

My name's JR., and I'm the teaching pastor here. I've been a pastor for almost a decade, and in that time, I've learned to be ashamed of calling myself a pastor.

Not always. In fact, sometimes it comes in handy. But particularly when I'm meeting for the first time people who don't go to church, I usually try to wait as long as possible in a conversation before bringing up that old conversational standby, "So what do you do for a living?"

Let me be clear: I'm not ashamed of *Jesus*. I *love* talking about Jesus. One conversation about Jesus with someone who's not a 'church person' will make my whole week. But I *am* often ashamed of being associated with Christians.

Because (you know this) Christians are weird. We've cultivated a reputation in our culture for being against a lot of stuff, for being sticks in the mud, for complaining and petitioning against whatever we disagree with.

So when I'm in conversation with a new friend (I'm an extrovert, so everyone I meet is a new friend; I skip the 'acquaintance' stage), and they find out I'm not only a Christian but a *pastor*, it usually gets awkward quickly. They're trying to figure out what I'm going to start condemning them for and I'm trying to tell them, Look, I'm not like *those Christians*, I just really love Jesus!

I shouldn't give *those Christians* too hard a time, though. Because I've been one of those Christians, too. I grew up in Church, and when I was in seventh grade, I was really struggling with lustful thoughts (as an adolescent boy? Big surprise, right?). I prayed to God to help me control my thought life, to help me to have thoughts that were more pure. And I distinctly felt God tell me to quit listening to the radio.

Now, you need to understand that when I was 13, I wasn't listening to good music. I went to bed every night with the Top 40 station playing, so I was getting a steady stream of music that painted pretty awful pictures of sexuality, of both men and women. In retrospect, it's no wonder I was struggling so hard to keep my thoughts pure.

But of course 13-year-old me didn't know this, so when I felt God tell me to shut off the radio, I did. And practically overnight, my thoughts got a lot easier to control. It was really cool.

I wish I could tell you that story ended there, but this is a story about how I was a weird Christian. What happened next is that I became a righteous crusader against the radio. I imagined myself as Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai with an 11th Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Listen to The radio!

I became a micro-prophet, proclaiming the evils of the radio to all my friends (who were pretty much my youth group at Church). I started arguments. I won a few converts. I made a lot of enemies. I was one of those weird Christians.

All because I took something that was very good for me, something that was helping me to look more like Jesus, and tried to force it on everyone else.

Because I've been there, here's what I know about those weird Christians: they are trying to live out a core Scriptural truth, a doctrine that is fundamental to our particular denomination and a truth that - when we get it right - is beautiful and powerful and freeing.

It's called Holiness. And it's not supposed to make us weird. We're supposed to be different, but not weird. Not mean, cruel or judgmental. So why is it so easy to get wrong?

First, let's talk about what Holiness actually *is*. What does it mean to be Holy? Holiness is a church word, but it actually just means different. Specifically, the world Holy establishes two ways to be in the world: with God and without God. Like we've been talking about since January: God's Way, and everything else. The stuff that's set apart, the stuff that's dedicated to God (like temples, priests, holy days, etc) are considered sacred - another word for holy. And if you take something ordinary and dedicate it to God, if you make it holy, you're sanctifying it.

Holy, sacred, sanctification. All these Church words basically just mean "like God, different from the world".

In our denomination, we place a lot of emphasis on *people* being Holy. As in you and me. We are to be like God and not like the world. We are to be different.

So you can see where some of the weird Christians get it, right? I mean, how are we supposed to be different? Protesting people who aren't like us? That makes it pretty clear how different we are. Or maybe it's lifestyle stuff - we don't drink, don't dance, don't go to movies, don't wear jewelry (all things our denomination has advocated at one point or another).

What does different mean?

To answer that, we're going to spend the rest of our time together in Galatians chapter 5. Turn there in your Bibles (if you grabbed one of ours, it's on page XXX, and please feel free to keep that Bible). As you're turning there, let's review where we've been since January.

We begin with Creation. In the beginning, God created the world to operate according to a certain logic. And we too were created with a Way we were to live, a Way that leads to life. But we chose our own Way, and introduced Sin and Death into the world. God came into our brokenness as Jesus, and his life, death and resurrection broke the power of Sin and Death and opened the Way to God back up for us.

When we repent - when we turn away from our selfish, sinful ways and back to God's Way - the way we were originally created to live, we begin a new life, a new journey.

And last week, we talked about where that journey will end - when God returns to set the world right, to put a final end to Sin and Death. We are living in that Between period. God's kingdom is already here, but not yet fully here.

Holiness is what happens Between our conversion and the second coming. Holiness is us becoming sanctified. Us becoming more like God and less like our old selves. Holiness is our journey from the old world that's passing away and into God's new reality. We are different from the world dominated by sin and death because we are becoming more and more like Jesus. We are becoming the persons God created us to be.

In other words, to paraphrase one of my favorite Church Fathers, God became like us to make us like God. So when we look at Jesus, we see how we're to be different.

Paul describes it well to a group of Christians in Galatia. He's writing to them because they're struggling with the same problem. How do we be different? What does it mean to be like Jesus? In Chapter 5, beginning in verse 13, Paul says this:

You have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your flesh. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Paul first points out that the life God calls us to is a life of freedom. But not freedom as we usually think of it - freedom to do whatever we want. Paul says, no, if you look at Jesus, he used his freedom (as God) to serve other people. So too, when we turn to God, we are free to give ourselves to those around us. Our families, our friends, our coworkers, our enemies. This is what it means to be Holy. Paul goes on:

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your flesh craves. The flesh wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the flesh desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

Paul points out that tension we all know: we're between two worlds. We're between that world of sin and death we were born into - Paul calls that our 'flesh', and the world God is bringing about, the new world of the Holy Spirit.

And when we turn to God, we're already in the world of the Spirit, but not yet freed from the desires of our flesh. We're already Holy, but we're not yet holy. We're both. Because we're in the process of becoming like God. Paul goes on:

But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your flesh, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Paul gives a pretty stereotypical list of sins. He says, this is what the old you looked like. This is the world you're walking away from. This is a world dominated by sin and death. People who live like this aren't living in God's world. They're not following God.

What I find fascinating about lists like these is that for most Christians, this is where being a Christian stops. We look back at "the world" and think, Okay. I just need to *not do* that stuff. Because I'm saved out of that. That's the stuff I'm saved from.

This is what legalism grows out of: we're not actually looking ahead, at God, at the life we're supposed to be walking in, at the Jesus we're supposed to be following. We're only looking behind us, at all the stuff we're not supposed to do anymore. So we end up judging and condemning those who aren't like us. We end up dividing sins into acceptable and unacceptable sins.

If you're new to Church, here's a sad but helpful fact: In the Church, we have the 'bad sins' - we hold up sexual immorality or drunkenness as particularly evil. We judge and shun anyone who wrestles with those particular sins. But we have a whole different set of 'acceptable sins'. You can

be in Church a long time and be cruel or divisive or jealous or selfish or a gossip or have a temper and no one bats an eye. We shrug our shoulders and say, Oh that's just the way they are.

Which is outrageous and heartbreaking. It's no wonder those outside the Church see us as so inconsistent.

When the Church reduces Holiness to just not being like the world, that's when we get weird. That's when the world starts to look at the Church and say, Whatever God they serve, I'm not interested in. Because they're a bunch of hypocrites.

If we're going to take holiness seriously, if we are going to be different the way God calls us to be different, the way *Jesus* was different, we can't look back at what we're leaving behind. We have to look forward. Toward God. We have to look at Jesus. Look at what Paul does next in Galatians:

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. -- Galatians 5:13-24 (NLT)

Paul doesn't just say, Here's a list of bad things. Just don't do those. He says, look, you know what the world looks like. You know what your sinful desires look like. You know where you struggle, what you're being saved from.

Now let me show you what you're being saved *for*. Let me hold up a picture of Jesus so you can see where you're going. When you walk toward Jesus, this is what the Holy Spirit will produce in you.

You'll be loving. Joyful. Peaceful. Patient. Kind. Good. Faithful. Gentle. Self-controlled. *This* is what a holy life looks like. This is how you're to be different from the world, how you are to be transformed from your old self.

We need this picture of holiness always before us. We need to hold it up because it's who we're becoming. Without Jesus constantly in front of our faces, one of two things will happen:

We'll either stay where we are, comfortable and worldly. We'll remain untransformed. We'll stay in lives dominated by sin. Or we'll end up legalists. We'll be so focused on what we're saved *from* that we become gatekeepers, rule enforcers. And we'll magnify some sins while we denigrate others. As Jesus said, we'll be so worried about the specks in other peoples' eyes we'll miss the log in our own.

We must always keep our eye on Jesus. Jesus is our guide, our North Star, our model, our template. But that doesn't mean that we all have to wear robes and sandals and grow sweet beards. That was the problem the Galatian Christians were facing. They thought that since Jesus was Jewish, they had to become Jewish - get circumcised and keep a dietary code and all those other superficial things.

But Paul said, No! As we leave behind the life of Death and step into God's life, the Holy Spirit is working within us to produce Jesus' *character*. It's not about external rules, but internal transformation.

Holiness isn't about following rules. If you think not listening to the radio makes you holy, I've got news for you: Holiness isn't about the music you listen to. It's about the quality of your character. As I matured in my faith, as I became more like Jesus, I found I was able to listen to the radio. I'd grown to a place where I could discern the kinds of music I was listening to. I could take something into my ears without letting it shape my soul.

If you think not doing certain things determines how Holy you are, you're wrong. If you think that just not being in the world makes you Holy, you're missing the point.

Look at Jesus. Jesus embraced the world. Jesus was *always* around people who wouldn't be caught dead in a Church building. Jesus' enemies called him a glutton and a drunk. You don't get that sort of reputation by being a stick in the mud, by staying away from worldly places. Jesus embraced those places. Jesus brought the party.

But at the same time, Holiness *is* being different. Jesus *wasn't* a glutton or a drunk. And wherever he went, he called those around him to take the next step toward God. By his own actions, he constantly held up to them what they *could be*. His life was one big invitation to come back to God.

And that life doesn't look like a bunch of rules. We're not saved for Law. We're saved for freedom. Freedom - as Paul said - to be like Jesus. To use our freedom to become slaves for those around us. In Jesus, I am free to give myself up for the good of those around me. My whole life becomes a sacrifice to God. I offer myself to God, set my life apart. I choose to be different so that my life is one big invitation to everyone else. Just like Jesus.

So the question before you today: are you looking to Jesus? Are you following where he leads, looking ahead at your model, your template? Or are you looking back at the world you're called out of?

Are you comfortable where you are, unwilling to turn from your sinful, selfish ways and be different? Or are you using holiness as an excuse to judge and condemn those around you? Are you ignoring the log in your own eye because you're so busy hunting for specks in the eyes of those around you?

I want to be a person who looks like Jesus. And that means I'm going to look different from the world, from a lot of the people around me. But I never want that difference to make me cruel or judgmental or condemning because *that's not how Jesus was*. I want to live the kind of life that people who don't know Jesus envy. I want to be a person whose lifestyle is attractive like Jesus' was.

I want to be part of a Church that has a wonderful reputation among non-Christians. I want to be part of a people who are so much like Jesus that people who don't know him just can't get enough of us.

I don't want my faith to be reduced to what's on my iPod or what's in my glass or my stance on gay marriage.

I want to be loving. And joyful. And peaceful. And patient. And kind and good and gentle. I want to be self-controlled.

Don't you? Don't you want to live the life God is calling you to? Don't you want that kind of life?

Jesus is calling you to take the next step forward in your relationship with him. Because that's what Jesus does. What is your next step?

Examine

Put Paul's list of sins on the screen. Make it visually interesting if you can.

sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins

1. Consider Paul's list of sins from Galatians 5. In the last week, which of these were part of your life?
2. In the next week, where will you be tempted to fall into any of these?

Now put up Paul's fruit of the Spirit:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

3. In the last week, where did you bear this fruit?
4. What fruit will you particularly need this week?
5. **What does Holiness look like in your life this week? What next step is Jesus calling you to?**

Benediction

Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another." -- Galatians 5:25-26 (NLT)