

## Distinguished

The historic Titanic was a ship of distinction. Not only was it the grandest ocean liner of its time, it had separate quarters for the rich and elite, from those of the more common levels of society. That which distinguishes a person from among others is the focus of today's Templates of Truth.

God had given Moses and His people the building plans, furnishings and interior design for the tabernacle. God wanted to dwell in the midst of His people, and the tabernacle became the place where God's glory came down. In order for God to remain among His people, there had to be an environment which embraced His holiness. Throughout the book of Leviticus, God gave Moses the expanded details of the law and sacrificial system to ensure that the people dealt effectively with their sins, that proper atonement was made, and His forgiveness could be extended.

God spoke to Aaron and said, *Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you...so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean* (Leviticus 10:9-10). If you want to justify even a casual consumption of alcohol, you'll be hard put in using Scripture to do it. In nearly every reference, the Bible either prohibits or strongly discourages the believer's consumption of alcoholic drink. It is just one example of the ways in which God wants His people to stand out as different and distinguished from all others. In every way, God expects the same – *For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy; for I am holy* (Leviticus 11:44). The Hebrew word translated *consecrate* means to be set apart and distinguished as clean, holy, pure and righteous. That was not just a command for the ancient Israelites, the Apostle Peter applied it to you and I today as well – *like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior* (I Peter 1:15). Peter was urging us as Christians to be different; to be distinguished in our *behavior*.

Are Christians distinguished, different? A 2003 Barna Research survey leaves some serious questions. Among those who claimed to be "born again," 45% believed gambling was morally acceptable behavior; 49% approved of co-habitation; 38% favored abortion; 42% agreed with non-marital sexual relations; 33% saw nothing wrong with viewing pornography; and, 36% felt the use of profanity was acceptable. It is alarming how many Christians in America not only view such behaviors as morally acceptable, but practice them to various degrees in their own lives. For those who do, there are few distinguishing behavioral qualities that characterize them as strikingly different from their non-believing peers. Yet, God calls for that contrast – *come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean, and I will welcome you* (II Corinthians 6:17). Favor with God is obviously related to faithfulness and obedience to His commands and expectations concerning our behavior and lifestyle.

How do we do that? How do we live holy lives when our human nature holds such a great capacity for unholiness? It is, first of all, a mindset – *those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, (set their minds*

*on) the things of the Spirit* (Romans 8:5). Paul urged us to – *take every thought captive (into) obedience (to) Christ* (II Corinthians 10:5). To a large extent, we are what we think. If our mindset sees nothing wrong with a behavior or value, we are far more likely to allow it in our own life. Holiness starts in our thoughts, beliefs and opinions. Compromise and attitudes of “moderation” have become the enemy of holiness with many Christians – “There is nothing wrong with drinking as long as you don’t get drunk,” is a prime example.

After a proper mindset, holiness becomes a choice. Joshua stated the claim very clearly – *choose for yourselves today whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (Joshua 24:15). We may be born with a sin nature, but to act out in sinful ways is always a choice of our will. In Christ, we have a greater capacity to choose obedience to Him because – *greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world* (I John 4:4). We can’t blame our unholy behavior on anything or anyone. We sin because we decide to sin and we choose to sin.

As one whose journey with God is speckled with bad choices, faults and failures, I can assure you that holiness is indeed a challenging goal. With that admission, however, I can also assure you that when *we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (I John 1:9). To what extent are we forgiven – *as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us* (Psalm 103:12). And not only that, God declares – *I am the one who wipes out your transgressions...and I will not remember your sins* (Isaiah 43:25). We don’t have to slaughter animals and sprinkle blood on the altar as the ancient Israelites did. Sincere confession and repentance is all God requires. Confession holds the mindset, and repentance embodies the choice.

Just as that ancient tabernacle became the place where God dwelled among His people, you and I as believers have a body that is the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. He indwells within us. Our temple must be a holy place for His power to be able to work effectively within us. How clean is your temple?

That’s today’s Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.