

Why Be Holy?

By Robert Vernon

Bobby Vernon:

This morning's chapel speaker is Assistant Chief of Los Angeles Police Department. He has literally thousands of men underneath him, under his command, and he's in charge of administrative services. Now, I don't know about you guys, but oftentimes, like when I'm sitting up here in the bleachers and stuff, I sometimes, you know, look down the speakers of the chapel and I often wonder, you know, what are these guys really like in real life? I mean, they practice what they preach or what? Well, I can vouch for this guy because I've had the privilege of living with him for 21 years. I'm proud to introduce my dad, Bob Vernon.

Robert Vernon:

And I know Bobby, too. I could tell you some things about the kid, but he was kind to me, so I'll be kind to him. I've been asked to speak on this concept of holiness. I looked into the dictionary and I found that to be holy, according to Webster, is to identify with God. Isn't that interesting? To identify with God, to be like God, to be pure, to be un-defiled, to be holy.

I'm a cop. Sometimes I want to be known as a cop. There are other times when I didn't want to be known as a cop. I worked dope for quite a few years, and now I used to say I was an expert in narcotics and people kind of got confused about that. They say, oh, what kind do you use? You know, I worked dope for a number of years. And part of that time on occasion, I had to be undercover. Now, I really never did well as an undercover officer. I remember the first time

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

that I worked undercover. It was before I got into dope. I was, I was working a pickpocket detail. That sounded bad, didn't it?

[Audience Laughter]

I was working to pickpocket detail downtown, and I thought I was blending in real nicely with the scenery, you know, and I was watching the, the bus stop there at 7th and Broadway. And a lot of people, that's where they'd like to work. They jostle people as they get on the bus and pick their pocket. You know, and so I was against the wall there, the [Inaudible] Store. And I was being real cool, you know. And this guy came up and he said, good morning, officer. Do you have the time? You know, I got my watch all the way up before I realized what he said. You know, I thought, well, I'm really undercover. You know, the guy knows who I am.

Another time I was in a bowling alley and I thought I was really cool. This time, I hadn't shaved for several days. You know, and I look real scrounging. And I thought, boy, I really don't look like a cop, you know? And I was sitting there and talking to some guys that were involved in the drug scene, you know, and my, my knees were up on the seat in front of me as trying to be real cool, you know, sit real low. And I'm talking to this guy and I got my knees up a little too high and I had my badge loose in my pocket. Guess what happened? It came sliding out and slid across the floor in front of everybody.

[Audience Laughter]

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

And they all looked at oh, a cop, you know, very embarrassing. Well. Sometime you want to identify yourself as a police officer. Other times you don't. But to be holy is to identify with God. To be holy is not to be an undercover Christian, to be all he is, to be out front; to be like God, to follow his commands, to be pure, to be un-defiled. And you might be asking yourself is, as I did a long time ago, why should I do that? What's in it for me? That's a hassle. To stand alone many times because there's not too many people identifying with God is really a hassle. Why do it? If all there is to becoming a Christian is to, by faith, receive Jesus Christ in your life, why not keep one foot in the world, you know? Why not kind of mess around a little bit? Why not kind of be half a Christian? I mean, have your eternity settled, but still, you know, do whatever everyone else is doing. Why be holy?

This is one of my favorite messages. I've given it many times. I love it. Every time I give it, God speaks to me; because there are many practical reasons why it is beneficial to be holy, to identify with God. I'm going to ask that we just very briefly bow heads in prayer as we look at four of those many reasons. Our Father, open my eyes and open all of our eyes that we may behold wonderful things out of your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Four reasons why I found it beneficial, advantageous, to identify with God: to be holy as he gives me strength. I've got to admit one thing to you. I don't have it in my own, myself to be holy. I have the propensity to be otherwise. I can really identify with the Apostle Paul in Roman 7. And you know what he says there? You know, the good I want to do I can't. And that which I don't want to do, I find myself always doing. I believe in the biblical principles. I believe in following God's commands. I want to sometimes I fail. And then its confession time and then it's starting all over again, and it's, it's being clean again. But there are there four very practical reasons why I want to keep on involved in this struggle. I don't want to give up.

Reason number one and two are found in the same series of verses in John, chapter 14 and 15 where we have the setting. Very apropos to this Easter time, just before the crucifixion, where Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the upper room. They're sitting around the table. What Leonardo Da Vinci, or Michelangelo, or whoever it was, you know, come up with The Last Supper and many of you have seen it. I've seen it. I don't know if it is really like that, but there they were, at least in an upper room. And Jesus is talking with them, and you've got to recognize something. The Bible is a condensation. In a condensation, things are kind of cut down to the very essential elements, and you don't usually see repetition in condensations. But in Chapter 14 and 15, I remember they were all one series of, of conversations going and it wasn't separated until many hundred years after the Bible was written. This is a conversation in the upper room. Five times in a conversation, he repeats himself. Jesus says, "if you love me, you'll keep my commands. If you love me, you'll keep my commands." The first time it appears in chapter 14, verse 15. The next time in verse 21. The third time in verse 23. The fourth time in verse 31. And finally, the last time in verse 10 of Chapter 15. And then, you find these words in verse 11. The next immediate verse, right after he says for the fifth time to keep his commandments, he says, "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Reason number one, we identify with God. We keep his commandments in order to be full of joy. It's the best way to live. It's the way with the most fulfillment. It's the way to achieve your potential.

Another verse that is parallel to that is in Psalm 119, verse 73. Kind of an obscure verse. You may not have heard it before. It popped out to me the first time I read it in the living version. Right in the middle of the longest chapter in the Bible, and David says these words, "Lord, you made my body, give me the sense to heed your commands." Now, let's say that again.

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

What is David saying? "Lord, you made my body, give me the sense to heed your commands."

What David is saying is, Lord, since you put me together, since you're the manufacturer of life, would you please give me the common sense to follow the manufacturer's guidelines?

I have a story I like to tell to illustrate this point. When I first became lieutenant, I took over the freeway squad in Los Angeles, large Olds-mobiles. They only hit the street at after midnight because up until that time you don't need a high speed car because, you know, the freeways have been called many things in one of their ways of describing the freeways are the largest parking lots in the world. You know, I mean, you get out there and you don't move too much. So during the daytime, we have motorcycles on the freeways, at night we had these high speed pursuit cars because after midnight, people quite often get up well over 100 miles an hour. When I took over the squad, I asked to have one of these cars demonstrated and we went down into this shop and we got out one. And Sergeant Larry de Camp and ex-corsairs fighter pilot from World War Two was the driver.

[Audience Laughter]

He still thought he was flying corsairs, I think. And we got in a car and he fired it up, and it really idled rough. I mean, the whole car rocked as it idled (hohom, hohom), you know. And I thought, boy, this thing's out of tune. So I said, "Larry, we'd better get another one." He said, "Why?" I said, "It's out of tune." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Look at the way it's roughing so idle, it idles so roughly (laughs)."

[Audience Laughter]

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

He said, "No, no, no. It's supposed to be like this. Got a full cam, lot of fuel going in there. This, this is fine." I said, "Okay." I said, ""By the way, what are these headrests for?" He said, "You'll find out."

[Audience Laughter]

He handed me a helmet and I said, "What's that for?" He said, "You'll find out."

[Audience Laughter]

He said, "By the way, put on these airplane seat belts over your shoulders." I said, "What's that for?" He said, "You'll find out." We went down to the Santa Monica Freeway, got on the Western Avenue on ramp, which is a downgrade. And we sat there is about two o'clock in the morning. The whole car's rocking (hohom, hohom). You know, I'm kind of getting used to this by now, you know. And all of a sudden (blows air out of mouth quickly), you know, there was a blur on the freeway. He said, "There goes one!" And he put his foot way up there somewhere. You know, on the carburetor.

[Audience Laughter]

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

And down the freeway we came, you know, in our tires or spinning rubber, And I mean, we're really going and I found out why we had the headrest. Three G's, you know.

[Audience Laughter]

Well, not really, but it felt like it. And as we came on to the freeway, I checked the Stuart Warner clock that was pronounced there, up on the dashboard, you know, police clock. And and it registered 90 miles per hour as we got to the bottom of the on ramp. And we accelerated up to well over 140 miles an hour, and then we backed off (chuckles) and we got a clock on these guys at 122. And we hit the Reds, and then pulled over, took them about a mile to pull over. You know, they're going so fast. And we got them over to the side, and they jumped out of the car and they came running back. And I'm trying to get all, out of all these belts, you know?

[Audience Laughter]

And I finally got out and I'm thinking, "Great Scott, they're attacking us." You know, they're running back. But what they were doing, they were all excited. They came running back and they said, "What do you got under the hood of that thing?" You know?

[Audience Laughter]

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

So we lifted the hood and showed them.

[Audience Laughter]

You know, we talked about the engine, and then we took him to jail. You know.

[Audience Laughter]

Well, we booked them and after we booked and we were sitting in a coffee room and somewhere, I forget where the conversation took place. But anyhow, we're sitting around and we're talking after this incident went down. I said, "Larry, that's an incredible car. What have you done in the car?" He said, "Well, you saw the four roll bars, two lengthwise, one over the backseat." He said, "Well, we put that in there. We put those special headrests with a pipe that went into the backseat. We need a strong one, you know, and you notice the extensions on the on the all the instrumentation, because once you're zipped in with those babies, you can't move. You know, we have to reach out." And I said, "Yeah, I know. So what did you do to the engine?" He said, "Oh, well," and he started reading off a bunch of technical jargon about the size of the cam and how many thousands they milled off the heads. And I said "Wait a minute. You have modified the engine." He said Yeah. Ray Wynn in motor transport and his men have modified the engine." I said, "Larry, the kids at the hot rod races, when they, when they modify their engines, quite often the engines blow, the cars go out of control. People are killed. I could just see that happening. You know, a big suit against the city, officers killed, maybe, maybe innocent

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

citizens." He said, "No, no. You don't have to worry about the engine blowing." I said, "What do you mean? You just told me you modified it?" He said, "Yeah, but before we did," get a load of this, I love this, he said, "We talked with the Oldsmobile people, we consulted the manufacturer. And since they made the engine, they told us what we could do, and still be within safety boundaries. They told us how to get the most out of the engine because you see, they made it."

Now, doesn't it make sense? And you know, that basic principle is a very commonsense principle that that applies to this life, the spiritual, the physical, the moral. God who made everything, including you and I, is the manufacturer and it only makes sense to consult him; and when he gives us manufacturer guidelines in this manual right here, it makes sense to follow it to get the most out of the equipment. That's a basic principle. Reason number one, you identify with God, you're holy. You want to live by his commands because it's a way you really get the most out of life. Secondly, in the same series of verses, you notice a phrase that constantly appears that says, "If you love me."

Now, what's a word that's synonymous. Almost a synonym with love? I think it's the word trust. And what he's saying is, "If you love-trust me, you'll keep my commandments." If you really trust me the way you say then when I say something, you'll do it because you'll know I'm out after your best. And that will become your demonstration of love back to me. How many times have you told God verbally in a prayer, "God, I love you." God loves to hear that. But you know what Jesus saying here, don't just tell me, show me. Give me a love gift; and the love gift is your obedience, identifying with me, being holy. That is a love gift to God. That is saying, God, I love you.

I'll never forget an incident occurred when I was the captain of Venice Precinct, and out in the Venice Beach we had many music festivals. They used to call them, on the beach; Love-

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

Ins, Rock-Ins, whatever they were. There were all kind of bands, rather some weird bands. One I'll never forget the name of this band that in the name of it was Dog Breath.

[Audience Laughter]

They kind of sounded like that, you know what I mean? What this is, is it was a, it was kind of a format to allow fledgling rock bands to become known and they would promote their albums and stuff as they were playing. And they'd do it free. And there'd be 12000, 15000 kids out there in Venice Beach. One such day was after the Fourth of July. We had a big riot on the Fourth of July or Memorial Day, I forget--it was some kind of a holiday, and we'd had several people injured and a couple people killed, a couple people actually stabbed to death in one of the reasons that this occurred is everyone was loaded. You know, it was just kind of a conglomerate of people under the influence of something; paint, drugs, gasoline fumes, you know, whatever they could get, glue, marijuana, of course, cocaine, heroin. It was everything there, downers, uppers, whatever. And so we decided, well, you know, if we're going to save lives, we can have to make arrests, and so I came up with a system. I said, "Well, I don't want them to know we're arresting them because it'll start a riot." So I got the ten baddest, biggest guys I could get. And I said, "The reason I've selected you guys is you're big and bad." They said, "Yeah, we are. That's right, boss."

[Audience Laughter]

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

I said, "I want you to take off your uniforms and put on a bathing suit. No gun. If you're really bad, you'll do this." And so they did. They took off their uniforms and they just got in their swimming suits. And you can't really conceal a gun too much there, you know. And so here they are in just bathing suits and they have no weapons. They have no handcuffs or anything. And we had a bike program going where undercover officers go out, make purchases of narcotics from the guys who were dealing. And we had a guy sitting up on top, the Roosevelt Hotel with, with binoculars. And when this guy would make a buy of narcotics, he had some kind of a signal; I don't know he'd pull on his right ear, comb his hair or something. Whoever he was looking at when he did whatever he did was the guy that he just made the buy from. And so they had the whole mob cordoned off in the coordinates. And they could bring in, talk in by radio, this arrest team of these 10 big guys. The way it would happen is kind of interesting. You know, you see this guy in a red sweater just sold some dope, you know, and all of a sudden there are 10 guys around him and suddenly he disappears with the 10 guys.

[Audience Laughter]

And you know, nobody said you're under arrest or anything, all of a sudden they kind of surround him like a big amoeba, you know, and it just kind of.

[Audience Laughter]

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

You walk out and you hear a voice saying "help," you know, and a guy goes out; kind of neat.

[Audience Laughter]

Well, we arrested by noon, we had arrested over 50 people that way. And would you believe, nobody knew it? You know, just suddenly, hey guys that are dealing in dope suddenly disappear. You know, they're gone. And so there wasn't much dope around by noon. But just as we were loading the last group into a bus, we had a bus behind the Roosevelt Hotel. Some of the kids became aware of this and they run over to the mob (mimicking voice) "They're taken off our friends, they're ripping. The cops are here. They're ripping off our friends." And they suddenly surround a bus and they were rocking the bus. They're trying to get in. And I had about 300 guys or 350 guys or so back in the RTD bus. It was a large garage there, about a block away. And they were metro officers with their helmets and batons and gas, guns and everything. And if a riot develops, that's what I was going to use. And so somebody said, "Well, Captain, you ready? Ready for Metro?" You know, they're rocking thins. And I said, no. Let me try some. So I went out with a sergeant and I tried to talk to them. And I told the guys before I left, I said, now, the reason I'm taking the sergeant, he's on a raid. If I get in trouble, I want the metro guys there. I want it fast. They said, okay boss.

So I went in there and I talked with them for a while, and it it was interesting. They first started with kind of antagonism and I'll kind of save time here and not go through the whole thing. But after about 30 minutes or so of talking, they kind of understood what we were trying to do. And although they still didn't agree, they backed off and they went back to the crowd and

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

they let us take these dealers away without any confrontation. But before it, they went away, a little girl came up to me. She looked about 14 or 15, very unkempt, probably a runaway. And she came up to me and she reached in a, in a Kraft brown sack she had and she brought out a raw potato, and she handed it to me and she said, "Sir, here." I took this raw potato and I thought, what on earth is this about? You know, I said, "What are you giving me this for?" She said, "Well, because I love you." And I thought, oh, she's really being wise, you know. And then I looked in her face and she had tears in her eyes. I could see she was sincere and I said, "Well, what do you mean? What? Why a potato?" She said, "Well, it's all I have. This was going to be my meal today, my breakfast, my lunch, my dinner, it's it's the only thing I have and I want to give it to you because you didn't use the 250 officers you have in the busting." I thought it was a secret, you know. She said, "You came down and you talked with us and you reasoned with us. You didn't hit us on the head. And for that, we love you. And I love you, and I want you to have this." Man, about wiped me out. You know, I stood there. I didn't know what to do with it, but I wasn't going to give it back and not accept your gift. That means I got five minutes hang in there.

[Audience Laughter]

And I accepted that. And I've often thought about that girl and wondered what happened to her, who she was; whether she ate that day or not. But, you know, that was, that was a profound message to me. She could have just verbally said, thank you for talking with us. But somehow this meant so much more. It wasn't much. It was just a raw potato, but it was a message of love. I've never forgotten it. God says you love me? Give me a message of love; obey me. Identify with me. Be holy.

The third reason we might not be able to get the four, because I'm going to have to conclude. The third reason is as a prerequisite for service. We obey God, we identify with God because it's a must if you're going to serve him, you say where you find that? Well, there are many places in the Bible that talk about this condition. I just want to give you one verse this morning. It's in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 20 and 21, where he talks about vessels in a house. And these, this concept is so important to me. When I first got a hold of this principle, it literally revolutionized my life because it brought hope to me. And it says this, "Now in any large house. There are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wooden vessels, of earthenware and some to honor and some to dishonor." Now, that poses kind of a question, although it's concealed. The question is if there are four kinds of vessels, which does he use? Because it says some are used for honorable purposes, and other for dishonorable. Now, I want you to look up here for a minute and see kind of the order of things: gold first, silver next, little less expensive, wooden, and finally, earthenware, dirt. Now from the human viewpoint, which is the most valuable? Well, of course, the gold. Five hundred bucks an ounce, you know. Always has been expensive. And you look at the next verse to find the answer of which ones he uses, and you find it has nothing to do with a human intrinsic value of the vessel.

First of all, he lets us know he's really talking about people. And he said, "Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work." You want to be used by God. Some of you are gold vessels; some of us are dirt vessels. But you see, that has nothing to do with whether you'll be used or not. From a human viewpoint, you may have much to offer God. But the criterion that God uses is, are you holy? Are you identifying with me? Are you keeping my commands? If you are, even if you're dirt, I'll use you. If you're not, even if you're gold, I can't use you.

Vernon: Why Be Holy?

And I want to conclude by saying this. I started here, like many of you at Biola. I prepared by sitting under such men as Jay Vernon McGee. Charles Feinberg, Louis Talbot, Sam Sutherland. And I wanted to be used by God. But as I associated with other people here, I found out that I, in my eyes at least, was not made out of gold or silver. And I really wondered, can God ever use me? And then I came upon this truth. And I suddenly realized I, me, Vernon, I've got the potential of being used by God. If I just identify with him; if I'm holy. I'm not gonna pretend I'm always holy. But God is working on me. He still is working on me. And I'm getting closer, by his grace. And I want to tell you something. There is nothing more exciting in the world then to be used by God. Nothing. And I'll tell you, I've experienced a lot of exciting things. I've been a policeman for 25 years. I've been in high speed pursuits; I've kicked down doors in the middle of night and faced guns. I've done a lot of things that are fun and exciting and, and dangerous. But let me tell you something again, there is nothing like sensing the presence of God in your life and being used by him.

Why identify with God? Why be holy? It's really to be the most fulfilled to experience joy. It's to give God a love gift. And finally, it's so you can be used by him. Let's pray.

Father, I want to be holy. I want to identify with you. I want to be a godly man. But God, I confess to you and before these many brothers and sisters, I don't have it within myself. It must come from you. God, lead in my life. Give me the spiritual strength that only you can give. God, use me. Use all of us. In Jesus' name, amen.