

An Inconvenient Christianity

Preached by Bro. Joe Donat

If you are an American football fan at all, and an NFL fan in particular, you would be aware that this is what is known as the off-season. No games are being played at this time; however, there is nothing "off" about the off-season. Once the official season ends, culminating in the Super Bowl championship game, owners and coaching staffs gear up to draft the best talent colleges and universities around the nation have to offer. They also survey free agency, that is players who have played out their contracts and are free to sign with any team, looking to add great players to their roster as well. Then it's on to off-season team activities, training camp and the exhibition season and practice, practice, practice as they seek to play in football's equivalent of Carnegie Hall.

Locally, the New York Jets have revamped their coaching staff in the hopes of turning a sorry franchise around into perennial contenders. So why am I mentioning all of this in a sermon? Bear with me, for a moment. I'm getting to that. Anyway, the team produced a series of videos that mapped out their strategy for free agency and the draft. Interestingly enough, talent wasn't the only major thing they were looking for to build a winner. You would think, the only ingredient necessary for a successful program is acquiring the most talented guys around, right? Not so. Believe it or not, they were also looking for, get this, character guys. They didn't want people who could just play football, they wanted guys who would "eat, sleep, and dream football." And every time they were asked about specific players, the coaches didn't just gush about their talent. They also mentioned how the player was a really good guy - someone with a love for the game and a high character guy. The head coach even said that his door was always open, not just for football stuff, but also if the player was having any personal problems off the field. He gets it. Championships cannot be won if star players can't play due to DWIs or illegal substance charges or domestic violence issues, all problems that plague the sport.

So what does this have to do with Christianity? Well, replace the word football with God and replace the word character (which, incidentally, isn't such a bad word) with holiness, and you'll see where I'm going with this. Even the world has standards, so we shouldn't be surprised that God does too. And this brings us to our first point.

1. Empty Christianity.

What do I mean by empty Christianity? In preaching about the life of the Christian, one of the scariest topics is holiness. It is a topic that we are compelled to come back to time after

time while preaching about anything else. So much of our preaching could be taken as merely how to perform the Christian life, how to behave like a Christian, how to be spiritual. We could create a computer program that imitates life, but it will never have life in itself. We could create a Christian lifestyle that imitates being alive in the Spirit, but is devoid of the divine spark, the presence of God, the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul warned about this in 2 Tim 3:5:

2Ti 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

The prophet Isaiah had some things to say about this as well:

Isa 29:13-14 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

14Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid.

Isa 48:1 Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, *but* not in truth, nor in righteousness.

Moses wanted to be the defender of his people, but could do nothing until he found himself on holy ground and connecting with the Holy One of Israel. Joshua was all ready for battle to enter the Promised Land physically, but he needed to meet with the Captain of the Lord of Hosts. Peter had all kinds of theology and commitment, but he needed the power of God to move forward. Paul had a form of godliness, but it was not until he met with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus that he experienced holiness and became saved and served God. We call it revival. We sing "Lord, send a revival and let it begin with me."

We call it the baptism of the Spirit. We complain about how too many people are playing at church and being a Christian. There are so many aspects to the impact of holiness that we could go on and on. In order to go on in the power of God, we need to reckon with the issue of holiness. It's scary because at some point, we have to quit just talking about being a Christian and even acting out the Christian life ; we have to mean it and keep on meaning it. As one author wrote,

"It is not difficult in our world to get a person interested in the message of the Gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier Christians called holiness."

— From *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson

Nineteenth-century Scottish theologian John Brown said, "Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervours, or uncommanded austerities; it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills."

A. W. Tozer lamented, "Religion today is not transforming people; rather it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the moral level of society; it is descending to society's own level, and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smilingly accepting its surrender." And remember, having passed in 1963, Tozer wrote this at least 60 years ago. Things are even worse these days - and I'm just talking about in churches! - which brings us to the next point.

2. God demands holiness.

How do I know that? Well, let's let God's word speak for itself.

1Pe 1:13-16 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Lev 19:2 Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God *am* holy.

Lev 20:7 Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I *am* the LORD your God.

Am 3:3 Can two walk together,
except they be agreed?

1Th 4:7 For God hath not called
us unto uncleanness, but unto
holiness.

Furthermore, we are to be adorned with
holiness.

Ps 29:2 Give unto the LORD the
glory due unto his name; worship
the LORD in the beauty of
holiness.

2Ch 20:21 And when he had
consulted with the people, he
appointed singers unto the
LORD, and that should praise the
beauty of holiness, as they went
out before the army, and to say,
Praise the LORD; for his mercy
endureth for ever.

Ps 93:5 Thy testimonies are very
sure: holiness becometh thine
house, O LORD, for ever.

Ps 96:9 O worship the LORD in
the beauty of holiness: fear
before him, all the earth.

Ps 110:3 Thy people *shall be*
willing in the day of thy power,
in the beauties of holiness from
the womb of the morning: thou
hast the dew of thy youth.

1Pe 3:1-5 Likewise, ye wives, *be*
in subjection to your own
husbands; that, if any obey not
the word, they also may without
the word be won by the
conversation of the wives;

2While they behold your chaste
conversation *coupled* with fear.

3Whose adorning let it not be
that outward *adorning* of plaiting
the hair, and of wearing of gold,
or of putting on of apparel;

4But *let it be* the hidden man of
the heart, in that which is not
corruptible, *even the ornament* of
a meek and quiet spirit, which is
in the sight of God of great price.

5For after this manner in the old
time the holy women also, who
trusted in God, adorned
themselves, being in subjection
unto their own husbands:

Ex 28:36 And thou shalt make a
plate *of* pure gold, and grave
upon it, *like* the engravings of a
signet, HOLINESS TO THE
LORD.

1Th 3:11-13 Now God himself
and our Father, and our Lord
Jesus Christ, direct our way unto
you.

12And the Lord make you to
increase and abound in love one
toward another, and toward all

men, even as we *do* toward you:
13 To the end he may stablish
your hearts unblameable in
holiness before God, even our
Father, at the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ with all his saints.

2Co 7:1 Having therefore these
promises, dearly beloved, let us
cleanse ourselves from all
filthiness of the flesh and spirit,
perfecting holiness in the fear of
God.

Ro 6:15-22 What then? shall we
sin, because we are not under the
law, but under grace? God
forbid.

16 Know ye not, that to whom ye
yield yourselves servants to
obey, his servants ye are to
whom ye obey; whether of sin
unto death, or of obedience unto
righteousness?

17 But God be thanked, that ye
were the servants of sin, but ye
have obeyed from the heart that
form of doctrine which was
delivered you.

18 Being then made free from sin,
ye became the servants of
righteousness.

19 I speak after the manner of
men because of the infirmity of
your flesh: for as ye have yielded
your members servants to
uncleanness and to iniquity unto
iniquity; even so now yield your
members servants to
righteousness unto holiness.

20 For when ye were the servants
of sin, ye were free from
righteousness.

21 What fruit had ye then in those
things whereof ye are now
ashamed? for the end of those
things *is* death.

22 But now being made free from
sin, and become servants to God,
ye have your fruit unto holiness,
and the end everlasting life.

Notice a recurring theme? Anyway,
the Apostle Paul in this passage from
Romans, brings us to our next point.

3. We can grow in holiness.

- God's Word will produce
holiness.

Jn 17:17 Sanctify them through
thy truth: thy word is truth.

Ps 19:7-9 The law of the LORD
is perfect, converting the soul:
the testimony of the LORD *is*
sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the LORD *are*
right, rejoicing the heart: the
commandment of the LORD *is*
pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD *is* clean,
enduring for ever: the judgments
of the LORD *are* true *and*

righteous altogether.

Ps 119:104-105 Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.
105Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Ro 10:17 So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Pastor and Bible commentator John Phillips said, "Paul's absolute confidence in the gospel was based on its supremacy. He knew it to be far superior to any religion or philosophy ever known on earth. The world of Paul's day was dominated by three lines of thought-the Greek, the Roman, and the Hebrew; but Greek logic, Roman law and Hebrew light all paled before the gospel. In the face of all three Paul could say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

So, what is that Gospel message that Paul had so much confidence in? In a nutshell, the Gospel message can be found in 1Corinthians 15:1-4,

1Corinthians 15:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
2By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
3For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
4And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

As we read through the rest of the scriptures, we see that we are saved by turning away from our sin and trusting the finished work of Christ on the cross alone for our salvation. Faith in anything or anyone else elevates that person or object or entity to the level of God and reduces the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice. Paul emphasized this in Romans chapter 10:8-13.

Romans 10:8-13 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;
9That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
10For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
11For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
12For there is no difference

between the Jew and the Greek:
for the same Lord over all is rich
unto all that call upon him.

13For whosoever shall call upon
the name of the Lord shall be
saved.

Now, there are many religions or
religious people that teach that good
works are what we need to impress God
to be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are
ye saved through faith; and that
not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of
God:

9Not of works, lest any man
should boast.

The Roman Catholic Church would
teach that Mary plays a role in our
salvation. However, the Bible says no
such thing. In fact, Mary has only one
command in the whole of scripture.
In John chapter two, at the wedding of
Canaan when the host runs out of wine
(unfermented wine, but that's a message
for another day), Mary gives her one and
only command in the whole of the Bible.
Picking up the action in John chapter 2,
we read,

John 2:1-5 And the third day
there was a marriage in Cana of
Galilee; and the mother of Jesus
was there:

2And both Jesus was called, and
his disciples, to the marriage.

3And when they wanted wine,
the mother of Jesus saith unto
him, They have no wine.

4Jesus saith unto her, Woman,
what have I to do with thee?
mine hour is not yet come.

5His mother saith unto the
servants, Whatsoever he saith
unto you, do *it*.

Now get ready, because here is
Mary's lone command. His mother saith
unto the servants, "Whatsoever he saith
unto you, do it." So if we want to follow
Mary's command, we should do
whatever Jesus tells us. Let's take time
for a few examples of what Jesus did in
fact say.

John 3:16 For God so loved the
world, that he gave his only
begotten Son, that whosoever
believeth in him should not
perish, but have everlasting life.

Again we see salvation is a gift we
could never earn.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him,
I am the way, the truth, and the
life: no man cometh unto the
Father, but by me.

John 19:30 When Jesus therefore
had received the vinegar, he said,
It is finished: and he bowed his
head, and gave up the ghost.

John Phillips said of this passage, "He was in complete control. *Tetelestai*. Finished. Every jot and tittle of the law, every word and deed, all that he had been given to do while on earth - finished. That triumphant word has been echoing down the centuries. The work that saves is finished. No one can add to a finished work. We can add nothing to the saving work of Christ."

Tetelestai is from the Greek and means paid in full. Jesus paid the full price for every sin. No church, no pastor, no priest, no sacrament, no good work, no other offering, no matter how sincere, can play a role in God's perfect plan. God is perfect and man is imperfect. If we were to add anything to God's plan, the result would be something imperfect and therefore not of God.

And once we are saved, by accepting Jesus' payment in full, we are now clothed in God's righteousness and we can begin to live the holy life that God wants us to. And that brings us back to our next point about holiness.

- Some aspects of holiness can be cultivated.

Php 4:8-9 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.

9Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

1Jn 2:15-17 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Col 3:1-2 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

It has been said, that "The greatest security against sin is to be shocked at its presence." One way to do that is to spend your time around holy things.

As someone who is in regular contact with international students, I am

continually made aware of the fact that families in the U.S. in general are not closely knit like those in other countries. Part of the problem in America is that we treat our family as profane. Our treatment of women has become profane. Movies, television programs and news stories reflect that as our entertainment and media have become profane.

Hollywood and the music industry continually expose us to and encourage immoral behavior. Remember, what you laugh at today, you will embrace tomorrow. Therefore, we need to be careful in choosing our entertainment and media outlets but that too is a whole message for another day.

Furthermore, it used to be more common for preachers to preach about pursuing holiness, now they want to promote an experience and pursue happiness. Remember this, our founding fathers and brave patriots have bled and died so that we could have life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But Jesus bled and died for us so that we could have life, liberty and the pursuit of holiness. Imagine if we pursued holiness like we pursue happiness. Wow! Our failure rate would decrease dramatically. In any case, realizing that God alone is perfect and that we are not, brings us to our next point.

- Other aspects of holiness can only be appreciated after we have experienced failure and realize how much we are really depending on ourselves.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, God put them through a test by calling out, "Adam, where are you?" He knew where they were, but Adam had to realize that he was no longer holy. Isaiah might have thought himself to be somebody, and so he was undone and his lips purged of being unclean by burning coal. Peter could not be converted to preach with power until after he realized that in the weakness of his flesh he would deny Christ.

2Co 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I

strong.

Jas 1:2-8 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

5If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

As today's message winds down, I hope that you have sensed a pattern here today. The Bible speaks again and again of God's holiness and if we are truly Christians, that is "little Christs," then we need to heed God's call to live out holy lives. As we get ready to close out today's message, there are two challenges.

First, believer, there is no time like the present to get your house in order and begin living a holy life before a holy God. In Romans chapter 12, God calls this our "reasonable service." If something in your life is holding you back from being a holy vessel that can be used of God, then get rid of it. If necessary, replace it with something that God would approve of.

But today there is another challenge. Perhaps there is someone today within the sound of my voice who has never stopped to take a moment and to honestly assess their standing before a holy and righteous God. As I mentioned earlier in the sermon, Jesus said there is only one way to the Father, and that is through Him, plus nothing, minus nothing. Once you have asked Jesus to forgive you of all your sin, past, present, and future, you can begin a right relationship with Him and begin to pursue a holy life that is pleasing to Him. Why not make today your acceptable day of salvation?

In any case, anyone who needs prayer can come forward, and anyone who knows they need God's free gift of salvation, please either come forward or contact the church and someone will be delighted to show you how you can have complete forgiveness of your sin, and a home in heaven after you die - based on God's word, not some vain desire or empty hope. Please don't wait, come forward on the very first verse of our invitational hymn.

But before we go into the invitational hymn, let's pray.

1. Empty Christianity. 2Ti 3:5, Isa

29:13-14,48:1,

2. God demands holiness. 1Pe 1:13-16, Lev 19:2,20:7, Am 3:3, 1Th 4:7, Ps 29:2, 2Ch 20:21, Ps 93:5,96:9,110:3, 1Pe 3:1-5, Ex 28:36 , 1Th 3:11-13, 2Co 7:1 , Ro 6:15-22
3. We can grow in holiness. Jn 17:17 , Ps 19:7-9,119:104-105, Ro 10:17 , 1Cor 15:1-4, Rom 10:8-13, Eph 2:8-9, John 2:1-5,3:16 ,14:6,19:30, Php 4:8-9, 1Jn 2:15-17, Col 3:1-2, 2Co 12:7-10, Jas 1:2-8