



Light from the Word

Walking Carefully and in Holiness – Part 1

*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*¹

As we read this Scripture (as well as other related verses), we might ask what is “holiness” as it relates to God? Bible dictionaries define holiness in two main strands, with the primary meaning being “transcendent, totally other, set apart, without equal.” The secondary meaning relates to “purity, absence of moral impurity, etc.” With respect to God the Seraphim cry out continually “holy, holy, holy,” praising God for Who He is.² It seems words are insufficient to describe God’s holiness — the use of the word “holy” three times in succession demonstrates that His holiness is above all.

This description is not just one of His many attributes, but rather it describes His essence as “wholly” holy; without equal and totally transcendent.³ We find ourselves, like the Seraphim, struggling to fully understand, let alone articulate the holiness of God; Notwithstanding our inability to comprehend the fullness of God’s holiness, we are called to seek “*to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge*” and that we “*may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.*”⁴ As we begin to comprehend, in our limited ability, the distance between the holiness of God and our unworthiness, we are driven to our knees in worship.

We can get a better picture of God’s holiness and its impact on us when we reflect on encounters with God by the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Look at Moses’ interaction with God in Exodus where he said “*show me Thy glory*” and how God could only give him a view of His “back parts.”⁵ After that encounter, to protect the people, Moses had to cover his face due to the glow that resulted from that backward glance

of God’s glory. Look also at Isaiah when he saw the “*Lord high and lifted up*” and the impact on him caused him to respond, “*Woe is me, I am undone.*”⁶ Job stated, “*Behold, I am vile ... I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.*”⁷ And the list goes on.

These were godly men who, when exposed to the holiness of God, saw the depths of their depravity. There is a beautiful circular dynamic when we begin to see and understand the holiness of God. We are exposed to His holiness; this opens our eyes to our sinfulness and need for redemption; leading to our cry of brokenness and His cleansing; which leads to a deeper love for God and a willingness to serve; leading to a deeper relationship with God and a more complete understanding of His holiness. Isaiah’s humble and repentant response led to the seraph placing a hot coal to cleanse his iniquity. In a cry of thanksgiving and praise, Isaiah answered God’s call, “*Here am I, send me.*”⁸

Does it really matter if we have an appropriate understanding of the holiness of God and Christ? What we really believe about God, and especially about Christ’s work of salvation, will work its way out into every aspect of our lives. Every attitude/motive will be shaped by what we think of Him. If our thoughts are out of sync with regard to His holiness and his mercy, then our lives will reflect this imbalance. “*But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*”⁹

The theme verse above is a quote from Leviticus¹⁰ and is mentioned by Peter as a direct command to each of us as Christians to be holy for God is holy. The call to holiness comes very early in Peter’s letter and is a dominant theme throughout. The grammar includes an imperative verb to begin this action

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Walking in Humility Part 2

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immediately. It is not a suggestion, but a command; not optional, but an expectation. The significance of this imperative is more poignant when we consider the inspired statement by the writer of Hebrews *“Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”*¹¹

It does not say be ye holy as God is holy but rather *for* He is holy. Peter well understood that we are unable to attain the level of holiness inherent in God or Christ, but we are to reflect His character in our lives. Our holiness is perfected in Christ *“who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”*¹² So Jesus meets the requirement for *positional* holiness, but we have the obligation/responsibility for *practical* holiness as we are empowered by His Spirit.

Is holiness merely a matter of doing what is right and not

doing what is wrong? If that was the case the Pharisees would have had an edge on everyone as they approached “holiness” in their walk. Christ had some very stern words to those spiritual leaders of Israel who put more emphasis on “doing” and “appearance” than on real heart change and submission to God. He said *“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*¹³

Holiness is first a matter of “Whose we are” (*positional*) and then a matter of what we do or don’t do (*practical*). The fact that the positional comes first does not negate the need for the practical; as the practice is the expected fruit of the position. To truly glorify God with our lives we need the practical to be an outflow of the positional. We are called to be a *“living sacrifice”* to God, totally abandoned to Him and set apart for His glory.¹⁴ Holiness is a real and abiding

relationship with Christ that will reflect the character of God and manifest the fruit of the Spirit. By the empowerment of the Spirit, we will *“work out”* that which is within.¹⁵

In this first part of a two part series we have considered some aspects of the “what” and the “why” of holiness. In part 2 we will consider the “how” or the more practical application of this command “be ye holy.”

(Footnotes)

- ¹ 1 Peter 1:15-16
- ² Isaiah 6:3
- ³ Is 40:13-14,25
- ⁴ Eph 3:18-19
- ⁵ Ex 33:18,23
- ⁶ Is 6:5
- ⁷ Job 40:4
- ⁸ Is 6:6
- ⁹ Jeremiah 9:24
- ¹⁰ Lev 11:44
- ¹¹ Heb 12:14
- ¹² 2 Cor 5:21
- ¹³ Mt 5:20
- ¹⁴ Rom 12:1
- ¹⁵ Phil 2:12

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