Good afternoon! We are continuing our series on “Legit: Becoming a Real Christ-Follower” and we are on our 5th message. This afternoon, I’d like to deal with a subject matter that concerns all of us and that is “sin”. How do we overcome sin? How do we tackle sin in our lives?

Three pastors went to a pastors convention and were all sharing one room. The first pastor said quite seriously, "How about we confess our secret sins one to another? The Bible says confess your sins to one another. I'll start - my secret sin is I just love to gamble. When I go out of town, it's cha-ching cha-ching, let the machines ring."

The second pastor said, "My secret sin is that I love to drink. In always bring a bottle of wine with me wherever I go."

The third pastor said, "My secret sin is I like to gossip. Oh boy, I just can't wait to get out of this room!"

Sin is not easy to overcome, isn’t it? Many of us here are Christians already and yet, if we’re honest, we still sin. We sin at least once a day. Sin is not just the things we do or say that goes against the commands of God in the Bible but even those things that come to our mind. Jesus says, “if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he commits adultery with her in his heart” or “anyone who is angry with a brother or sister be will be subject to judgment.” So, sin is a serious matter. The standard set by Jesus for his followers is high. Can we ever meet that standard? No and Yes. No, if continue to live in our own power. Yes, if we live according to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

That is what I want to share with you this afternoon. Overcoming sin by living holy lives. Which produces another question, how do we live holy lives?
Let us look at our passage this morning and see how the Bible answers this question.

Read 1 Peter 1:14-22.

When you think of the word 'holiness' what comes to your mind? Does it conjure up an image of a person carrying a Bible, a person kneeling down in prayer, silence in church, choirs of angels singing, a long white flowing robe, lit candles, organ music, stained glass, and quiet time?

Is that the mental picture you have of holiness? Many people do. It's almost as though holiness is the private preserve of an austere group of monks, missionaries, mystics, and martyrs.

Hindus, for example, think that one could become holy by practicing yoga, or taking a bath in the Ganges River. Buddhists, meanwhile, teach that one can become a purified person through a series of rebirths until one reaches Nirvana, the state of eternal bliss. Even some Christians have their own idea of holiness. To be holy, it's necessary that you listen to Christian music only, read Christian books and magazines only, and eat certain food only. In early Christian times, in fact, some Christians would retire into caves just to get away from worldly cares and hopefully, become holy. We call these people ascetics.

So, you see, people have different ideas of how to be holy. Some people, however, don't even have a slightest idea of what being holy means. Or they choose to ignore the concept altogether. And so we hear people using the word carelessly like 'holy moses’ ‘holy cow’ 'holy mackerel.'

Because people nowadays are ignoring holiness, we see rampant immorality and other wicked things occurring all around us. And the church has not been spared of it. We do things that we are not supposed to do, we commit acts that the Bible forbids us to. It’s surprising to see that holiness is also being taken lightly in our midst.
Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines the word 'holy' as having divine quality or venerated as sacred. The dictionary also says that the word 'holy' comes from an old English word, Hal, which means whole, W-H-O-L-E. The word whole, meanwhile, can either mean complete or healthy. Thus, when we say that something or someone is holy, it connotes completeness or healthiness of that object or person. So, that object or person is in a state of being in which there is no missing or unhealthy parts and therefore, it is without defect, unblemished, and in short, perfect.

This definition is correct but it doesn't give the whole picture (no pun intended). To get the whole picture, we must go to the Bible. It’s only by knowing what the Bible says that we can then live a life that is holy. So now, let me give you its meaning based on the Bible.

To be holy is to be Set Apart. You see, the word holy as used in our text this morning comes from a Greek word that can mean pure, blameless, or consecrated. Pure and blameless are what the dictionary gives us. Consecrated is what the Bible imparts to us. To be consecrated is to be solemnly devoted for a purpose. Thus, when something or someone is holy, that thing or person is set apart.

I’m sure that every one of us here has a toothbrush, right? And I’m very certain that no one of us would want anybody else to use our toothbrush. In fact, no one of us would dare touch someone else’s toothbrush. Even if you love each other, you wouldn’t dare use the other person’s toothbrush. For us, the toothbrush is a sacred thing. It has been set apart for a purpose. Just for our own purpose. We may share a toothpaste, but not a toothbrush.

Do you get the point? As Christians, we are like toothbrushes because we have been set apart by God for a purpose. Just for his own purpose. That purpose is to be conformed to the image of his Son so that God may be glorified.
Romans 8:28-29a tells us, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”.

Because we have been set apart, God wants us to act like we really have been set apart. Verse 14 of our passage says, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance."

All of us here engaged in sinful habits before we came to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Some of us were deeper into sin than others. We may have been gossips, liars, cheaters, womanizers, even alcoholics, heavy smokers, thieves, drug addicts, and so on and so forth. But by the grace of God, we have been set free from all these and have altogether abandoned our old way of life.

Since we have been set apart already, we should not slip back into our old ways. Before, we used to engage in these things because we didn't know better then. But we know better now. We know that God is not pleased with these things. Besides, doing these things hurt us and other people as well.

Before, we were living in a garbage dump. We slept there and we ate there, But God took us out of that garbage dump, washed us, gave us new clean clothes, and let us live in his own house to enjoy the comforts and food and all. I don’t think anyone would want to go back to the garbage dump once he has tasted the good life. Anyone who does so would be like a dog who goes back to eat his own vomit.

You see, we should throw away our former evil desires, not conforming to them any longer because something better is here. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”
Now, in verse 15-16, we read, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

What it's telling us is that instead of imitating the ungodly world with its fads and fashions, our lives should reproduce the holy character of the one who called us. To be godly means to be Godlike. You see, God is holy in all his ways. If we are to be like him, we must be holy in all that we do and say. In this life we will never be holy as he is, we know that and God knows that. But we should, at least, make the commitment to live holy lives. God expects us and wants us to be holy like him. Trying to be holy is the sign of an obedient child of God.

But living a holy life I know could be a struggle at times. Let me tell you, however, that the power of the Holy Spirit is there to help us overcome our weaknesses. Paul says to the Ephesian Christians, who they themselves needed power to live, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being”. (Eph. 3:16) So, the Holy Spirit is your help. Just keep in step with the Holy Spirit. Be sensitive to his leading. When you’re about to commit a sin, and you get convicted like someone whispering to you, “Uh-oh, that’s wrong, don’t even think about it”, that’s the Holy Spirit talking to you. He wants you to be aware that you’re treading on dangerous ground. Then, you ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen you. And give you self-control which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Now, verse 17 tells us to live like strangers here on earth. In a way we are because we have been set apart. We no longer belong to the world. We belong to God. In fact, the Bible says that our citizenship is in heaven. Therefore, we should live our lives differently now. So, to be holy is to be set apart.

Now, how did God accomplish this? What method or means did he employ to set us apart?
The answer is found in verses 18-21. Let me read to you these verses once more...

From these verses we can see that God's method in setting us apart is by sending his own son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. We call this method **Sacrificial Atonement**.

To atone is to do something to show that you are sorry for having done something wrong. In short, it is to make amends. Now, the Bible says that Jesus did not sin. He was a lamb without blemish or defect. He lived a sinless life while he was on earth. So, he didn't need to make atonement for any sin at all.

The atonement of Jesus, therefore, was for us. Because of our sins. The Bible says in Romans 3:23, “…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

You see, a holy God demands holiness from his creatures. But since Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, they passed on their sin of disobedience to us. And from that time on, every person who ever lived has been in rebellion against God. As Isaiah 53:6 (NLT) says, “All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.”

The reality is we all want to do our own thing because we don't know better. But God knows better. He knows that if left to our own devices, we'll all die, not only physically, but spiritually as well. Which means that we'll be separated from God forever. With no hope of getting to heaven. For the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death."

But our holy God is also a loving God. His love emanates from his holiness. He sent his own son to save us from hell. He wants us to experience eternal life in heaven. Thus, with the blood of Jesus, he redeemed us.
Not with perishable things such as gold or silver, things that really don't matter in the end. Things that cannot match the value of a soul. Only another soul can save our souls.

And that is the soul of Jesus. When he died, he gave up his own soul or life for us. He shed his own blood. By his death, our sins were forgiven.

God didn't have to do this. He was not obligated to save us. But he did it because he loves us so much. Lamentations 3:22 tells us, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."

What God did was a great sacrifice. He let his own son die on the cross in order for us to live.

You know, if you are a parent, and you come home from work really feeling tired and all you want to do is just to go to your bedroom and lie down and rest but then your little child greets you at the door and says that he wants to play, how would you react? If you played with your child, that is what we call sacrifice. You are sacrificing your time and energy in order to put a little joy in your child's heart. Because your child is worth your sacrifice.

In the same way, our loving God looked down from heaven and upon seeing that we are lost, sent his son Jesus to die for us. He sacrificed his own son because we are worth dying for.

Yet, as verse 21 tells us, God raised Jesus from the dead and glorified him. As a result, we have this living hope of being raised from the dead as well. In fact, we have the assurance of eternal life in heaven.

So, sacrificial atonement is the method by which God set us apart. But being set apart or being saved is not something that is forced upon us. We have to make a decision whether we accept or not what Jesus has done for us. You see, salvation does not rest on the good things that we do but on what Jesus Christ has done for us, namely, dying on the cross.
Salvation doesn’t depend on what we can do but on what Jesus has already done for us. If we will humble ourselves and confess our sins, asking God's forgiveness, and asking Jesus to enter our hearts, then we will be saved.

If you want to be saved this afternoon, I'll give you a chance later on to respond to God's message.

Now, a saved person as we know now has been set apart and made holy. How would you know that a person is holy? There is a manifestation. It should be seen through his life. It should be manifested through **Selfless Acts**. Let me read our final verse, verse 22, "....

Holiness doesn't mean only getting your act together in the sense of avoiding sin by trying to live in a godly manner. It also means loving sincerely.

When you love sincerely, you find it easier to do things for others. Your loving gestures are prompted by a great desire to put others before you. I believe this is what the apostle Peter is trying to say. You see, it's so easy to say that we love our brothers and sisters. We may even try to convince ourselves that we do love our brothers and sisters because we belong to one family. But then, somehow, we don't find it easy to act it out.

But putting it in practical terms, how can we show our brothers and sisters that we truly love them? First, it is by encouraging them. The Bible tells us in Thessalonians to “encourage one another and build each other up.” For example, a simple "Good job" or "well done" will go a long way toward boosting the confidence of someone who just did something for the church. Then, for those who are quite nervous or scared in tackling a particular task, we can say with enthusiasm, "You can do it with God's help," "God is with you," "I believe in you." And for those who are going through tough times, well you would need to spend a little more time with them and say not only a few words.
You know, words can be helpful or destructive. There was a boy who was scolded severely by his teacher because he seemed to be always daydreaming in school. As a result, he didn’t want to go to school anymore. His mother, however, gave him encouraging words and so he went back to school. The boy was Thomas Alva Edison.

Now, another thing we can do to show our love is to lend a helping hand. The apostle Paul says in Acts 20:35, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak.” It means being available when help is needed like moving chairs and tables, picking up trash, setting the table, preparing food, decorating this and that. And you know what, I'm glad that I see this taking place in our church. I notice that everyone is just busy with something. Although perhaps, some are just trying to look busy. Then, if I see someone not doing anything, I just tell myself that perhaps that person has a bum stomach or has a torn pants or skirt. But, seriously, I've heard visitors say that I'm blessed to belong to such a supportive church. And I praise God for that.

Doing selfless acts, of course, should not be focused only to people in the church. Our selfless acts must also target those outside the church. We must endeavor to be encouraging and helpful to the unbelievers. We must show that we love them and care for them.

Now, sharing the gospel is very important and must be our priority. But coupling it with a sincere desire to share our lives with others will make the gospel more powerful and effective. There’s a quote that’s wrongly attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. It goes, “Preach the gospel. Use words if necessary.” The point is, the gospel is holistic. We should care not only about the spiritual need of people, but also about their physical needs.

When Jesus was on earth, he did not only preach and teach. He also healed the sick, fed the hungry, and set the demon-possessed free.
So, his approach to man’s salvation was holistic, meaning he was concerned with the whole being of the person. The apostles did the same. For they went out healing people and attending to the physical needs of people as they preached the gospel. BTW, holistic and holy come from the same root word of whole.

You see, when we live holy lives, people will take notice. They will see the kind of light we have because we will reflect the glory of Jesus. Jesus said that we are the light of the world. What this means is that we are a reflection of the true light which is him. Our function is to shine for him just as the moon reflects the glory of the sun.

Let me end this message by sharing with you a story about Billy Graham.

A well-known professional golfer was playing in a tournament with President Gerald Ford, fellow pro Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round was over one of the other pros on the tour asked, “Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?”

The pro said with disgust, “I don’t need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!”

With that he headed for the practice tee. His friend followed, and after the golfer had pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, “Was Billy a little rough on you out there?” The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, “No, he didn’t even mention religion.”

Astonishingly, Billy Graham had said nothing about God, Jesus, or religion, yet the pro stomped away after the game accusing Billy of trying to ram religion down his throat.

What had happened? Simply this: The evangelist had so reflected Christ-likeness that his presence brought the same feeling to the pro as experienced by Isaiah.
Isaiah knew he was ‘lost, a man of unclean lips, and living among a people of unclean lips.’ In the life of Billy Graham, the lost pro had sensed the presence of a Holy God.

I have always imagined and strive for to walk away from someone or some persons and have them think or remark, “here is truly something different about that man. He lights up the room. He makes me feel so warm. There is something about him. I need to visit with him and find out what it is.”

If we are truly CHRIST-LIKE… shouldn’t it be that way?

There are multiple occasions in the Bible where people just dropped what they were doing when Jesus entered the courtyard or home. That should be our goal. They should look at each one of us and see “HOLY”. They should hear us speak and think “HOLY”.

D. L. Moody said, “It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. Lighthouses do not ring bells and fire cannon to call attention to their shining—they just shine.”

Folks, I hope we will shine and not just talk about shining. Let us be obedient to God’s command that we be holy as he is holy.