

The Beauty of Holiness

*"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."
Psalm 96:9*

Salvation is only the beginning and not the end of God's purpose for His elect. The Bible says God chose us and reconciled us to Himself in Christ so that we would live a holy life (Ephesians 1:4; 5:25-27). It has been said that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." In God's eyes, *holiness* is beauty of the highest order and so precious that He commands us to pursue it with the greatest diligence. And yet the last holiness movement in the church occurred well over a century ago. Teaching on holiness is rarely heard in the church today. Many professing Christians are averse to pursuing holiness and even shrink from using the word *holy*. Tragically, this reflects very badly on the lawless state of today's church.

Why is holiness so important to God? Above all, our God is holy. Holy is the primary word in the Scriptures that best describes the Person of God. The Bible uses "holy" and its related words holiness and sanctification more than one thousand times to describe God and the things of God. The Bible says, "There is no one holy like the Lord (1 Samuel 2:2)." The Hebrew and Greek words for "holy" in the Old and New Testaments mean separate and pure. Our triune God is holy - completely pure and void of evil. "God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). God the Father is holy, God the Son is holy, and God the Spirit is holy. In heaven, all the celestial creatures worship God day and night calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3)." God's manifest glory is the radiance of His holiness. As Moses declared, "Who is like You, O Lord, among the celestial beings? Who is like You, glorious in holiness? (Exodus 15:11)."

Why is it so important that we pursue holiness after we are saved? Holiness is not an end in itself; rather it is the only way we can know God. The Bible says that unless we live holy lives, we

cannot know God or abide in God (1 John 3:6). Holiness and fellowship with God go hand-in-hand. You cannot have one without the other (1 John 1:6-7). Therefore the Bible says, "Pursue holiness; for without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14)." Since God is holy, all true holiness originates from Him. And because God is holy, no one can know God or come into union with God unless God Himself has made them holy. In the Old Covenant, God sanctified (made holy) all His priests so that they could approach Him. Similarly, in the New Covenant, God makes all those who receive His Son as Lord a holy priesthood so they can draw near to Him and know Him (Hebrews 8:10-12; 1 Peter 2:5). This is why Jesus Christ died on the cross - to make us holy so we could join God's family. "Both He (Jesus) who makes men holy and those who are made holy are all from the same Father, so He (Jesus) is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11)." Since we were born with a sinful nature, how does Jesus make us holy? Before we were saved, our sinful nature was like a "sin factory" within us that continuously produced sinful attitudes and actions. Therefore, to make us a new creation in Christ, God had to first deal with the old creation (our sinful Adam nature). By Christ's death on the cross, God not only dealt with the fruit of the old creation (our sinful actions) by forgiving our sins, He also destroyed its root (our sinful nature/the sin factory). "For we know that our old man of sin was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin (*our sinful nature*) would be destroyed, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:6-7)." Thus, by the divine operation of the cross, God removed our sinful nature and replaced it with Christ's holy nature when we were born again of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:27; 2:11-12).

Now that God has created us in holiness (Ephesians 4:24), He also calls us to live a holy life. For a Christian, there are no exceptions to God's call. Paul wrote, "It is God's will that you should be holy... for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who

rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)." And Peter said, "Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).'" Therefore our Holy God wants us to be holy in spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Many Christians mistakenly think that because they were cleansed from their sins by Christ's atoning sacrifice, they can have fellowship with God even if they do not walk in holiness. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible says that anyone who continues to practice sin cannot know God or abide in God (1 John 3:6). Many other Christians pursue holiness by trying to improve their behavior through their self-efforts (Galatians 3:3). This is not true Christianity. Trying to be holy by your own self-will and self-discipline undermines true Biblical faith and is a religious form of lawlessness. When we were saved, God made us holy (cleansed us from sin) because we believed and acted on the truth that *Christ died for us* to forgive our sins (Romans 5:8). God now enables us to walk in holiness if we believe and act on the truth that *we died with Christ* to remove our sinful nature (Romans 6:8). God removed our sinful nature when we were saved so we could have spiritual union and intimate fellowship with Him through His Holy Spirit who lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

Our pursuit of holiness is precious in the sight of God. For anyone who seeks to know God, all the things of earth pale in comparison to seeing the beauty of His holiness. If you have the heart of the bride of Christ, you will find the beauty of His holiness irresistible, and His fellowship worth far more than anything you give up so that you can know Him and abide in Him.

*As King David testified, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple."
Psalm 27:4*