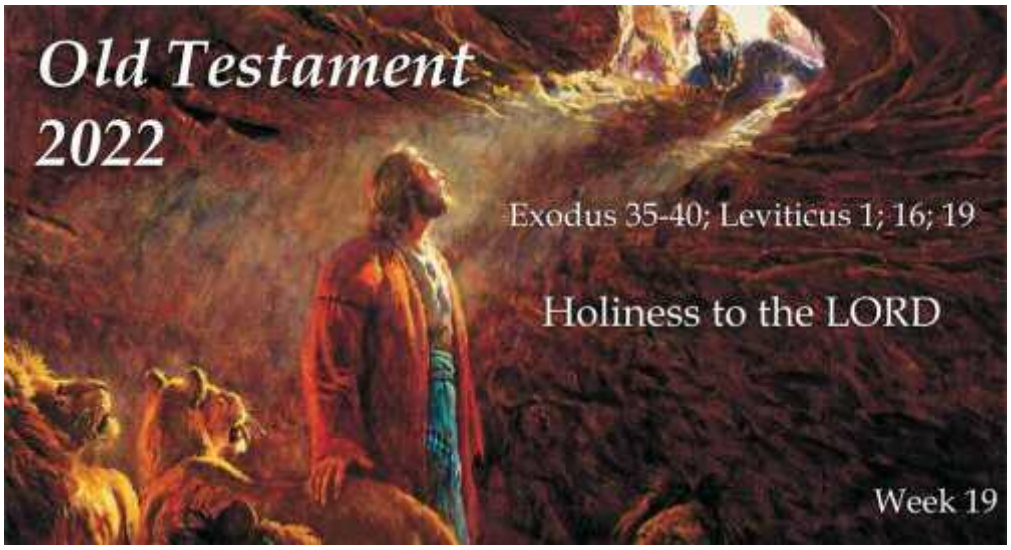

Week 19 is scheduled for study May 2-8, 2022. For me, this week's watchcry is "Become holy!" All the lessons are about this subject.

Day 1

As you study the scriptures, pay attention to spiritual impressions you receive about way you can become more like Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Exodus 35-40; Leviticus 19 - The Lord wants me to become holy as He is.

Please bear with me today as I try to mentally work my own way through this concept of becoming holy. In the past, as I have thought of the word "holy", I have pictured this in my mind.

I am the first to admit that I have no idea who St. Philip Neri is, pictured above. Who he is or why he was made a Saint is beside the point. It is the depiction of this image of him that I want you to focus on. It is the elevation of the self to a state of godly piety/holiness that I think of when I hear about being holy. He is carrying scriptures and the Easter lily, the symbol of Christ himself, with his eyes cast wistfully heavenward, and his hand upon his own chest as though to say, "Me Lord?", as if in the depths of his humility he is stunned that God would deign to speak to him personally. He even has the halo around his head to portray his own sanctity. This is what I have always pictured in my mind when I think of being holy. Again, please don't get me wrong. I'm not knocking Saint Philip Neri. Don't know the man or his history. I just want you to understand where I am coming from when I see the word holy. And I was born and raised in the Church, so how I got this image of holiness in my head I will never know.

Now that I have embarrassed myself by admitting my own silliness and misdirected thinking, let's set the record straight about what holiness really is, and how we can and should achieve it. My generous assumption is that I am the only one reading this who has a misperception of what holiness is or what it represents. I may be the only person in the Church who has ever gotten the wrong idea of what it actually means to be holy,

right? To set the record straight on what holiness is and what makes a person holy, let's back up and make a comparison. We'll start with the obvious - sin.

Bondage

The product of sin, in any form, and from any source, is unhappiness and corruption of the soul. This is why the scriptures talk about fallen man, because the nature of the mortal body is to seek creature comforts, to please itself, and to avoid anything that restricts the pleasures of the body. So sin, by its nature leads us to excesses in behaviors and attitudes that eventually leads us, if pursued, to destruction, physically and spiritually. Most sins have addictive elements to them, whether it is physical, like smoking, drinking, drugs, etc., or emotional, like lying, covetousness, envy, haughtiness, etc.

The physical sins each have physical pleasures attached to them that get us started and get us hooked. The addiction takes place when we come to believe that we can no longer live without our chosen substance. We know that is not true, but the pain involved in quitting appears greater than the continuation of the habit, so we keep the addiction.

Emotional addictions are more subtle, for they are based on lies we have told ourselves. We actually convince our self that we are better than our neighbor, that they are not only entitled to our opinion of their behavior, but that they actually need it for their own happiness. The levels of self conceit that it is possible for us to rise to is incredible. In the case of envy and covetousness, we actually convince our self that we deserve what belongs to someone else.

The problem with all sins is that they are divisive by nature. I am not aware of any sin that seeks to unite people into being one or acting in unison in anything. Are you? Sin is secretive and binding in nature, and the end result always leads to some form of unhappiness and sorrow. Do you think that perhaps this is why the Lord is so dead set against such behaviors? Would you want such results for your children, or for yourself? Any clear thinking person would never rationally make such a choice for themself or for another. Yet, we all suffer from the effects of sin in our lives, because whether or not we know better, we have chosen that path in one way or another for our self.

Freedom

What God, our Father, wants for us, is the freedom we can enjoy from all the results of sin and what it does to us. The freedom from the corrupting influences of the life of sin that is called holiness. Holiness is a life of joy and happiness. When we are free from the addictions that bind us down, the emotions that canker our soul, and the habits that make us suffer, we can experience life in a whole new way. The commandments we have received from God offer us a choice that the world cannot provide for us. Living the life of a covenant and commandment keeping person creates opportunities to experience happiness free from the addictions of sin. And commandments, by their very nature are uniting in their results.

How many commandments can you keep that blesses only you? Really. How many? Pick a commandment. Tithing is personal, but the result of paying it blesses untold others through your contribution. Fast Offerings, and all other voluntary contributions have the same effect. All of them are added together, and the sum of everyone's individual generosity, no matter how small it may be, becomes a powerful force for doing good in the world.

When we minister to one another, we become united through love. When we serve and protect our family members we grow stronger, because we are not alone in our efforts to be and do good. Keeping the Word of Wisdom protects us from the ravages of the results of not keeping the Word of Wisdom. And because we keep the commandments God is able to bless us in ways that others cannot be blessed.

Note: If there is one thing I have noticed between good and evil it is that evil always ends by leaving us alone and without support. Good always offers us the strength of others and unity with God, which is strengthening even when we are alone.

Holiness

Holiness then is the opposite of sin. A holy life is the opposite of a sinful life. A sinful life is filled with indulgence and addiction, and concern for self. The holy life is filled with giving, kindness, and the concern for others. It isn't the self proclaimed piety and humble self flagellation (whipping yourself for your sins) that I envisioned holiness to be. Holiness is living like God lives. No wonder He expects us to become holy, like Him. This is the goal of the statement "Be ye therefore perfect, even as I am." To be perfect is

to become whole, or free from defect, no longer lacking those things that bring happiness. Being perfect has nothing to do with not making any mistakes, ever. That certainly isn't what God is referring to. He is better aware of who He is dealing with than we are. He knows we all make mistakes. He also knows that if we choose to keep His commandments that we will change and become more holy, i.e. free from sin, hence becoming happier and more prosperous, more united in all we do, and more like Him. This is why we will eventually be happy to live in His presence, for we will have learned to live like Him.

With this definition of holiness in mind, go back through today's lesson and fill out the table presented in the manual. See if this change of perspective changes how you might have otherwise made your choices for the table.

Day 2

As you study the scriptures, pay attention to spiritual impressions you receive about way you can become more like Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Exodus 35:4-36:7 - The Lord asks me to make my offerings with a willing heart.

Sometimes, when I write these commentaries, something pops into my head without any explanation or way for me to use it, but I feel it is important. Well, here is a verse that is one of my favorites in all the scriptures. Perhaps you will have need of it at some point and you will find it helpful. Doctrine and Covenants 88:33.

> 33 For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift.

Now that I have that out of the way, let's look at the concept of being willing, for we are talking today about being both a willing receiver AND a willing giver, just being willing is important.

When Israel left Egypt, the scriptures say they "spoiled" or emptied the country of their riches. They took all they could carry. The Egyptians were glad to give them their riches just to get rid of them. Have you ever wondered why the Israelites would need all those

jewels and precious stones, the gold and silver, etc.? After all, they were headed out into no man's land where there were no merchants or stores for them to spend their newly gotten riches. All those riches were just extra baggage for them to carry around. Well, the Lord had a purpose for it, it was to build the temple.

When Moses called upon the people to bring all their precious things to build the tabernacle, I think that one of the reasons they brought more than was needed was because of the easiness of the gift. I am sure there were those who actually had a genuine desire to worship the Lord, and their contribution was a sacred thing to them. But I also believe that for many, their contribution was an easy ask. They hadn't done anything to get their riches, and those riches weren't doing anything but making their travels more difficult. Call me a pragmatist, but I think I am close to being correct.

But let's set that point aside and look at the parts of Moses' request that required personal sacrifice, the willingness to use their individual talents to create all that was needed to build the Tabernacle. People needed to forge metal sculptures, weave ropes, work hides, embroider whole giant panels with cherubim, etc. All kinds of skills were needed, and the Lord referred to those in whom He had given those talents to do the work, wise. By calling the people with the talents wise, He meant that they had the knowledge to do what was needed. And the Lord expressed His appreciation for those who were not only wise, but willing to use their abilities in behalf of the Tabernacle that needed to be built.

Two-edged sword

Willingness is a two-edged sword. In other words, it cuts either way you swing it. Our main focus today is on our willingness to give of ourselves to the needs of others. And there is just so much need these days. Very few are able to provide themselves with everything and anything they need. Most of us need something we can't get or do on our own. Let's face it, we need each other. And the Lord cherishes those who give with a willing heart.

A willing heart is not one that expects payment, begrudges being made to provide the service, or is only willing to do the minimal amount required to get out of the commitment. A willing heart is a generous heart, one filled with generosity, one that finds joy in being able to do the giving.

This same willingness with which we hopefully give to others becomes a burden when it is others who are coming to serve us. Are we willing to receive when others try to serve us? Are we gracious, grateful, and kind to ourselves, as well as to those who initiated the service? A willing heart is one that allows us to see the necessity of both the giving and the receiving, for both giving and receiving render lessons we all need to learn in this life.

As mentioned in the manual by President Bonnie L. Oscarson, "Each person has something important to contribute and has unique talents and abilities that help move this important work along." The difficult thing about having a willing heart is that sometimes others are all too willing to take advantage of your generosity, and keep their own abilities to themselves. We are left to ask the question, "Which is more important, that I remain willing to give, no matter what the receiver does, or that I get something from my gift?" I am certainly glad the Savior of us all was willing to give, knowing full well that many of us would give little to nothing back in return. There was a man with a willing heart!

Day 3

As you study the scriptures, pay attention to spiritual impressions you receive about way you can become more like Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Leviticus 1:1-9; 16 - Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, I can be forgiven.

Just a couple of thoughts on today's lesson. The burnt offering was one where the whole animals was sacrificed. It wasn't just partially used either. The whole animal was consumed in the fire. But even that wasn't all of it. The insides were to be washed to make them clean for the sacrifice. Sound familiar? When the Lord asks us to put our heart on the altar of sacrifice, He doesn't want a tainted sacrifice, but one that is clean, inside and out, and done in the way He has instructed.

Why do you think the Lord would be so concerned that everything be done in His own way? I think the answer is because His way is the way of happiness, and helping us learn to be happy is what the whole plan of salvation is all about. He is trying to teach us how to become holy, as He is holy, and that requires specific kinds of changes to be

made within each of us. Hence, His commandments that specify we do things in certain ways. He knows what needs to be changed for us to experience the kind of sacred joy He lives with each day. We do not. This is why we trust God and do things His way, for His ways always bring greater happiness than anything our ways could produce.

I like the imagery of the fire consuming the whole animal. This all-in approach is how the Savior went into the atonement for the sins of mankind. It is what is required for us to become holy ourselves. We can't hold any part of ourselves back. We must be willing to give all we have for the changes to become real in our life. It is this blessing of the willing heart, being really willing to undergo whatever God requires of us, that creates the holy life and teaches us the holy attitudes. This is the point of all temple worship and all commandments, to bring us closer to understanding the nature and character of God, because we are becoming more like Him.

The manual recommends reading the additional material called, "The Tabernacle and Sacrifice" on page 79. I have written an article by the same name you can read here - *The Tabernacle and Sacrifice*.

FHE/Personal Study

The strictness of the way.

It can be easy to get frustrated with the strictness of the way. Why all the rules? Why is there seemingly no freedom to interpret the commandments in a way that would be easier to live and keep them? Becoming a god is hard. Yes. Can you imagine commandments that were loosey-goosey about how they were to be interpreted? What if living a Christlike life was easier, because we could pick and choose what we wanted to live or exclude from our life? How do you make or pass judgment on such a system as that? There is good reason for God's laws being straightforward and direct. It is because He needs to be able to judge whether or not we lived up to the law, so the law has to be exacting and measurable. We may not know how to measure our obedience, but He knows how. If He can look at us and measure the amount of our faith then He can tell us whether our willingness was a grudging willingness or an all-in willingness.

It is up to us to try to live up to God's standards. It is not His responsibility to try to live down to our standards. He lives by a celestial law, the law we must learn to love or we

will never want to live where He does. For these reasons I am grateful His laws are strict, consistent, and something I can rely on.

Click the link below to

print a PDF copy of the article.

OT19-2022 - Holiness to the LORD

Week 19