of him? Or the son of man that you visit him? You want to see the humility of God? Look at Philippians 2. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but took upon Himself the form of a servant.

And in that state, He humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross. That's the humility of God. God is a humble God.

God is a just God. God is a merciful God. And for that reason, to be holy means to do justice like God is just.

To love mercy because God is merciful. To walk humbly because God is a humble God. And we are to become like God in His character.

These are personal traits, personal characteristics. This is the character of God and He expects us to take it upon to become that too. Now, I'm not suggesting He expects us to do this all ourselves.

It will take a number of sessions for me to share with you what I think the Bible teaches in general is how we get there from here. I'm just trying to define right now what it is, where it is we're trying to get to. What it is God's looking for.

In later sessions, we'll talk about what the Bible teaches about how to get into that condition from where we are now. Another place where a similar list of attributes is found is in a verse we read a moment ago, Matthew 23, 23, when Jesus said that the Pharisees were very regular in their payment of tithes. He said they neglected what He said were the weightier matters of the law.

There are some things weightier than others. Some things matter more to God than others. And what are those weightier matters? Jesus said justice and mercy.

Those two correspond with what Micah said. Do justice love mercy? Well, justice and mercy and faithfulness or faith. The translation of *pistis* can be faith or faithfulness.

I think most modern translations would agree he means faithfulness here. And so, faithfulness, why? Because faithfulness is also an attribute of God. He wants the character of God to be reproduced in us.

He wants us to be just. He wants us to be merciful. He wants us to be faithful.

He wants us to be humble. Why? Because God is all those things. And He has called us to be holy like He is holy.

To share in His personal characteristics. To become like Him in our character. Another list of a similar sort is that which is found in Galatians 5, 22 and 23.

A very familiar list to most Christians, I hope. And that's where Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit. He says in Galatians 5, 22 and 23, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, which means what we would usually call patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Now, what are these? But character traits. Whose traits are they? They're the traits of Christ. This is the character of Christ that's called the fruit of the Spirit.

By the way, this matter of fruit, God wanting to see fruit in our lives, Isaiah 5, 7 also identifies fruit that God's looking at in our lives. Isaiah 5, 7, He identifies the fruit He wants as justice. Again, God seems to have this hang-up about justice.

He's always calling for justice on the part of His people. But the spiritual fruit includes justice. It includes love.

It includes self-control. It includes being patient. These are character traits.

Goodness. You know, what kind of person would you like to be or would you like to be remembered as? What would you like at your funeral for your kids or those who knew you to say about you? Would you like them to say, my father was witty. My father was talented.

My mother was good-looking. My mother was popular. Or would you like your children to say, my father was a good man.

My father was a just man. A fair-minded man. A humble man.

A compassionate man. My mother, she was a gracious woman. She was a patient woman.

I mean, I don't know what your answer would be. I know what my answer would be. I know what I would prefer.

But I think a lot of people, when they set goals for their lives, what their self-image is

about, what they're hoping to become and be remembered as and so forth, and be viewed as, they're all the wrong things. I hope that when I die, my children can say, my father was a lot like Jesus. You know, Richard Wurmbrandt was a Romanian pastor.

Lutheran, I believe. And he suffered for 14 years in communist prisons for his faith. He has since been released.

I believe he's still alive, though he's very elderly. And he lives in the United States now. But he endured great sufferings.

And many of you have read his books, Tortured for Christ, and many other books he's written. He's the founder of Open Doors. No, no, that's rather, he's Voice of the Martyrs, Voice of the Martyrs Ministries.

And Richard Wurmbrandt, when he was in prison, at one time was tortured by communist guards, who actually beat him on the soles of his feet as part of his torture. At a later date, Wurmbrandt had tuberculosis, and he was thrown into a special cell where tuberculosis patients were kept. And if I remember the story correctly, this guard who had beat him on his feet had fallen into disfavor with his superiors and was thrown in prison.

And eventually had tuberculosis also and ended up in the same cell with Richard Wurmbrandt. And Richard Wurmbrandt washed the feet of this man and ministered this man. And the man died.

I mean, Richard Wurmbrandt didn't die, but this man did die. But before he died, he said, Brother Wurmbrandt, or Pastor Wurmbrandt, he said, you have told me so many things about Jesus, this Jesus that you believe in, but I really need to know what is Jesus really like? And Pastor Wurmbrandt said, well, he's a lot like me. Would you feel comfortable saying that? You know, Paul said, be followers of me as I am of Christ.

Would you be comfortable saying that to people? Be followers of me. Imitate me. You want to know how to live right? Do what I'm doing.

Follow my example. Many of you would say, no, I would never say that. In fact, I've heard preachers say, I would never say that.

I've heard pastors say, don't follow me, follow Jesus. Well, that sounds very commendable and humble. The only thing is, that's a shame.

It's a shame that a man of God can't say, listen, if you want to know what Jesus is like, He's a lot like me. Now, of course, humility would cause most of us never to really say that because we're so mindful of the many ways we're not like Jesus. We're so mindful of our defects that we know Jesus didn't have.

But, it is, it should be, God intends for it to be, that people can look at us and say, so that's what Jesus is like. And if someone says, what is this Jesus like? I say, well, have you been watching me? Now, I have often had unbelievers complain to me that they would never consider Christianity seriously because every Christian they ever knew turned out to be a scoundrel. And they say, you know, I've never seen a Christian who really was genuine.

They're all a bunch of hypocrites and so forth. And in many cases, they have some specific cases that have profoundly affected their opinion about Christians. And, of course, what I do, what most Christians do in that case, when I'm talking to people, I say, well, you know, don't look at the Christians, look at Jesus.

But I always kind of cringe when I say that because where are they supposed to see Jesus if not in the Christians? I mean, He's invisible, right? I mean, for me to say, don't look at them, look at Jesus. I realize all the while I'm saying it that that's the best I can say. But it seems like I should be able to say something better than that.

It seems like I should be able to say, you can see Jesus in His people because that's what they did in the early church. The Christians lived like Jesus. Even the skeptics, even the Roman critics of Christianity in the first century wrote, see how these people love each other.

They loved like Jesus loved. They lived like Jesus lived. Their character was transformed.

Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6, 9-11, he says, you know, the unrighteous will never inherit the kingdom of God, neither, and then he gives a long list, fornicators, or adulterers, or covetous, or drunkards, or homosexuals, and so on and so forth. He says, they shall not inherit the kingdom of God, and such were some of you, but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of our Lord. He says, you used to be that kind of person, but you're not that kind of person anymore.

You don't do those things. You're different now. You're more like Jesus now.

Now, I believe that if you're a true Christian, I imagine most of you are, that you could testify that you're a lot more like Jesus now than you were before you were Christian. I hope so. But, the goal is to be like him more, to be changed from glory to glory into that same image.

And this change is measured not in terms of mystical experience, it's not measured in terms of charismatic gifts, it's not measured in terms of how many hours a day you spend in prayer, how many days a week you fast, or how many meals you eat that you don't like, or how many clothes you wear that you're uncomfortable in, or how out of style your clothes are. None of those things have anything to do with advancing on this goal of being holy. What does is being transformed in your character.

You know, the scripture I just alluded to, 2 Corinthians 3.18, that we're to be changed from glory to glory into that image. That word change, the Greek word, is found only four times in the New Testament. It's metamorpho.

And obviously it sounds like our English word metamorphosized. And the other three places it's found, it's found twice in the Gospels. In parallel accounts, both of them talk about the transfiguration.

That Jesus took three of his disciples up on the mountain and he was transfigured before their eyes. And they saw his glory. He didn't look the same as before.

He looked radiant. He glowed. And they saw him in his glorified form.

And the word that is used for that change in his appearance to the place is the same one, metamorpho, metamorphosized. Or the English word is usually translated transfigured. Well, that same word is also found in Romans chapter 12 and verse 2, where it says, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

That's the same Greek word, transfigured. And the same Greek word is used one other place, and that's in the verse I was mentioning, 2 Corinthians 3, 18, that we beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, we are being changed, metamorphosized from glory to glory into that same image. That God is changing us into, supernaturally, inwardly, into the image of Christ.

And that image, of course, is measured in terms of character. And so we have the fruit of the Spirit, self-control, peace, patience, kindness, goodness. There's other lists in the Scripture that describe what God wants us to be.

They all have to do with character. In Ephesians and in Colossians, both we have lists of what Paul refers to as the traits of the new man, as opposed to the old man. I'm sure if you've read those epistles that you're familiar with this dichotomy between the old man and the new man.

Paul talks about putting off the old man, putting on the new man. That is a concept we'll deal with in one of our later talks in this series. But let me just show you what Paul says are the characteristics of the new man that we are to put on.

Certainly, it's a description of the kind of person you are to become. In Colossians 3, verses 12-14, these are the traits of the new man that Paul lists. Mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, which is also translated as gentleness.

Patience, forbearance. Now, I put in parentheses there, tolerance. Now, forbearance and tolerance are not exactly the same word, but they're similar.

Tolerance these days is a bad word among conservatives because liberals are always arguing that we should be more tolerant. By that, they mean that we should approve of things that are evil and that we should just let evil run amok. We should tolerate that.

We shouldn't interfere with that. We shouldn't criticize. We shouldn't judge.

That's not, of course, what I'm suggesting by tolerance. Forbearance means that you can tolerate abuse to yourself. People who you find irritating, people who disappoint you, people who are a trial to you, to bear with them, to tolerate from them, treatment that you would prefer not to have to tolerate, but the ability to forbear is a character trait.

Forgiveness and love are also in that list. In Ephesians 4, there's another list, but very similar, much overlap. Ephesians 4, 23 through 32, he also lists the traits of the new man, which we are to put on.

They are listed there in Ephesians as truthfulness, or telling the truth. Diligence, actually, the way he says it is let him that stole steal no more, but let him rather work with his hands in that which is good, that he might have to give to him that has need. But that's working diligently.

Generosity is in the same verse. Graceful speech, that's of course the verse 29 where he says let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying that it might minister grace to the hearers. Graceful speech, kindness, tender heartedness, forgiveness.

These are the traits of a new man, of the new man that we are to put on. This is, of course, character. In another passage we have another list of traits that obviously are of the same kind in a different kind of setting.

I call these spiritual additives because Peter tells us to add them to our life. It's in 2 Peter 1, verses 5 through 8. Peter says, but also for this very reason giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So here we have faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love, again the same kind of list as these other passages have. All of these places are telling us what it is that God wants us to do, what He wants us to become, how He wants us to change. Now, I must confess that of course I have not, like any other human being, I can only be in a small number, my experience of churches is limited.

Certainly the vast overwhelming majority of churches, even in my geographical area, I've never been in, and I don't know what they're doing. But I will say this, that the churches I have been in, and that's been a wide variety of several different denominations, in the

time that I've been there, I have not found the preaching in those churches to be devoted to nurturing these traits in the believers. I'm not saying that the pastors never mentioned any of them, but a lot of times there's just a desire to get people to conform to whatever it is the vision or the agenda of the leaders of a church want people to be like, or what they want to be doing, get them excited about this project or that project or something.

But really what the church needs to be doing is encouraging, cultivating, and instructing and exhorting people along the lines that the Bible does. And these are the things that the Bible indicates are essential. James also has something to say about this.

In James 1, 26 and 27, he says, if anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure religion and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this. This is what genuine religion, what true holiness is.

It's not seeming to be religious outwardly, but this is what it is. It's to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. So, practical compassion.

I can see in my notes I hit that D on widows twice. I actually know that widows isn't spelled that way. That's a typo.

But to have compassion on widows and orphans and to be pure, to live purely unspotted from the world. This is what God is looking for in us. This is what he calls pure and undefiled religion.

This is what the holiness is that God desires. It is his character, the character of Jesus reproduced in us. Now, I'm not going to go much longer.

In fact, I don't even intend to take everything tonight that's on these notes because I want to save some of them to be actually the last things at the bottom of the notes I'm going to save for another time because I want to, well, I don't know. I want to go more into that. But I do want to tell you why character is the thing that matters to God.

I mean, why isn't God just looking for people who dress well or who can prophesy and speak in tongues? Why isn't that the thing that matters to him? Why does character matter to him? What's the big deal with that? Well, the reason is that when God made man in the first place, there was something he had in mind, and that is that there be something in his image. I mean, he made the plants, he made the animals, the birds, the fish, and they said, let's make man in our image. Why? What's the point? Because, apparently, as I said earlier, the more like each other two beings are, the more promising is the potential fellowship between them.

And though I believe God takes delight in the plants and the flowers and the trees and

the birds and the fish and the animals, I believe God takes delight in all those things, but I don't believe that he has satisfying fellowship with them. And I believe that after he had made all these things, there is yet one thing lacking, and that was that there be someone, something, in his image, something that was like him, enough for him to share in fellowship in a meaningful way with. Now, that's my take on it.

Now, it's interesting that when the devil tempted Eve, he said, you know, this fruit that you're not supposed to eat, it's not really like God said. God said you'll die, but it's not really that way. God knows that in the day you eat of it, you'll be like him, knowing good and evil.

Now, was the devil telling the truth? Yes. At one level, he certainly was telling the truth, because after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, at the end of chapter 3 of Genesis, it says God said, look, the man we've made has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. The very thing that the devil promised, in one sense, came true.

The devil knew and told the truth, but it was a half-truth. It was a truth told for the purpose of deception. Here's the deception.

The implication was, if you eat this fruit, you will be more like God after you eat it than you are now. It will make you more like God, because you will share a trait of God, the knowledge of good and evil, that you don't currently share. But you see, the knowledge of good and evil is one of God's objective traits.

Animals don't know good and evil. God does. And now, people do too.

We share that objective trait, but it's not one of his personal traits. It's not anything to do with his character. And in the sense that really mattered, although Adam and Eve became more like God in that one respect, they became less like Him in the way that matters.

They became rebels. They became corrupt. They became unholy.

They became self-centered. They became proud. They took a dive in terms of character.

And although in one sense the devil told the truth, he told it in order to obscure a more important truth, namely that while it is true you will become like God in this one respect, what he didn't tell them is you'll become less like God than you already are. You'll become less pure. You'll become less holy.

You'll become less just and merciful. And you'll become corrupted, unlike God. And so the image of God that God originally sought in man was corrupted and tarnished.

And God desires to recover it. He desires to recover it. That's what Jesus came to do, to redeem that which was lost.

And to recover it for God. And, of course, the area where the loss has been meaningful has been in the area of character. And so Jesus has come not only to acquire our forgiveness for having fallen and for having sinned, but to change us, to get us to return to where he originally wanted us to be in the first place before we fell.

Now, of course, I don't believe that absolute sinless perfection will be had prior to our death and glorification. But we know that that's ultimately what God has in mind. Ultimately, when Jesus comes back, we will be sinless.

We'll be as pure as Adam and Eve were pure before the fall. In the meantime, what are we supposed to do? Just sit around in our hands and wait for the rapture? Or wait till we die? No, obviously, the Bible intends for us to make progress in that direction. Because even though we may not attain total perfection, and we'll not, I don't believe we'll attain total perfection in this life, the more that we attain, the more our fellowship with God can be enjoyed by both him and ourselves.

The more like him we become, the more pleased he will be. And therefore, through his spirit, through the grace of God working through us, and by our, I believe, our cooperation, that he intends for us to become more like we were before, and that his image, which has been lost, will be recovered. In measure in this life, and totally eventually in the next life.

Sin, therefore, is, as Paul put it in Romans chapter 3, in verse 23, falling short of the glory of God. I said earlier that to Paul, the glory of God is something equivalent to the likeness of Christ. Again, I have not demonstrated that beyond question from scripture tonight.

I will on another occasion. But suffice it to say, what we fell short of when we sin is the glory of God. We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We fall short of being like Jesus. And that's what sin is. And that's why God wants us to get over the sin, to live a godly life and a holy life, to be like Jesus again.

Why? Not only because God desires to have someone to fellowship with. Remember, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. But also because when he made man in the first place, God demonstrated a desire to entrust man with something.

Initially, all God really entrusted man with, well, there's more than that, but he entrusted man with the creation. He said, OK, I'm going to give you dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. I'm going to give you dominion over that.

Now, prior to that, God had all the dominion over it, and he shared it with man. He entrusted that to man. But he entrusted more than that.

He entrusted his very image with man. He entrusted something of a freeness of choice with man that animals don't have. That's why man sinned and animals don't sin, I believe.

But what God wants to entrust us with is something too, and that is his glory. We have fallen short of the glory, and he wants that glory to be entrusted to us again. But you don't want to entrust things to people who have poor character.

You don't want to lend money to someone who's unreliable. You don't want to put your children in the care of somebody who's cruel and unmerciful. You don't want to put things of value in the hands of people who don't have good character.

A friend of mine, you can take this illustration with a grain of salt. I do, but nonetheless, it's illustrative of something. A friend of mine was in South America working with Youth of the Mission some years ago, many, many years ago, twenty-something years ago.

And he was crying out to God for a greater revelation of God. He said, God, why don't you just pull back the curtain and just reveal yourself fully to me. I just want to see you and see your glory.

I just don't want there to be any of the obstructions between me and you. Just pour it all out on me. Just reveal it all to me right now.

And he said, God spoke to him. That's what you can take with a grain of salt or not. He said, God spoke to him and said, how do I know I can trust you? And whether that's true or not, whether that was really God's figure or not, I always thought that's a good illustration of something.

Because it really does illustrate, I think, something that is a concern of God's. How does he know he can trust you? Now, of course, if you're of a certain religious, theological ilk, you might say, well, God can't trust us. God never will be able to trust us.

We just trust him. You know, we're saved by faith in him. He doesn't have faith in us.

But how can there be any kind of a relationship where one person trusts the other, but that person can't trust the first party? I mean, mutual trust is part of what relationships are about. God wants to trust us with stuff. He wants to entrust us with his glory.

He wants to entrust us with the rule of the whole world. We will judge angels. The meek will inherit the earth.

God has a lot in mind for us that he wants to put in our hands. But he wants us to become like him before we are given such privilege, before he makes his glory vulnerable to us. Is God's glory vulnerable to us? Check it out.

In 1 Corinthians 6, what does Paul say? He's talking about the need for Christians to live

holy and moral lives. He's talking against sexual immorality in this particular passage. And he makes a very interesting observation that kind of is, in a way, it's kind of scary to consider how much God has put himself at risk with us.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 6, verses 15 and 16, Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not. Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two he says shall become one flesh. What's Paul getting at here? He's saying, you are the body of Christ.

Your body is a member of Christ himself. You are the members of Christ. Now, what happens if you and a harlot get together? Well, you become one flesh in a sexual union.

But there's more than meets the eye going on there. It's not just you. You're a member of the body of Christ.

You have made Christ one with a harlot. That's what Paul said. I didn't say that.

He says, shall I join the members of Christ with a harlot? Do you realize how vulnerable Christ's own glory is by investing it in us, weak creatures? I mean, what I do, there's a sense in which his whole reputation goes with me. In fact, there's more to it than that. I don't dare to speculate on the full impact of what he's suggesting there.

But it sounds to me that when I sin, I'm doing something like involving Christ in sin. Because I'm his body. And I don't know to what degree Paul would push that point.

But it certainly illustrates this, that God is entrusting us with himself. He's entrusting us with the knowledge of him. He's entrusting us with his glory, with his reputation.

No wonder it matters to him whether we're reliable, whether we're faithful, whether we're just. We're the only Jesus that many people are going to see. And what we do, we involve his reputation in.

It shouldn't be surprising then that character matters to him. Look at perhaps only one other scripture tonight. I'm not sure we're getting near the end of the time I want to allot myself tonight.

Look at Psalm chapter 4. I think we will close with this. The psalmist says, this is David, in Psalm 4 and verse 6, he says, There are many who say, who will show us any good? Then his prayer is, Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us. The light of your face, your glory, may it be seen on us.

There's a lot of people out there somewhat cynical. They say, there's no goodness in this world. There's no justice.

There's no honest people. There's no truly righteous Christians. They're all hypocrites.

There's a great cynicism out there, and we Christians give them much reason to reinforce that opinion. In many cases. And David is sensitive to that fact.

He says, you know, there's a lot of people out there saying, who will show us any good? And I got a feeling they're not saying, please show us some good. I think basically what they're saying is, there ain't no good. And if there is, I challenge anyone to show me.

I challenge someone to show me an uncompromised person. I challenge someone to show me a Christian who's not a hypocrite. I challenge anybody to show me a seamlessly honest man.

There's a lot of people out there who'd say that. And you know what? Sinners take a little bit of delight in the fact that there are no comers. Do you know why? Because they kind of feel instinctively that God ought to grade on a curve.

And they figure, if no one's any better than they are, then God can't really hold their imperfections against them too severely. I mean, after all, if everyone is bad, then how can God ever suggest that people ought to be anything other than bad? How could God judge people for being bad? If it's the universal condition of all people. But let somebody be righteous.

And it suddenly takes away their excuses. I remember, this is an illustration from R.C. Sproul. He was talking about lecturing in a seminary class.

Or actually, I think, I believe he was a student in the seminary class. I don't remember if he was a lecturer or a student. But he said there was this one exam that the professor gave that was really, really hard.

And as the test results were being announced the next day, and the professor was reading off the names in the grade, it was so-and-so F, so-and-so F, so-and-so failed, so-and-so failed. One after another, everyone failed the test. And then all of a sudden it came to so-and-so Susie Jones A. 100%.

He says, do you think the other students when they heard that cheered for Susie Jones? No, they all groaned and booed and hissed. Why? She did the right thing. She performed as she should.

She passed the test. Why did everyone groan and hiss at her? Because she broke the curve. Everyone else failed.

If there was no one who didn't fail, everyone could just say, well, see, the test was too hard. It was an unfair test. I may have failed, but so does everybody else, no big deal.

But when someone says, ah, but it is possible to pass this test, and here's someone who did it, suddenly it takes away all the excuses of those who fail. And God has standards.

And most people in the world, if they believe there's a God at all, and most of them do unless they've tried to convince themselves that there isn't, they know that they don't meet God's standards, and they hope nobody does.

And they convince themselves that nobody does. But David said, Lord, there's a lot of people saying who will show us any good, but Lord, lift up the light of your countenance on us. Let your face, your countenance, your glory, your light be seen in us.

People are asking the question, may we be the answer to their question. That's what David is praying. Now, of course, if you are like Christ, there will be a lot of people who will appreciate it.

But there will be a lot of people who won't. Because a lot of people just do not want there to be anyone who is more righteous than them. Because it does break the curve.

But God, nonetheless, we're not to make our decisions based on how people are going to react to us. God has called us to be holy, to be like him, to have our character transformed into his likeness. And it's one thing to say that and to acknowledge that and say, OK, we agree, we're supposed to be like God.

It's another thing to really do it. How do we do that? I'm sure a lot of you would say, well, Steve, you know, I really, I mean, I know that. I've known all that stuff.

But I've tried. Can't be done. I simply cannot overcome sin in my life.

I simply cannot. I just can't get over my impatience, my bad temper or whatever else it is. I'm just not like Jesus, and I've tried before, and I can't help it.

Well, I'd have to say that's the same with me. But I do believe, and I have seen and experienced, too, what the Bible teaches is true. That there is a way of victory.

It's not a way to instant perfection. But it's a way of progress in the developing of the character of Christ. And it is available to all Christians.

It doesn't take super Christians to become more like Jesus. It's the normal Christian path. Anything less than that is subnormal and is retarded Christianity, really.

I mean, retarded growth. We are expected to be transformed into the image of Christ. If you are not more like Jesus today than you were last year, why aren't you? Well, it's possible that you don't know or you haven't observed that there is a way that's given in Scripture to be changed into the image of Christ.

There are steps to take. There are principles to conform to. There are things that the Bible tells us about this.

It does not just call us to do some impossible thing and say, have at it. God, who really

wants us to be holy, has also given us the instructions necessary to advance on that goal. And so, in the remainder of our series in weeks to come, I want to take the practical teaching of Scripture about how it is that we do change.

How it is we are to be transformed, metamorphosized from glory to glory into that image. Because it's not just pie in the sky. It's not just some kind of theoretical theology.

It is something that many Christians in history have made obvious progress. There are people that you know who you say, well, that person is so Christ-like. I wish I could be like that person.

Well, it's not an accident. You might say, well, that's just the grace of God. Well, it is the grace of God.

But it's not just that God wants some Christians to be holy so they were lucky ones and he doesn't care for you to be holy so you're not going to get that grace. He calls us all to be holy. This is the will of God for you, even your sanctification, Paul said, that you be holy.

So, there must be something different about a person who's made progress than someone who hasn't. There are things that the Bible says that can be observed and followed. And so, we will examine them because I think it's extremely important.

And I do wish that we could, when people say, who will show us any good? I can say, oh, there's a group of people over here. Check them out. These people are living like the people in the book of Acts did.

They had favor with all men, briefly, because they were different. They were like God. They were like Jesus.

And that is what the body of Christ is supposed to be. So, that is a definition of the goal. We'll have to define the path to that goal in later sessions.