

statement to the man or woman who would be holy. A HOLY PERSON HAS THE COURAGE TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE HE MARCHES TO A DRUMBEAT OF A DIFFERENT DRUMMER AND HE IS NOT AFRAID TO BE OUT OF STEP.

Holiness is not a matter of theology or simply words in a hymnal. Holiness is lived out in our daily lives. Pascal wrote: *"The serene, silent beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world, next to the might of the Spirit of God."*

#### **It means that we love differently**

Once we begin to think differently, we live differently and we love differently. Love is what sets the God follower apart. It is the litmus test for Christians. It is not a love like the world loves - it is a

**Sincere love** - It is genuine, authentic. Like God's love for us. Our motive is not to get, but to give.

**Deep love** - It is intense, fervent. It means to love with all of our strength. Christian love is not a felling - it is an act of the will.

**Pure Love** - It is spotless, clean. men speak romantically about loving from the heart. But God speaks realistically about loving from a PURE HEART.

This is the same kind of love Jesus talked about when he said, *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love for one another."* (John 13:35) Love one another - sincerely, deeply, and purely and people will KNOW that you are different. That will know that you are followers of Christ.

Tradition tells us of a pagan who went to report on the early church movement. He visited a compound where Christians were living together. He went intending to write something bad about them, but instead he wrote, "Behold, how they love one another."

Their love for one another was the "mark of circumcision" on their lives that distinguished them from those around.

d. **It means that we talk differently** - When we start to THINK differently, we begin to LIVE differently, which leads to LOVING differently. And when we

begin to LOVE differently, we start to TALK differently.

The words we use reveal most obviously if we are different or not. We live in a world which used words to put people down and tear them up. God followers are to use their words to build people up.

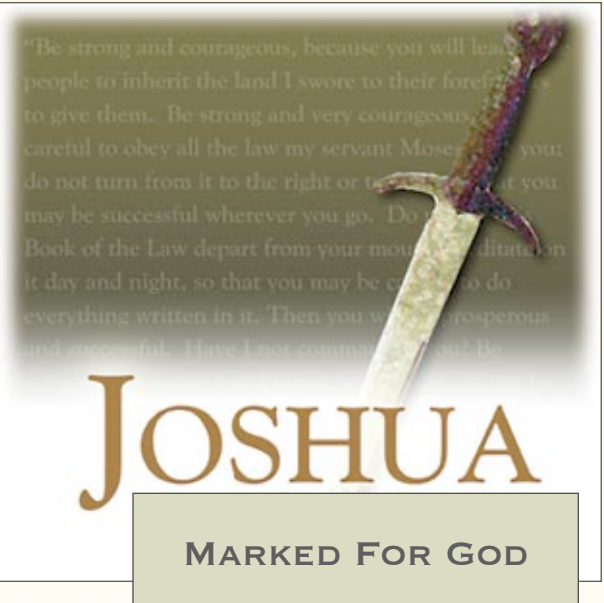
One man said that once he and his wife had words - *but he never got a chance to use his.* In our words are the power to edify, to give life, but too often we use our words to mortify and bring death. Have you ever stolen someone's joy with your words or killed their spirit with words?

When God prepared the Hebrews to enter the promised land - he "marked" them. He took the time to put a physical covenant mark on them that forever distinguished them from all other people's on the earth.

He wants us to bear the "mark of God" in our bodies as well. But, we're not talking about a physical mark, for that physical mark is but a scar, it was a metaphor in Israel for what God wants for us as His church - to have circumcised lips, circumcised ears, circumcised eyes, circumcised hearts - instruments which have undergone radical spiritual surgery - that leaves its mark on us forever - and forever distinguishes us as the people of God.

# AGAPE

## PULPIT SERIES



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In C.E. Montague's novel, "Rough Justice", a memorable scene describes a little boy named Bron going to church for the first time with his governess. He watches with interest every part of the service and then the preacher climbs into a high pulpit and little Bron hears him tell some terrible news. It is about a brave and kind man who was nailed to a cross, terribly hurt a long time ago, and who still feels dreadful pain even now, because there was something not done that he wants them all to do.

Little Bron thinks that the preacher is telling the story because a lot of people are there and they will do something about it. He sits impatiently on the edge of the pew. He can hardly wait to see who will make the first move and what they will do to right this terrible injustice. But he sits quietly and decides that perhaps after the service someone will do something about it. Little Bron begins to weep but nobody else seems at all upset. The service is over, the people walk away as if they had not heard such terrible news, as if nothing remarkable has happened.

As Bron leaves the church, he is trembling. His governess looks at him and says, "Bron, don't take it to heart -- someone will think you're different."

DIFFERENT - *to be alive and sensitive in one's spirit*

DIFFERENT - *to show emotion*

DIFFERENT - *to listen to what is going on in God's house, really to hear, to respond.*

DIFFERENT - *to represent Jesus Christ to the world.*

What does different mean? The dictionary says "distinct, separate, not the same, out of the ordinary, unusual." Ought now God-followers then, to be different? Ought not we be distinct, separate, not the same, out of the ordinary, unusual?

## 1. A METAPHOR FOR HOLINESS

God has always wanted his people to be different; that there should be a distinguishing mark on them from other peoples; that they might set apart from others. When the Hebrews crossed the Jordan to occupy the Promised Land, God marked them through an act called circumcision. God said to Joshua in Joshua 5:2, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelite men again."

Circumcision was an outward sign of an inward obedience. It was a physical act filled with spiritual meaning. It was a very important means of marking their identity as the people of God. It revealed a covenant

relationship that God had with His people. Joshua set aside a whole day to perform mass circumcision. And God was pleased. At the conclusion of the day of circumcision God said (verse 9) "*This day I have taken away the reproach of Egypt from you.*"

Throughout scripture circumcision is a metaphor for holiness. Moses complained that he had (literally) "uncircumcised lips" (Ex. 6:12), by which he means his speech was not fit to participate in God's program.

Jeremiah spoke of the uncircumcised ears, that is, ears unfit to hear God's word. When Israel entered the Promised land, they were to regard its fruit as "uncircumcised" for three years, but in the "fourth year all its fruit must be consecrated as a praise offering to the Lord." (Lev. 19:24)

Jeremiah issued the call to men of Judah and Jerusalem, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts." (Jer. 4:4) A circumcised heart refers to the human intellectual-emotional-spiritual forum, where decisions were made, as able to participate in God's covenant. It was a call to RADICAL SPIRITUAL SURGERY where the spirit was broken, the heart was open, and the will was submissive to God. It provided the true identity of God's people. It was a way that they would represent God to the world.

## 2. A CALL TO HOLINESS

In the same way, God calls his people to holiness today. A holy person is not an odd person, but a DISTINCT person. A holy person has a quality about their life that is separate. Their personal lifestyle is not only different from their past lifestyle, but is quite different from the lifestyles of unbelievers around them. They are real, genuine authentic. They represent the likeness of Christ to a watching world. The apostle Peter wrote, "You also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:15-16). Eugene Petersen's paraphrase states, "Let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness." (1 Peter 1:15-16 The Message).

We have been commanded to live a holy life--energetic and blazing with holiness. Someone once said, "We may choose a married life or a single life, but it is not left to us to choose whether or not we live a holy life." Holiness, to be different, is not an option - it is mandatory - it is what MARKS us as God-followers.

## 3. Why We Don't Want to Hear About Holiness

You might be tempted to say, "Now hold on just a minute - This holiness thing is just a little too much for me." The problem is that we don't want to be different.

**We value conformity.** We don't want to stand out in a crowd. We wear the same style clothes, we use the same kind of language, we conform to the "in things." Like little Bron's governess, what we fear the most in life is being different. We have become an assembly line society. We are terrified of being set apart.

**We visualize a caricature (cartoon) of holiness.** We don't like the idea of holiness because we think, it communicates an attitude and displays actions that have become known as "holier-than-thou." We disdain spirituality and behavior that puts one on a pedestal as being better than the rest. Jesus despised this type of mentality and morality in the Pharisees and we agree with him.

**We misunderstand what it means to be holy.** We have an image of a holy person as a monk or priest. We think that holy people live far away in monasteries, separate themselves from any kind of fun or frivolity, and trade in their luxury cars, comfortable homes, and well-paying jobs for a peace corps stint in a third world country. Consequently, we say "No thank you to holiness." Now while I don't think it would hurt any of us to give up some of our luxury for a while and live among a desperately poor people group - that is not what holiness is.

### It is a Mark of Distinctiveness

Holiness, being different, is none of that. Yet it is more than that. What does it mean to be different.

**It means that we live differently** - "Don't forget, he's also a responsible father, and won't let you get by with sloppy living. Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God." (1 Peter 1:17 The Message).

Henry Thoreau -- a rugged New England individualist of the nineteenth century once went to jail rather than to pay his poll tax to a state that supported slavery. During this period he wrote his essay, "Civil Disobedience" - now famous the world over. Thoreau's good friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson hurried to visit him in jail, and peering through the bars exclaimed: "Why Henry, what are you doing in there?" To which Thoreau quickly replied, "*Nay Ralph, the question is what are YOU doing out there?*"

Thoreau was not a man I would consider a spiritual example that we ought to follow but his incarceration for something he believes in does in fact make a powerful