

The book cover is a dark blue, textured material, possibly leather or cloth, with a prominent embossed decorative border. The border consists of a series of repeating circular and floral motifs, creating a frame around the central text. The text is printed in a gold or yellow color.

**Holiness
Illustrated**

Ted Hughes

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Preface

Do we really need another book on holiness? I suppose that depends on your perspective. From my viewpoint and experience there are still many people who are unable to clearly articulate their understanding of this Wesleyan doctrine. Others are a bit fuzzy in their efforts to explain it. Perhaps a more relevant form of the above question would be: Is it possible to have too many books on this great subject?

Part of the problem is that the subject is both simple and profound. It was explained to me so simply by my mother that I understood enough to seek it, and experience it when I was only six years old. And yet, after sixty years of study, teaching, and preaching it, I have found the subject to be both profound and inexhaustible.

The subject can be approached in a wide variety of formats and focuses. I titled a previous book I wrote, *Holiness: A Jewel of Many Facets* (published in Africa). Like a fine diamond it can be examined from many angles, all of which shine with equal brilliance.

In this book I am not primarily interested in an academic approach. We already have a variety of theology books that have done an admirable job of expounding the technical aspects of the doctrine. What I propose to do in this book is to present a series of brief lessons that are simple and practical, with illustrations that are easy to understand and can be applied to real life.

We will look at holiness from a variety of perspectives, but always with the purpose of making it simple and easy to understand by the average person. At the same time, the broad variety of these perspectives will give insight into the breadth and the profundity of the subject being examined.

I send it forth with the desire and the prayer that it will provide insight and understanding that may lead some sincere seekers into the most wonderful experience that Almighty God offers to His people.

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HOLINESS IS HARMONY WITH GOD

“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.’” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

God’s Plan from the Beginning

God revealed His plan for mankind before He actually created him. “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:4). It is clear that God created mankind because He wanted to enjoy fellowship with him. To have that kind of relationship, there would have to exist harmony between them. They would have to share values and interests. In the Bible text above, immediately after giving the command for us to be holy, God hastens to explain the reason for the command. It is “because I am holy.” God wants us to share the same nature. We were not created to argue with God or to be in conflict with Him. God desires a fellowship based on unity of spirit and purpose at the deepest level of our being. There is no place for animosity in this relationship. According to God’s plan, it is to be a relationship of a profound mutual love.

Harmony Is Desirable

Harmony is to be desired because it is beautiful. We recognize it when it comes to music. The sounds of a symphony orchestra thrill our ears. It happens because it is planned that way. The composer chooses the musical key, and then writes the part for each instrument so that they blend together in an ear-pleasing harmony. When the orchestra comes together to perform the work of art, they begin by asking a single instrument to sound a keynote. Then every instrument adjusts its tone to be in agreement with that sound. The violins adjust by loosening or tightening the strings. The horns match the tone by shortening or lengthening the tubes that the air passes through. This process continues until every instrument is “in tune.” This eliminates the “sour” notes, and results in music that is pleasant to the ear.

Harmony Is Pleasant

Where harmony does not exist it can be painful. It is the major difference between music and noise (cacophony). Disharmony represents conflict, disagreement, incompatibility, clashing, discord, disorder, antagonism, stress, and opposition. Harmony represents the opposites: agreement, compatibility, accord, good relationship, and absence of conflict.

What Was The Relationship God Envisioned With Man?

The reason God created the human race was that He desired fellowship with free beings like Himself. He designed man with that possibility before He created him (Ephesians 1:4-6). The only way that fellowship could become a reality was if harmony could be achieved between the natures of God and man. It was a momentous decision when God decreed that He would share His nature with His creatures. In the record of the creation story it states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

What Does It Mean To Be In Harmony With God?

The basis of the God-man relationship was a shared nature. This was the guarantee of the perfect companionship that God desired. As long as they shared the same nature there would be no conflict or stress between them. They would be in perfect agreement. They would think in

the same way and share the same values. They would be in perfect harmony. They would love each other with a perfect love. They would be mutually committed to faithfulness to each other. To do anything to displease or hurt the other would be unthinkable. The commonality of their natures would go beyond any other factor that binds people together. They would both enjoy a satisfying relationship. They would share the same interests and pursue the same goals. It would truly be wonderful for both God and man.

What Happened?

For a time, in the Garden of Eden, it worked (we don't know for how long). The fellowship and harmony was beautiful. There was no tension. It was exactly the way God had envisioned it. The problem was that this wonderful relationship was conditioned on obedience to God's commands on the part of Adam and Eve. When they exercised their power of choice in an act of disobedience to God, everything changed. The innocence and purity in which they had been created was lost. Man no longer shared with God His holiness. He became a sinner. As a sinner, conflict arose between God and man. Sin and holiness are not compatible. As a result man became the enemy of God. No longer was there harmony between them.

Was There Any Way The Original Harmony Could Be Restored?

It would not be easy to restore that which was lost! God had to uphold the integrity of His government and apply the penalty for sin. He could not say that the disobedience of man did not matter, for it was a serious problem that mattered a lot. The only way the relationship could be restored would be for man to recover what he had lost. How could this happen? Man certainly could not achieve it by his own effort. To make it happen, God had to take the initiative because man was incapable of even approaching God. To make a long story short, and to focus on the principle without getting into theological technicalities, the door was opened for reconciliation and a total spiritual renewal by what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is now possible to be restored to the original relationship to which God destined the human race. It means the creation of a "new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). It is the restoration of what was lost, and the return to a relationship of harmony with God.

Another Dimension of Harmony with God

It is interesting to note the result of another dimension of being brought back into harmony with God. As individuals are tuned to the holiness of God, they are also brought into harmony with each other. Their harmony with God means that they become compatible with each other, They share the same values, goals, and objectives. This is the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus for His disciples, "... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21). As God shares His nature with His people, they are bound together in harmony and unity. Believers enjoy harmony with God and with each other. Wherever this harmony does not exist, the ideal of God's plan has not yet been reached. It is this harmony between believers that will be the most convincing argument for the world to believe (John 17:21b).

Sin Destroys Harmony with God

God loves the sinner, but God hates sin. The result of sin is separation from God. Sin destroys the purpose of God in creation. Sin is opposition to God. Opposition to God is never a good idea! Can you imagine shaking your fist in the face of God and in essence saying, "God, I don't like you? I don't want to be holy. I think I am smarter than you. I know a better way. You can just leave me alone and let me do my thing. I don't need you anymore." That is insanity! To be in harmony with God and to enjoy fellowship with Him is the greatest of all blessings. To lose that harmony is the greatest of all losses.

HOLINESS IS CLEANNESS

“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow”
(Psalms 51:7).

The Problem

God had put in motion a plan for the redemption of the human race. It was a wonderful plan, but it did present some challenges. Sin had darkened the intellect of man to the point that there were some concepts that were difficult for him to grasp. God had to begin at a simple level to reveal the need for cleansing.

After the Fall, there was a fundamental concept that mankind had to understand before he could comprehend the significance of God’s plan of salvation for a sinful race. It was one of the first things that God tried to reveal to the darkened conscience of sinful men. In essence the concept was simply this: There is a difference between what is clean and what is unclean. They needed to learn to distinguish between them. They had to learn this from a special revelation because in their sin-darkened mental state after the Fall they were totally incapable of understanding the difference between clean and unclean in the eyes of God.

The First Lesson

God had to start as if He were teaching spiritual kindergartners. The first lesson was very simple: “You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean” (Leviticus 10:10). You would think that anybody would understand that! Perhaps so in the physical sense, but in the spiritual realm it was a totally foreign concept. The situation was serious.

Sin had contaminated the very nature of humankind. The entire race had become morally dirty. In the eyes of God their righteousness looked like “dirty rags” (Isaiah 64:6 KJV). Their impurity was loathsome, nasty, and sickening to God. Isaiah describes it graphically: “From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil” (Isaiah 1:6). It would take a radical cleansing to solve the problem. At first, God taught them about this need through the object lesson of ceremonial washing, but centuries would pass before it became a reality in the hearts of the people.

A Foreshadowing of the Work of Christ

The basic idea is that contact with something unclean would result in defilement that required a special process to resolve. It was a foundation stone in the system of Mosaic Law. Of course, at that time, it was only symbolic, ceremonial, and temporary, but it foreshadowed the reality of the true cleansing that was to come through Christ.

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14).

Clean Is Better Than Filthy

The Bible represents sin as something filthy, dirty, repulsive, undesirable, and harmful. It is characterized as a stain upon the human soul. Only an abnormal human being would prefer a

dirty body to a clean one. (In certain circumstances, a child may be an exception, but mothers would generally agree that they prefer their children to be clean, even over the protests of their offspring to the application of soap and water.) God also wants His children to be clean! And, as we shall see, He has made ample provision for the possibility.

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols” (Ezekiel 36:25).

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

“Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Sovereign LORD” (Jeremiah 2:22).

“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver” (Malachi 3:2-3).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The Cleansing Agent

Have you ever had the experience of trying to remove a stubborn stain? My wife is good at that. I have watched her as she moves up the scale of potency with solvents and stain removers until she finds one that works. I have observed her apply Shout, Oxy-Clean, Resolve, Carbon Tetrachloride, Goof-Off, and Goo Gone among others. It is always a joy and a relief when something is found that works. When it comes to the human soul, many remedies have been tried that have not worked. The one that never fails is the blood of Christ. It is always effective, and as the songwriter states “it goes deeper than the stain has gone.”

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14)!

The Prediction of the Prophets

The prophet Zechariah had a clear view of this solution to the fundamental problem of mankind when approximately 500 years before the birth of Christ, he said, “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zechariah 13:1). The fountain to which he referred was opened as the blood of Christ flowed from His wounds on the cross.

A century or so before Zechariah, Ezekiel also saw it coming: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols” (Ezekiel 36:25).

Jesus Made the Unclean Clean

In Bible times leprosy was a very contagious disease that required that those afflicted by it be removed from contact with society. It was considered unclean, and as a protection to others, lepers were required to shout the warning “Unclean, unclean!” to anybody near them. The story

is related in all three of the synoptic gospels of a leper who came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus responded immediately, "I am willing. Be clean" (Matthew 8:2-3; Mark 1:40-41; Luke 5:12-13). It is impressive to note the willingness of Jesus to make the unclean clean. All that was required was a simple request from those who had the faith to believe He could do it. If this were the attitude of Jesus toward physical uncleanness, how much more would He be willing to cleanse the spiritual/moral disease of sin?

The Thread Runs Throughout the Entire Bible

The requirement of cleanness is found repeatedly in the Law. It is expressed in the desperate cry of the psalmist: "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Psalms 51:2,7). The perceptive prophets saw it far in the distance. It was clearly expressed in the message and actions of Christ. It was carried out by the Holy Spirit in the experience of the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost. It was an important part of the message of the Apostles. Cleanness is both the requirement and the provision of God. It is the message of the Bible from cover to cover.

Peter may have been one of the first to recognize the true nature of the work of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. He now had time to reflect on what had happened. At the council of Apostles in Jerusalem he was defending the "Gentile Pentecost" that happened in his presence at the house of Cornelius: "After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7-9).

The Theology of Cleanness Is Clearly Expressed in Classic Hymnology

Cleanse Me

"Search me, O God, and know my heart today.
Try me O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free."
"I praise Thee Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill Thy Word and make me pure within.
Fill me with fire where I once burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name."
—J. Edwin Orr, 1936

Rock of Ages (verse 1)

"Let the water and the blood, from Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure: save from wrath and make me pure."
—Augustus M. Toplady, 1776

Whiter Than Snow

"Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole;
I want Thee forever to live in my soul;
Break down every idol, cast out every foe—
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

"Lord Jesus, for this I must humbly entreat;
I wait blessed Lord, at Your crucified feet;

By faith, for my cleansing I see Your blood flow—
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”
—James Nicholson, 1872

Are You Washed in the Blood? (verse 4)
“Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin—
O be washed in the blood of the Lamb;
There’s a fountain flowing for the soul unclean—
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”

Are you washed in the blood,
In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
—Elisha A. Hoffman, 1878

Nothing But the Blood (verses) 1-2)
What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my pardon this I see—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
—Robert Lowry, 1876

There Is a Fountain (verse 1)
There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s vein,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.
—William Cowper, 1771

It Is Wonderful to Be Clean On the Inside

Nobody would deny that after a hard day’s work in the yard, it is a great feeling to get into the shower and scrub off all the sweat, grime, mud, and dust. It feels great to get rid of the dirt and put on freshly washed clothes. It makes a big difference! But, how much more does it make a difference to get cleaned up on the inside. It is amazing to experience the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit dissolve the filth and the stains of sin, and to be given a heart totally cleaned up from the contamination of all sin. It is truly a wonderful feeling. Holiness is cleanness. There is no such thing as holiness without it.

Heaven Is an Absolutely Clean Place

One of the wonderful things to anticipate about heaven is there will be nothing unclean there. The golden streets will not be cluttered with trash. There will be no smelly garbage dumps. Nothing will decay. Vacuum cleaners will not be needed. Even better, there will be no sinners there. All of the inhabitants of that holy place will have pure hearts. But, you don't have to wait to get there to have a pure heart. You can have it now! It is a double blessing, for it not only prepares you to enter heaven, it also prepares you to live a life of blessing and victory right here in this sin-cursed world.

HOLINESS IS NORMALITY

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7 KJV).

What God Had In Mind For Mankind

God’s intentions for mankind were all good. He made ample provisions to meet all his needs. If His plan had been realized the human race would be abundantly blessed and happy. Human existence would be carried out in an atmosphere of peace, blessing, and joy, in intimate fellowship with God. Everything would be perfect. Man would live in holiness. God had planned it that way.

God Declares His Plan For The Human Race In Advance

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:3-7).

God’s Original Plan Describes The Normal Mode Of Human Existence

Although God had wonderful intentions for the human race, the plan was predicated on man living in obedience to God’s laws. When sin entered the picture through disobedience, everything changed. Blessing changed to a curse; holiness was replaced by a sinful nature; the plan of God was frustrated; normality for mankind was substituted by an abnormal mode of existence. Sin was an intrusion. God never intended it to be that way. It was an aberration to what God had intended.

Spiritual Health Turned Into A Deadly Spiritual and Moral Sickness

Health for the body is what holiness is for the spirit of man. Sin is represented in the Bible as a loathsome disease of the spirit. Like cancer it eats away at the spirit and ends in destruction. It is an abnormality. God’s plan consists of curing the “disease” and returning man to a condition of spiritual health and normality. Living in holiness is normality for human beings. Anything less than holiness is abnormal.

The Manual For Human Life

When a manufacturer produces an automobile and puts it on the market, it usually comes with an instruction manual that explains how it functions best and how to maintain it. The people who designed it have put it through a series of tests and have elaborated the specifications for its most efficient operation. The instructions may be ignored, but it is always to the detriment of the machine. The manufacturer knows the car he has put together better than anybody else, and therefore it is wise to pay attention to his recommendations for the operation and function of the machine.

God was the one who designed and created the human race. He has a thorough knowledge of how it functions best. The good news is that He provided us with a manual that describes in detail how we operate with the best results. How tragic it is to see people trying to operate their

lives as an automobile on only three out of six cylinders. Or, with a steering apparatus that is completely misaligned. They were not designed to operate that way and the malfunction usually ends up in a major disaster. Man was designed to operate in holiness. That is the normal way to live. Sin interrupted the plan of God for the human race, but through redemption, the plan of God is to return mankind to normality.

An Unexplainable Mystery

Is sickness better than health? Never! Is abnormal better than normal? Of course not! Isaiah described the physical equivalent of the malady of sin in these terms: “Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil” (Isaiah 1:5-6). That sounds pretty bad, doesn’t it?

In the light of that condition, Jeremiah asked the unanswerable question (Jeremiah 8:22). If there is a remedy available to cure the disease, and a physician ready to apply it, then why does healing not take place? Why is sickness considered more desirable than health? Why is brokenness better than wholeness? Why is abnormal preferred over normal? Why? Why? Why? There is no rational answer for that choice.

The Best Life

From any perspective the life of holiness is the best possible way to live. It is the good life; it is the plan of God; it is the way of blessing; it is the way of joy and satisfaction. Everything is better within the holiness lifestyle: The home, the church, human relationships, the family, pleasures – holiness makes everything better!

Only an irrational mind could find fault with the way Jesus taught us to live. It is the way of love, harmony, fellowship, wholesomeness, health, goodness, joy, satisfaction and rationality. Paul urged the Philippians: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

Who Is Strange?

It is interesting that unbelievers often think that Christians are abnormal or “strange.” Peter commented about this phenomenon: “They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you” (1 Peter 4:4). Paul explains the reason for this twisted thinking. “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:28). It is the unbelievers who are abnormal, and irrational. Their way of thinking has been corrupted. As a result their twisted thinking leads them to do what ought not to be done.

Jesus Returns a Man to Normality

On one occasion Jesus traveled by boat to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat a man with an evil spirit confronted him. He was obviously very abnormal. He was naked, he lived in a cemetery, and he would cry out and cut himself with stones. He terrified the people, but Jesus knew how to handle the situation. He cast out the evil spirit. The news soon spread to the nearby town, and the people rushed out to see what had happened. Both Mark and Luke record that when they arrived at the scene they found this man who had terrified the people, calmly “sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind.” What a change had taken place! There had been a total transformation from weird abnormality to total normality. That’s

what Jesus does.

HOLINESS IS REALIGNMENT

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”
(Romans 8:5-9).

“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:17).

Alignment Affects the Ability to Steer

Did you ever have the experience of trying to drive a car with the steering mechanism out of alignment? If so, you will remember how it constantly pulled toward the ditch along the edge of the road. It was a constant struggle to keep the car going in a straight line. If you let loose of the steering wheel it would immediately turn you towards disaster.

There is an experience quite similar to that in life when the “steering mechanism” is out of alignment. It is typical of the person who is being governed by the sinful nature. There is a constant pull in the direction of the ditch (sin). On most roads there is a white line painted in the middle of the road as a point of reference. On a vehicle that is properly aligned with the white line it is a relatively simple matter to steer it straight down the road. Think of the white line as the holiness of God. If our nature is aligned with His holiness, the normal thing is to keep from going into the ditch. However, in the contrary case the natural tendency is to be pulled towards sin.

A Two-fold Problem

The complete remedy for sin involves two steps: (1) It must deal with the problem of guilt for choices resulting in the violations of God’s laws. This is accomplished by repentance (deep sorrow for our sins and a choice to turn away from all sin), and forgiveness, which deals with our guilt for the sins we have committed, and restores us to a right relationship with God’s laws (no longer condemned). (2) But, the problem of the sinful nature still remains and must be dealt with to complete the solution. The two-fold nature of sin requires a two-fold solution. Guilt requires forgiveness; the sinful nature requires cleansing. The problem of the sinful nature cannot be forgiven because a person is not directly responsible for it. It must be cleansed by an act of the Holy Spirit. In the first step Christ becomes your Savior. In the second step He becomes Lord of your life.

The Results of the Cleansing Act

The cleansing act of the Holy Spirit brings us into alignment with the holiness of God, which in turn produces significant changes such as the following:

1. The End of the Struggle with the Sinful Nature: It brings to an end the tension that previously existed between the holiness of God and the sinful nature of man. They are incompatible and

result in a conflict. They cannot peaceably coexist in the human heart. Paul described the struggle: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18). But, when the sinful nature is cleansed, the struggle is over and the impulses that are contrary to God are removed.

2. Greater Intimacy with God: You will feel more comfortable in the presence of God, and will enjoy more intimacy with Him. The uncomfortable feeling that your relationship with God is not all that it ought to be is replaced by the knowledge that you are acceptable to God, and that He is pleased with you.
3. More Joy: You will find more joy in serving God. You will make more effort to please Him, and will discover satisfaction in bringing glory to Him.
4. Deeper Perception and Understanding of Truth: As the hindrances and limitations of the sinful nature to spiritual perception are removed, you will gain more insight and understanding of spiritual truth and a deeper knowledge of God Himself.
5. Greater Spiritual Strength: Your alignment with the holiness of God will make you stronger spiritually and less susceptible to falling into sin. As long as the human heart is influenced by the sinful nature, Satan will find an ally inside the heart to which he can appeal. When the enemy has been crucified (Galatians 5:24), temptation will still come from the outside, but there will not be a ready response from the inside to weaken your resistance to it.
6. Greater Motivation to Obey God: You will find it easier to obey God. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the drastic change that would occur under the New Covenant. He visualized a deep cleansing, a new heart, and a new spirit. He foresaw the change that would result from the indwelling of the Spirit of God that would motivate people to follow His decrees and be careful to keep His laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27). Jeremiah had a similar insight (Jeremiah 21:33). In the dispensation of the Holy Spirit it is possible for the human heart to be aligned with the nature of God in such a way that it becomes natural to obey Him – not by force or threat of punishment, but because we love Him and want to obey Him.
7. Stronger Resistance to Temptation: Your alignment with God will make you stronger spiritually. As long as the human heart is influenced by the sinful nature, Satan will find an ally inside the heart to which he can appeal. Temptation may come from the outside, but with the help of the Holy Spirit you will find it much easier to say “No!” to his enticements.
8. A Better Knowledge of God Himself: As you walk with God in a more intimate relationship He will reveal Himself to you in new ways, and His presence in your life will become a new reality.

These are just a few of the significant changes that will take place in the “deeper Christian life.” The list indeed could become very long. Your growth towards Christian maturity will be accelerated. You will constantly experience new adventures as you study the Word of God and walk in obedience. You will never arrive at a stage of the Christian life where no further progress is possible.

The Key to Spiritual Victory

It is a great help towards continuous spiritual victory over sin to get your spiritual “steering mechanism” in alignment with the holiness of God. It will bring to an end the constant struggle of the internal “pull” towards sin. Obeying God will become much easier.

HOLINESS IS A RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8).

“He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (Genesis 3:10).

What Did God Have in Mind When He Created Mankind?

God could create anything He wanted – except one thing! He could not create the love and fellowship of a free being. If it were created it would not be free. God longed for this relationship based on mutual love until He finally decided to take the risk of creating a new creature and granting him freedom.

We Were Designed to Live In Relationships

Relationships can exist only between persons. God created us as persons. He gave us the capacity to think (intellect), and to reason (rationality), and to feel (emotion). These characteristics matched the personhood of God thus making interaction and communication possible.

The Quality of Our Relationships Determines the Quality of Our Lives

Our relationships exist in many directions: We have relationships with our spouses, our children, our neighbors, our bosses, our teachers, our friends, to name just a few. Chances are those who enjoy good relationships in these directions are living a quality life. Those who have bad relationships in these directions are probably unhappy people. Proper relationships are important!

Our Relationship to God Is the Most Important Relationship of All

So much depends on a proper relationship to God. Everything is better when we do it God's way. But even more importantly our eternal destiny depends on it. The consequences will be disastrous if we mess up our relationship to God.

The Dimensions of Our Relationship to God

It is a relationship of friendship. Three times the Bible makes a reference to Abraham as a “friend” of God (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8). Isn't it amazing to think that God wants to be our friend? Like good friends, we enjoy spending time together. We share both our joys and our sorrows. We laugh and cry together. In truth, God is the best friend we have.

It is a relationship based on fatherhood. “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15). God is a wonderful father who loves us more than we can imagine, and wants to give good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11). Our father, the Creator of the universe, invites us into His presence and gives us permission to address Him in the most intimate terms: “Abba Father.”

It is a relationship of family. If God is our Father, that puts us into a unique relationship to Jesus Christ, the Son. Jesus declared, “Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and

mother” (Mark 3:35). What an amazing family we belong to! What a privilege to be part of the Family of God.

It is a relationship with a Counselor and Guide. Life has a way of getting rather complicated at times. It is easy to become confused and uncertain of the course to take. God has provided for this need as well. Let me just lift a few phrases from some promises He has made: “The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs” (Isaiah 58:11). “...he will be our guide even to the end” (Psalm 48:14). “...to guide our feet into the path of peace” (Luke 1:79). “...he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

It is a relationship with the Comforter. There are many Scriptures that speak to us about the ministry of the Comforter. Here are three of them: “Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones” (Isaiah 49:13). “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

It is a relationship of partners: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). After entering into a new multi-relationship with God, He invites us to become partners with Him in carrying out His redemptive plan for the lost race. He has enlisted us as His ambassadors, with full authority to speak for Him. It is both an honor and a responsibility.

The Setting of the Experiment Was Favorable to Success

We now go back to pick up the story of God’s adventuresome experiment. He created a beautiful garden that He called Eden. He placed Adam and Eve in it and provided everything imaginable for their pleasure and welfare. It worked. God’s dream came true. He came to the garden every day and enjoyed wonderful fellowship with Adam and Eve. Everything was wonderful.

Then Something Terrible Happened

To test their obedience there was a single tree in the garden whose fruit they were forbidden to eat. Everything else was freely available to them. Unfortunately, they misused their freedom and chose to disobey God. That choice had major consequences. They were thrown out of their beautiful home. Severe punishment was applied.

Does That Mean That God’s Plan Has Failed?

Yes, it did fail in the Garden of Eden, but God in His love and mercy does not give up easily. He devised a plan to rescue man from his lost condition. It would take a long time to make it happen, and it would be very costly to God personally, but His great love constrained Him to do it. The essence of the plan was, and is: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The sacrifice of Jesus made it possible for God to forgive sin for those who accept what Jesus did in their place, and yet continue to be a Just God. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so we could be set free. It is really working! Thousands of people are being brought into the Kingdom of God

every day. God's plan to create for Himself a holy people with whom He can fellowship is alive and well. Heaven is literally being populated in these days under the New Covenant.

Failure on the part of man may cause a delay or a detour, but eventually the purposes of God will prevail. Job got it right when he said, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

Holiness Is a Relationship with God

God wanted to enter into a special relationship with man. It had to be a holy relationship. The goal was to be in perfect harmony, and unbroken fellowship with God. "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'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). It is still possible to achieve that relationship today! It starts by giving God permission to do a special work of cleansing from the roots of sin in the heart of the believer, fulfilling the requirement for man to be holy. Then this allows for two holy persons (one divine and one human) to be united in a relationship based on total mutual love and total commitment to each other.

Make no mistake about it; it is the relationship that counts. If the relationship breaks down, there is nothing left. But, it is intended to be a permanent relationship that will last throughout eternity. It is also the highest level of spiritual experience, since it is the completion of the reason for which you were created. It was the desire for this relationship that motivated God to create the human race. While God created man for His benefit, the resulting relationship has resulted in many benefits for the race. While the relationship makes it possible for God to enjoy man, it also makes it possible for man to enjoy God. It is a mutual benefit. Everybody wins!

The essence of holiness is a perfect relationship with God.

HOLINESS IS LOVING GOD SUPREME

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

The Kind of Love God Wants

To put it simply, God wants total love. In the biblical definition it includes all the constituent elements of personality: heart, soul, mind, and strength. Notice in the Scriptures above that it includes the word “all” to modify each one of these aspects. It is not necessary to go into a psychological analysis to get the meaning. It simply means total, complete, supreme, nothing lacking, with your whole being.

It is not strange that God wants that kind of love. As human beings we too seek that kind of love in our intimate relationships. What kind of love do you want from your spouse? Would you be satisfied with 98%? That is a pretty high percentage – nearly perfect. But I don’t think you would settle for that. I think you would agree with God that the only love that really satisfies is the total kind – heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The Implications of That Kind of Love

The special kind of love that God wants makes a difference. Total radical love runs deep. It comes from the heart. It holds nothing back. If you love God that much it will affect the way you live. It will profoundly influence your attitude towards God. Here are a few logical implications if you really love God that much:

1. You will want very much to please God.
2. You will not even consider disobeying God.
3. You will be faithful in your service to God.
4. You will give the best you have for His use.
5. You will be strongly motivated to not disappoint God.
6. You will try very hard to obey His commands.
7. You will delight in His presence and frequently spend time with Him.
8. You will keep God at the top of your priorities. Your motto will be God First.
9. You will seek to maintain a growing relationship with God. The possibilities are limitless.
10. You will look for opportunities to tell others what God has done for you.

It is all a matter of love.

The Directions of Love

The word love appears 505 times in the Bible. This alone indicates that it is a big subject in Scripture. In fact, it could be argued that it is the single largest biblical subject. But, love in the Bible is divided into four directions:

1. There is the love of God for man: This is by far the largest use of the word love in Scripture. It all started with His love for us: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). He loved us before we loved Him: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). He loved us and

died for us while we were yet sinners: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The Bible describes God’s love as great (4 times), abounding (8 times), unending (32 times), and endures forever (46 times, see Psalm 136). What an amazing love! How much does God love us? To answer that question we can only point to Christ agonizing on the cross. That is the true measure of His love.

2. There is the love of man for God. God expects a response from His love for man. True love always wants a response. The command to love God in a special way is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament in almost identical words. (See the exact texts at the top of this page.) Loving God is a command.

3. There is the love of man for his neighbor. Loving your neighbor is a corollary of loving God. There is an inseparable connection between the two. The Bible bluntly states that a person who claims to love God but hates his brother is a liar! “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen (1 John 4:20).

4. There is the love of man for his enemies. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:43-45). With these words Jesus introduced a revolutionary new concept. Christian love extends even to our enemies.

We have taken a brief look at the four major dimensions of love in order to get a complete picture of it. However, for the purposes of this chapter our focus will be on our love for God.

Proof of Our Love

God has a way of determining whether or not our love is genuine. He cannot be fooled. The test is whether or not we obey His commands: “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).

There is no substitute for obedience. King Saul had been commanded to destroy the Amalekites, and to take no plunder. But, he had returned with the best of the livestock with the pretension to sacrifice them to God. When the prophet Samuel caught up with him, Saul reported, “I have carried out the LORD’s instructions” (1 Samuel 15:13). But then Samuel inquired, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?” (1 Samuel 15:14). He had been caught red-handed. Samuel then made a classic statement: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

It is an eternal principle; God wants obedience more than anything. It is more important than our ritualistic worship. It is more important than our opinions of something we think is better. God cannot accept any substitute for obedience.

God Sometimes Tests Our Love for Him

Example #1: A false prophet proposes that you follow another god. God responds: “The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your

soul” (Deuteronomy 13:3).

Example #2: Abraham and Isaac: God had a special relationship with Abraham. He is the only person in the Bible to be called a “friend of God” (James 3:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7). And yet, because of his key place in the plan of God, he was subjected to the severest test imaginable. He was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. It was extremely difficult because it didn’t make sense. Isaac represented the fulfillment of God’s promise that a nation would descend from him. But, in spite of the difficulties, Abraham trusted God and proceeded to do exactly what God instructed him to do. It was proof of his love and faith in God. As a result God was able to use him for a great purpose.

It is not likely that you will be tested in the same way, but Abraham is a wonderful and inspiring example to us of a man who obeyed God when he was severely tested.

Example #3, Job: Another example of a severe test is the case of Job. What made his experience especially difficult was that he was a good and just man and could not understand why such a thing was happening to him. However, his faith in God went beyond what he was able to understand. He affirmed that no matter what happened to him, it would not shake his faith in God. “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face” (Job 13:15). He did not doubt the final outcome after the test would be completed. “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Example #4, Peter: This example comes from the New Testament. Peter had been very dogmatic about his loyalty to Christ. But, following the arrest of Christ, he fled like the rest of the disciples. Christ had predicted that Peter would deny Him three times “before the cock crows.” He fulfilled that prophecy. Following the resurrection, Christ had a special question to ask him. “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord’, he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs’” (John 21:15). He repeated the question three times. (It may have had something to do with the fact that Peter had denied Him three times.)

There is a question about what he meant by “more than these.” He may have been pointing to the other disciples. Or, perhaps He was signaling Peter’s boat and the fishing nets. We probably will not know this side of heaven. Maybe that is a good thing.

Anybody can apply this Scripture to himself and fill in the blanks when it comes to the thing lacking in their love.

Jesus made it clear that love must be expressed not in words but in action. For Peter the instruction was that if he really loved Jesus, he should care for His lambs.

Some Final Questions About Your Love for God

Here is a series of questions that you can use to help you evaluate your love for God. Admittedly, they are tough questions, but they are questions that must be asked if you aspire to the highest level of spiritual experience.

1. Do you love anything more than you love God? (See John 21:15.)
2. Is there anything that you are holding back from God, no matter how small? (See Romans 12:1.)

3. Has your love cooled since you were saved? (See Revelation 2:4.)
4. Is there any command of God that you are not keeping? (See John 14:15.)
5. Do you have a fear of giving God an account of your life at any moment? (See Romans 14:12).
6. Would you describe your life as holy? If not, why? (See 1 Peter 1:15-16.)
7. Are you enjoying unbroken fellowship with God? (See 1 John 1:7.)
8. Do you feel comfortable in the presence of God? (See Psalm 16:11).
9. Do you seek God's will for your life with an open mind and heart? (See Hebrews 10:36.)
10. Do you regularly seek God's guidance on the decisions you make? (See Hebrews 10:36.)

Questions numbered 1-5 should be answered in the negative (No). Those numbered 6-10 should be answered in the positive (Yes). Any other answer may reveal that your love for God is incomplete, and needs to be examined.

HOLINESS IS FREEDOM FROM SIN

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:6-7).

“No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:6).

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).

The Two-Fold Nature of Sin

Sin exists in two forms. First, it is an act. Whenever a person willfully disobeys a law of God, it results in condemnation and guilt. The violated law has a penalty attached to it, which a just God must enforce. The only solution to this problem is to accept the free offer of forgiveness, which is made possible by the death of Christ on the cross. Forgiveness resolves the problem of guilt for acts of sin a person has committed.

Sin can also be defined as a principle or condition of the human situation by being born into a sinful race. In their natural condition humans are sinners by nature. We come into the world with a tendency toward sin. This kind of sin cannot be forgiven because we are not directly responsible for it. It is an inherited depravity that must be cleansed. According to Peter, this is what happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Referring to the Gentile Pentecost at the house of Cornelius, he said, “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9).

God’s Attitude Towards Sin

God hates sin in all of its forms with a passion. Sin is deadly. It separates a person from God. God is Holy. His holiness is completely incompatible with sin. He cannot tolerate it in any way, shape or form. All sin must be punished. No sin will enter heaven.

God’s Wonderful Plan of Salvation

Everything God does He does with excellence. It was certainly true when He provided a solution to the problem of sin for mankind. It is totally complete. It covers all sin for the entire human race. It is efficacious forever. No sin is too big. The plan is simple. Anyone can meet the conditions.

Freedom from Sinful Acts

There is nothing in scripture that allows for sinning in the life of a believer. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that sinful acts come to an end when a person is forgiven. Freedom from sin includes the freedom not to sin. Let us honestly look at a selection of Scriptures that clearly establish this fact.

Relevant Scripture Confirmation

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin...” (1 John 2:1).

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:4-6).

“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning”(1 John 3:8).

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work ... he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3: 9).

“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin, the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him” (1 John 5:18).

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2).

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” (Romans 6:15).

How can anybody sincerely look at Scriptures such as these and defend sinning in the life of a born-again believer. The freedom is not salvation in sin, but from sin. It is an insult to God to believe that He would design a plan that would leave us still in sin. His plan is a deliverance from both the guilt and power of sin to a life of complete victory over it.

Freedom from the Sinful Nature

But wait! Victory over sin must also include a solution to the sinful nature. The phrase “sinful nature” is used 46 times in the New Testament. It is used to describe its characteristics in the following ways:

It will take control of you: “For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death” (Romans 7:5).

The option is to be controlled by the Spirit: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9).

There is nothing good in the sinful nature. The sinful nature is a troublemaker. It will keep you from doing what you want to do. There is no reason for you to desire it: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18).

As long as the sinful nature controls you, it is impossible for you to please God. That is a major limitation. Your most fundamental desire should be to please God: “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Romans 8:8).

The final end of tolerating the sinful nature is spiritual death: “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13).

“The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:8).

The solution to the problem is radical, but there is no other solution: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

Crucify it! Put it to death! Kill it! There is no gentle way to deal with it. You either destroy it, or it will destroy you. It is that simple.

Both Solutions Are Necessary For Complete Freedom from Sin

It is truly a tragedy that many people begin the Christian life by receiving forgiveness for the sins they have committed, but stop there and do not go on to seek cleansing from the sinful nature which is what caused them to sin in the first place. Both forms of sin must be dealt with for salvation to be complete..

HOLINESS IS COMPLETE CONSECRATION

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

Definition of Consecrate

To devote entirely. To dedicate by a vow. To set apart for a special use or service. To give up oneself with seriousness or earnestness. Devoted: Very loving, loyal, or faithful.

These are condensed definitions suggested by a dictionary. They are all applicable to some aspect of what we mean by the word “consecrate.” When we consecrate something, the root meaning is that we give it to God for Him to use as He pleases. It may include such things as time, talent, or money. Total consecration means that we have reached the point of having given everything to God. We are completely devoted to Him. He is now in complete control of our life. This is the ultimate goal of our consecration.

Consecration in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, consecration had to do mostly with things that were set apart for sacred use in worship. The Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), the altar, the utensils used in the animal sacrifices were all said to be consecrated. Aaron and the priests were consecrated in special ceremonies because of their special religious functions. The firstborn of every family was also consecrated as belonging to God in a special way. There was also a special group of people called the Nazarites who were set apart (consecrated) for special service. (Samson is an example.)

Why Does God Want You to Be Totally Consecrated to Him?

God created you to bring glory to Him. That is why you exist. He has every right to ask you to fulfill that purpose. Since He created you, He has the right to use you as He pleases. You belong to Him. You can only accomplish His purposes if you are under His control.

God has a plan for your life. He already knows how He wants to use you for His glory. He has endowed you with the gifts you will need to fulfill His plan. You must be willing to let Him guide you to His unique plan for your life. You can be sure that His plan will be good; far better than any plan you could make by yourself.

How Can God Get Control of You?

There is only one way God can get control of you. You must give yourself willingly to Him. He will not force you, and He will not be satisfied with a consecration that is done grudgingly. The kind of consecration that God wants must be done willingly and joyfully. It is an act of love in response to His love for you. Trust is a big part of it. You do not need fear what God might do to you when you are in His hands. He always wants what is best for you. He always works in favor of His children, never against them.

What Is Meant by Total Consecration?

There are many things that you can give to God. It can involve your money in support of the work of His Kingdom. It can involve time invested in service to Him. Consecration can happen in a variety of ways. It can take place little by little over a period of time. But as your love and

commitment to God continues to increase, a point can be reached when there is nothing left to consecrate. You have given everything to Him. He has complete control over you. You have given Him permission to use you as He pleases. You have no reservations. Your main desire is to do His will and to live for His glory.

When your consecration reaches this point certain things begin to happen that are not possible at lower levels of consecration. The disciples of Christ experienced it on the Day of Pentecost. They were filled with the Holy Spirit which means He came to dwell in their hearts in a measure they did not previously have. They were cleansed from their selfish ambition, and their bickering about who was the greatest. They were empowered to carry out the assignment they had recently been given to evangelize the world (The Great Commission).

It all happened because after ten days of prayer and waiting they finally reached the point of consecration that allowed God to give them this special blessing.

Critical Points in the Process of Consecration

Consecration is not easy. It may involve some struggle at certain points, such as:

Who is really in charge of my life? It is a natural instinct for us to want to be in charge of our own lives. We hesitate to trust anybody else to know what is best for us. It is hard to surrender our (pseudo) sovereignty. The breakthrough comes when we realize that we are much better off with God in control. He wants to bless us and to help us. He has far more resources with which to work. His wisdom is far greater than ours.

There is a conflict between God's will and my will. How many problems arise when there is a battle between two wills. There is usually a winner and a loser. We don't like to lose! When it is God's will vs. my will it boils down to a matter of trust. Doesn't God always know what is best for me? Do I really trust in His goodness and wisdom? Would God make a mistake?

Jesus Himself faced this dilemma. On the night before His crucifixion in His humanity He shrunk back from the agonizing suffering He anticipated on the cross the following day. He asked the Father if there was any way to avoid it. But, He concluded His prayer by saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Satan tells lies about consecration. Examples:

"The Christian life is boring. If you consecrate your life to God you can't have fun anymore."

"If you marry that unbeliever you can convert him/her later."

"You can do both. Go ahead and do what you want now. You will have plenty of time later to put things in order."

Beware! "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

What Your Total Consecration Means to God

It means that you are available to Him. He can count on you. He can call on you at any time to respond to His call to go anywhere and do anything for which He needs your help. Like Isaiah, when God said, "Whom shall I send?" He responded, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). He

was ready and willing.

It is absolute proof of your love for God. Since you have not withheld anything from Him, God has the evidence that you are totally His. Total consecration is the maximum expression of love.

God knows that you take your relationship to Him seriously. Total consecration is not something one takes lightly. If you have made that kind of a commitment to God, He will know that He can trust you to be faithful to Him.

A total commitment to God means that you trust Him. That is important to Him. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). It requires a high level of trust to put yourself totally in the hands of someone. Putting yourself in the hands of God comes only after learning to trust Him.

What Your Total Consecration to God Will Mean to You

Here is some good news. Total consecration to God is a two-way deal. It results in mutual benefits to both sides.

In a relationship of total commitment you will enjoy more intimacy with God. You will draw closer to Him. You will learn to know Him better. He will become your friend. He will give you deeper insights into His nature, and into His Word. You will enjoy spending time with Him.

He will be there to give you help when you need it. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1).

He has promised to never leave you. He will always be there for you, whether or not you are aware of it. “The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Any way you look at it, total consecration is a good deal. We have so little to give in exchange for incredibly rich blessings. After you have given Him everything you have, you may regret that you don't have more to give.

HOLINESS IS THINKING LIKE GOD THINKS

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5 (KJV)).

Agreement with God

Amazing as it seems, God wants His children to work together with Him to accomplish His plan and purposes in the world. The Church is the agency through which He works. He always works through human instrumentality. Given the frailties, limitations and weaknesses of human beings, it might seem that there would be better ways to do it, but this is the method that God has chosen. In order to work together, we must be in agreement. We must have the same values, goals, and methods. Otherwise we would end up in conflict, confusion, and chaos.

The Mind of Christ

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).. Even better, the KJV puts it this way: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:” (Philippians 2:5 KJV). To have the mind of Christ simply means to think like He thinks.

How Did Christ Think?

Paul goes on immediately to be more specific about the way Christ thought. He humbled himself. He was truly God, but He consented to come to earth as a man. The condescension is unimaginable. “He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). He went even further: “...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). It staggers the mind! And yet, we are challenged to think like that!

Here are some of the implications of that kind of thinking.

He was motivated by love. Love is a powerful force. It was powerful enough to keep Him hanging in anguish on the cross when He knew He had the power and authority to call legions of angels to rescue Him and take vengeance on His enemies.

He was willing to suffer for the benefit of others. He did it for us, collectively and individually. It is one thing to quote John 3:16 that says, “For God so loved the world”...It is quite another thing to come to the personal realization that He did it personally for you.

He was moved to compassion as He looked upon human needs. One of the most common expressions about Jesus in the Scriptures is, “He was moved to compassion.” It happened every time He saw a human in need. Those words were always the prelude to action. He immediately moved to meet the need: To open blind eyes, to cleanse lepers, to help the helpless, to comfort those in sorrow, and to forgive sins.

He was willing to sacrifice His personal preferences to the will of God. He was like all human beings who shrink from suffering. But, His final words on the night before His crucifixion was, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). His highest priority was to do the will of His Father.

Alternatives to the Mind of Christ

The Bible is clear in describing a variety of ways of thinking that are contrary to the mind of Christ.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

Futile thinking: “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking” (Ephesians 4:17).

Unspiritual thinking: “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions” (Colossians 2:18).

Corrupt thinking: “and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Timothy 6:5).

Depraved thinking: “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:28).

The thinking of sinful man: “The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

Thinking that is hostile to God: The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7).

Thinking according to the standards of this age: “Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise” (1 Corinthians 3:18).

Thinking that does not take into account the things of God: “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matthew 16:23).

Thinking focused on earthly things: “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Philippians 3:19).

The Challenge of Thinking Like God Thinks

The way God thinks is superior to any other way of thinking. His way of thinking is based on infinite wisdom. All of the alternate ways of thinking have negative consequences such as futility, idle notions, untruth, conduct that ought not to be, spiritual death, hostility to God, human wisdom, and a focus on this world instead of the heavenly kingdom.

The Benefits of Thinking Like God Thinks

It puts us into harmony with God.

It prepares us to be used effectively in His service.

It allows for God to trust us. I had the privilege to serve for several years as the Administrative Assistant to one of our Regional Directors whose jurisdiction included a large continent. We had a wonderful relationship based on mutual respect and trust. On occasion, he would bring a stack of correspondence to my office and toss it on my desk, saying, “Please answer these letters. You and I think alike so you will know what I would say.” It is the same with God. If we think alike, it creates trust and confidence to work together.

Thinking like God thinks leads to life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Thinking like God thinks makes possible intimate fellowship.

It Can Happen

Paul affirmed to the Corinthian church, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16b). It is one of the greatest blessings, but it doesn’t come cheap. It requires a radical consecration, a wholehearted, unreserved commitment, a deep hunger for holiness, and a total love for God. These are the same requirements for heart cleansing and a holy heart. That is why we can say, Holiness Is Thinking Like God Thinks.

HOLINESS IS A LIFE TO BE LIVED

“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

“...who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Three Aspects of Holiness

1. Holiness is a doctrine to be believed. It is unlikely that it will be sought unless a person believes it is attainable. Unfortunately, there is a large segment of the Christian Church that has been taught that such a level of spirituality is impossible in spite the clear and repeated exhortations of the Scripture to the contrary. If a person reads the Bible with an open heart and mind, the truth will come through that God wants us to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16), He has called us to it (2 Timothy 1:9), Jesus has made provision for a Holy Church (Ephesians 5:25-26), and nobody will get into heaven without it (Hebrews 12:14).
2. Holiness is an experience to be received. Holiness is not something that can be achieved by human effort. Only God can make a person holy. It is a supernatural intervention. Holiness that is claimed from any other source is fictitious. It is a transformation that is carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is given only to those who make a radical commitment to God.
3. Holiness is a life to live. The internal transformation must work itself out into the conduct of the believer. The Bible promise is that, in this sin-cursed, violent, wicked, world, it is possible to live a completely victorious holy life. In the rest of this lesson we will focus on the life of holiness.

Characteristics of the Life of Holiness (The subject is so comprehensive it would be difficult to adequately cover in detail all of the characteristics of the holy life. We will have to limit the list to a few of the major items.)

It is a life of victory over sin. Willfully violating God’s laws is a thing of the past. The sincere Christian will make every effort to obey God and avoid every kind of sin and evil. Sin is a choice, and nobody can make you sin. God has promised a way out of every temptation. The holy life will be marked by freedom from sin and a continuous victory over sin.

It is a life of humility. God hates pride or arrogance. We have no reason for it. Everything we have is only what has been given to us. Even salvation comes to us through grace, and is a gift from God. Without the love and mercy of God we would neither be anything nor have anything. Our purpose in life is to live for the glory of God, not for our own glory. Self is no longer our primary focus. Paul spoke of the old self having been crucified.

It is a life lived under divine guidance. The only way we can fulfill the plan of God for our lives is to live them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, to put Him in control. Jesus promised that we could count on the Holy Spirit to help us in this regard: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14). To continuously

depend on the guidance of the Spirit is the only way to ensure that we will always remain in the will of God.

It is a life motivated by love. One of God's basic commands is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Jesus said that this was the greatest of all the commandments. The truth is that if we succeed in keeping this commandment, we don't have to worry about all the rest of them. This one fulfills them all. It is actually a practical definition of holiness. The key is to rise to this level of love.

It is a life enabled by Spirit power. God has chosen to work through human instrumentality in this world. He has placed the Church here as the agency through which His plan and purposes are to be accomplished. That is a really big assignment! Jesus recognized that in human strength alone it would never happen. His solution was to send the Holy Spirit to help us: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). What a difference it makes! God still wants to use all of us to work for Him. We can't all be missionaries or preachers, but the power of the Spirit is still available to be witnesses for Him wherever we are.

It is a life distinguishable from the world.

There are only two classes of people in the world: the spiritual and the worldly. We are all in one of those categories. They are opposed to each other. There is a fundamental difference between them. The worldly crowd is governed by worldly principles, the spiritual by spiritual principles. Every person is either on one side or the other. There is no neutrality. The differences should be obvious. The Scripture commands, "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). It is a sad commentary that the difference is not always easily noticeable. Some march under the Christian banner, but are not governed by Christian principles. Do you remember the old statement: "If it looks like a duck, and walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it is probably a duck". Would it not also be true that if a person looks like the world, and talks like the world, and acts like the world, then...(You can finish the sentence.) The life of holiness should be distinguishable from the worldly life.

It is a life lived in conformity to God's moral law.

The life of holiness is lived in conformity to the moral laws of God. Are the laws of God no longer valid? That depends. Ceremonial laws were temporary, a shadow of that which was to come. But when Jesus came, He fulfilled this part of the law and it became antiquated. We no longer offer sacrifices every Sunday to atone for our sins. "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. Jesus sacrificed for our sins once for all when he offered himself" (Hebrews 7:27).

However, the moral law is different. It will never change because it is based on the character of God. Its validity will never end. The Ten Commandments are a good example. These laws prescribe the boundaries of human behavior. It will always be wrong to worship another god. It will always be wrong to make an idol. It will always be wrong to treat the name of God irreverently. It will always be wrong to disrespect the Sabbath day. It will always be wrong to mistreat your parents. It will never be right to murder, commit adultery, lie, steal, or covet.

There are other moral laws of God as well. The Ten Commandments only illustrate the

eternal validity of the moral laws. Holy behavior requires that we obey them all.

It is a life motivated by purity of motives.

The holiness lifestyle means that our actions will always be governed by pure motives. It means that our intentions will always be good. Does this mean that it will always come out right or that we will never goof up? No! Due to human weaknesses we may communicate imperfectly, or be misunderstood. What it does mean is that we will always act out of love and never intentionally hurt another person.

It is a life-style lived everywhere and under all circumstances.

The holiness lifestyle is consistent. It is lived out every day, everywhere, and under all circumstances: at home, in the workplace, at the school, in the office, at the store, or wherever you may be. You must be a full-time Christian. You will always have an influence on those around you.

The Bottom Line

No matter how you look at it, the holiness lifestyle is the best life you could possibly choose. You will associate with God's people who are the best folk on the face of the earth. You will enjoy God's blessings. You will experience many joys. There is no better way to live. It has many rewards in this life, but best of all, it will lead you to heaven.

HOLINESS IS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DIVINE NATURE

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4).

“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

Defining the Nature of God

Who is God and what is He like? That is the first question that has occupied theologians across the centuries. Part of the answer is found in what they see when they look at God. They call these observations the attributes (characteristics) of God. Different theologians will elaborate different systems of classifying the attributes. As an example, we give here the list from Dr. H. Orton Wiley (An influential Nazarene Theologian in the early days of the Church of the Nazarene). He divides them into the three categories listed below:

I. The Absolute Attributes.

- A. Spirituality
- B. Infinity
- C. Eternity
- D. Immensity
- E. Immutability
- F. Perfection

II. The Relative Attributes

- A. Omnipresence
- B. Omnipotence
- C. Omniscience
- D. Wisdom
- E. Goodness.

III. The Moral Attributes

- A. Holiness
- B. Love
- C. Justice and righteousness
- D. Truth
- E. Grace (and related attributes such as mercy and forbearance)

God as Holy

While lists of attributes give us insight into many of God’s characteristics, when we use the word “holy” it is thought to be broader in scope even to the point of including all of the attributes. “Holy” is the single word that God Himself uses to describe His nature. “...for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Mere human words can never be adequate to describe spiritual realities as profound and complex as the nature of God. But the word “holy” probably comes as close as possible. Without it, we would be hard-pressed to describe the nature of God.

Participating in the Divine Nature

In the Scripture at the head of this section, the Apostle Peter introduces a breath-taking

concept. He makes reference to the possibility to “participate in the divine nature”. Incredible, but true! God gave the command for us to be holy, and here we see the glorious possibility of actually achieving that goal. God wants to share His nature with us. That is the greatest gift that an Almighty God could bestow on one of His creatures! There could be no greater experience for a mere human than to participate in the divine nature.

An Encounter with a Holy God

The Prophet Isaiah had an unusual experience that he related in Isaiah chapter 6. God pulled back the curtain that usually separates heaven and earth and gave him a glimpse of the throne of God in all its majesty and glory. He saw seraphs flying around the throne calling, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). It was awesome! His reaction was, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5). But he was in a good position at the throne of God for they knew what his problem was and hastened to solve it. A seraph flew to the altar and picked up a live coal with which he touched the mouth of Isaiah and declared, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for” (Isaiah 6:7). There are several lessons we can learn from this incident.

The seraphs were calling out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:3). Obviously it was a reference to the basic nature of God. Why were they not saying “Love, love, love?” It is because holiness is the fundamental nature of God. Love, as well as all of His other attributes arise from His holiness. It is because He is holy that He is love, light, just, merciful, etc.

His reaction when confronted by a Holy God was immediate. He became acutely aware of his own sinfulness. Many people evaluate their situation by comparing themselves to other humans. Making statements like, “everybody does it”, or “nobody’s perfect,” is a good way to come out looking fairly good. But how do you come out when you compare your holiness to God’s? Probably the same as Isaiah did. We must also remember that God’s judgments will be based on His nature.

The nature of the solution is also clear. That hot coal was an instrument of purification. It produced a powerful change. As soon as Isaiah heard of God’s need for a messenger, he willingly without hesitation offered himself immediately by saying, “Here am I. Send me!” It is clear that the cleansing experience produced this response of a man totally consecrated and desiring to serve God.

The Object of God’s Discipline

The second Scripture at the beginning of this section brings into focus the same subject from a different angle. Here it is talking about the difference between the discipline of our earthly fathers and the discipline of our heavenly Father. Our earthly fathers sometimes erred; God never makes a mistake. But then he hastens to add the motive or objective behind God’s discipline: “...but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10b). We have been talking about participating in the divine nature. This phrase describes the same thing: sharing in His holiness. Everything God does for us is good, but the best possible thing He could do for us is to share His holiness with us. It is the ultimate blessing. It is His final objective.

How Does a Person Get Holiness?

Holiness only exists in the nature of God. It has no other source. It does not exist in any other place. If you get it, it is because God has shared it with you. But God does not share His nature

indiscriminately. He is only willing to do it for those who are totally committed to Him in love and obedience.

HOLINESS IS REST OF THE SOUL

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9).

The Principle of Rest

From the very beginning God has had a concern that man should have adequate rest. He knows that human beings function better when they are rested. He established the guideline that after six days of work there must be a day of rest (Exodus 23:12; Leviticus 23:3; Deuteronomy 5:14; etc.). It was often repeated, and was important enough to be made one of The Ten Commandments.

It is interesting that God Himself submitted to this command. Following the six days of creative activity God rested.

Jesus also recognized the need for rest. He frequently took his disciples away for a time of rest and refreshment (Mark 6:31). One of the great promises He made was that if those who are “weary and burdened” would come to Him they would find rest for their souls (Matthew 11:28-29).

The Plan of God

It is hard work to try to achieve righteousness by human effort. It always ends in frustration because, no matter how hard you try, it can't be done. You will always end up tired and exhausted having spent a great amount of energy without reaching an impossible goal. Many people live daily on the treadmill of trying to gain favor or merit with God by doing good things. It leads to a life of struggle without blessing. It ends in spiritual exhaustion and failure. The obvious remedy for this failure is to try harder, which only makes the situation worse. However, the purpose and plan of God is to lead us to an experience where the soul is at rest.

The Testimony of the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul remembers when he was in the frustrating situation described above. He shares his testimony in Romans Chapter 7. He confesses his confusion (vs.15). He finds himself powerless to control his own behavior (vs.15). He recognizes that the root of the problem is the sin principle that lives in him (vs.17,20). His desires are good, but “I cannot carry it out” (vs.18). He then sums it up by declaring, “What a wretched man I am” (vs.18). He longs to be rescued from this pitiful condition (vs. 24). Then in the final verse of the chapter he relates that he found the solution to the problem “through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Then in Chapter 8 he bursts forth with a glorious proclamation: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” He now goes on to speak of the wonderful solution he found to the terrible experience he told us about in Chapter 7. Now his focus is on how through what Christ has done everything has changed (vs.4). We no longer are controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit who lives in us (vs.6,9). This leads to “life and peace” (vs.6).

It is truly sad how many Christians accept Romans 7 as the norm for the Christian life and never get on to Chapter 8. They are content to live in frustration and spiritual exhaustion. They put forth a lot of effort without any results. They will never enter into the soul-rest that God has promised to His people.

The Sabbath-Rest

The writer of Hebrews presents an insight into an experience of complete spiritual rest reserved for “the people of God” (Hebrews 4:1-11). He describes it as a “Sabbath-rest,” a state-of-being in which all conflict has ended and the soul is at perfect rest. This state of rest may be thought of as the grand climax of the work of God in the heart of man. This is the experience of God’s people who have ceased from their own efforts to achieve salvation, and have come to the point of complete faith and dependence on the work of Christ. “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his” (vs.9-10).

The Importance of Entering Soul-Rest

The condition of soul-rest is not optional. It is the plan of God for all believers. God’s people are exhorted to “make every effort to enter that rest” (vs.11). Believers who do not reach this state of grace may be responsible for the fall of others by “following their example of disobedience” (vs.11).

The Way to Spiritual Victory

In the spiritual realm victory is not achieved through hard work and struggle. It comes through surrender. So much energy is wasted by struggling against the will of God, trying to bargain with God, or gain concessions from Him. It doesn’t work, even if carried on over a long period of time. There is no substitute for obedience and surrender to the will of God. God’s terms are not subject to discount.

You Will Never Find Rest If...

There will be no soul-rest if there is sin in your life. In this condition you are in conflict with God.

There will be no soul-rest if you are running from God’s will. You must submit to His will before rest will come.

There will be no soul-rest if you are trying to bargain with God, trying to obtain concessions from Him, or asking for a “deal” with a discount.

Characteristics of the Promised Soul-Rest

It is rest from the conflict with the sinful nature.

It is rest from the guilt that results from unconfessed willful sin.

It is rest from the slavery and bondage of the chains of habits and addictions.

It is rest from the anxiety over what people think.

It is rest from the struggle between your will and God’s will.

It is rest from all your work to achieve righteousness by your own efforts.

It is rest from a guilty conscience that keeps you awake at night.

Beautiful Poetic Expressions of the Sabbath-rest in Hymns

“I’ve anchored my soul in the haven of rest.

I’ll sail the wide seas no more.

The tempest may sweep o’er the wild, stormy deep;

In Jesus I'm safe evermore."

– From The Haven of Rest, by Henry L. Gilmour, 1890

"There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God."

–From Near to the Heart of God, by Cleland B. McAfee, 1901

"Peace like a river so deep and so broad,
Wonderful peace, wonderful peace!
Resting my soul in the presence of God,
I have peace, sweet peace."

– From Wonderful Peace, by Haldor Lillenas, 1914

"Bringing life and health and gladness
All around this heavenly Guest
Banished unbelief and sadness;
And we just obey and rest.

"What a wonderful salvation,
Where we always see His face!
What a peaceful habitation!
What a quiet resting place."

– From Blessed Quietness, by Manie Payne Ferguson, ca 1897

Yes, "What a Wonderful Salvation!"

It is total, complete, and efficacious. It is adequate for every human being. It is a total solution that meets every need. It is eternal in its duration. It leads to holiness and happiness. It ends in peace and soul-rest.

HOLINESS IS THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

“He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

The Fullness of the Spirit

The Bible makes it very clear that there are two levels of experience in our relationship with the Holy Spirit:

Jesus, speaking to His disciples, distinguished between the period when the Holy Spirit would be with them and a later period when He (the Spirit) would be in them. The whole Holy Spirit carries out the work of justification and regeneration. But there is yet a higher level of our relationship with Him when He comes to take up permanent residence and be given unhindered control. .

When Jesus spoke to his disciples about “the gift my Father promised”, he spoke of two baptisms: “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5).

The strongest evidence, however, are the people in the New Testament who are specifically said to be full, or filled with the Holy Spirit. We could start with the 120 who were present on the Day of Pentecost. The record says, “they were all filled with Holy Spirit.” It also happened at the Gentile Pentecost in the house of Cornelius. Other individuals mentioned are Zechariah (husband of Elizabeth), Peter, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, and the seven deacons selected to serve tables. This is surely thought of as a superior level of spiritual experience.

What Are the Implications of Being Full of the Spirit

To begin with to be full of the Spirit implies the Spirit has access to our total being. There is no part of us in which He is not present. We are His dwelling place, but He will not move in until the keys to every room are surrendered to Him. His job is to take total control. There are no secrets. There are no areas “off limits.” He fills every part.

It also implies greater intimacy. He is now on the inside. Nothing is hidden, nothing held back. He is close to the very center of our being.

His presence brings more power. Jesus predicted it: “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This power makes us bolder and more effective in our Christian service.

Under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we will understand more easily the deep things of God, and will profit from His guidance. He will also be there to provide comfort and strength when we

need it. Being filled with the Spirit brings many benefits and blessings.

Some Folk Are Reluctant to Let the Spirit Take Control

It is a part of the sinful nature that makes us feel that way. Carnal pride leads us to want to be in control. We think that we are smarter and better informed to make our own decisions. Smarter than God? Hardly. The smartest thing a person can do is to put one's life in the hands of God!

Other Folk Want to Bargain with God

They would like to have salvation and heaven, but they want it at a discounted price. In some cases they may try to make a deal. It goes like this: "Oh God, I am willing to give you this, and this, and this, but please don't ask me for _____ (my girlfriend, my career, my money, or a favorite little sin)."

Many People Seem to Be Afraid to Let God Have Complete Control

The most elemental form of faith is to trust God. You cannot please God without faith in Him. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

The Key Is Consecration

Consecration is not something we do grudgingly because God requires it. It is an act of love that we gladly give in thanksgiving for His love and for what He has done for us. The main thing God wants from us is our love, but our consecration is a measure of our love for Him. To fear consecration is a lack of faith and trust in Him.

The main thing that God wants is our love, sincere, genuine, and total. Consecration can take place all at once or little by little over a period of time. However it is done, it must come to a point of completion. It happens when there is nothing left to consecrate. God wants all of you. We sometimes speak of the fullness of the Spirit as if we get more of Him. In reality, He gets more of us. There is only one kind of deal that God will make: all of you for all of Him. That is one great deal. God has so much to give you in contrast to what little you have to offer Him.

As soon as you reach the point of total consecration you have fulfilled the requirement for the fullness of the Spirit. If God doesn't act at that point you need to ask Him why. He is always faithful to do His part when you have done your part. Be patient and continue to search your heart. Don't give up. Keep seeking until the Spirit comes and gives you the full assurance that He has cleansed your heart.

HOLINESS IS THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE BIBLE

What is the Bible About?

Suppose that a person who had never seen a Bible would notice you carrying yours, and out of curiosity would ask, "What is that book about?" How would you describe it in one sentence? Different people would probably come up with a variety of answers. Here is my attempt: "The Bible is a book about a Holy God who seeks a mutually loving relationship with a holy people, and what He has done to make it possible." You may be able to improve on my definition, but the point is that the Bible is a book about holiness. If you were to take the word "holy" and its derivatives from the Bible, its message would be completely lost.

Holiness: A Fundamental Doctrine

Holiness is not simply one among a variety of biblical doctrines. It is an overarching doctrine to which all other doctrines are related. The concept of holiness as it relates to both God and man is fundamental. No matter what doctrine you may choose to talk about, it will eventually lead you to talk about holiness. It is a basic concept, to which everything in the Bible relates. For that reason it can rightly be described as the central idea of the Bible. The following chart is presented to illustrate the point.

| The Doctrine of ... | The Most Significant Things to Be Said About It |
|---------------------|--|
| God the Father | He is a Holy God. He wants us to be holy so we can enjoy fellowship together. "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'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). |
| Jesus | "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:12). |
| The Holy Spirit | Until the Holy Spirit came the church was incomplete. That is why Pentecost is considered the birthday of the church. He is the executor of the works of God in the human heart. His baptism of fire cleanses the heart. "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). |
| Salvation | The final step of salvation is holiness. "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Romans 6:22). Salvation is not complete until it ends in holiness. |
| Christian Behavior | The Bible is very clear about the kind of life a Christian ought to live. "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives" (2 Peter 3:11) For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thessalonians 4:7). |
| Heaven | Heaven is a holy place. "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Creation | “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). While Adam and Eve were created in innocence (Holiness) they lost this image when they sinned. |
| Sin | Sin separates a person from God. It exists in two forms: willful violations of God’s laws, which result in condemnation and guilt; and the sinful nature with which we are born. Both forms of sin must be solved. The first is solved by forgiveness, the second by cleansing. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The apostles became disciples when they responded to the call of Christ to follow Him. Their hearts were purified later at Pentecost (Acts 15:9). |
| The Judgment | At this moment the final destiny of all people will be determined. However, no change will be made in the spiritual condition of anybody on this occasion. Those who are holy will continue to be holy. “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Revelation 22:11). On that day only one thing will matter: Have you attained holiness of heart? |
| The Church | “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27). This is God’s plan for His Church. Key words: holy, cleansed, radiant, without blemish, and blameless. |

This chart is not intended to be exhaustive. These eleven major doctrines were selected simply to show that holiness is at the heart of the Bible message. All biblical doctrines arise out of the Holiness of God, and no matter where you start it will eventually lead to holiness. It is the central theme of the Bible. From beginning to end it is the story of a Holy God who wants a relationship with a holy people.

Holiness is the final objective of the work of God in the human heart. Salvation is incomplete until the heart has been made holy. Only holy hearts will be admitted to heaven. Only holiness is an adequate solution for the sinful human condition. From the beginning to the end the subject of holiness is at the very heart of the biblical message.

HOLINESS IS TO BE LIKE GOD

“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” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

The Nature Of God Defines Holiness

In the study of holiness we must begin with God. He has many attributes which are the characteristics we see when we look at Him. They come to us through contemplating the work of His hands, reading the revelation of Himself in the Scriptures, and the personal encounters we have with Him. Many attempts have been made to organize and classify these characteristics in efforts to understand better who He is. To some degree these lists are as variable as the theologians who make them. They all must fail to some degree to describe God fully, for God is infinite and the minds of men, at best, are finite.

It is a formidable task to attempt to put an Infinite God into mere human words. By their very nature these efforts are doomed to fall short. However, in spite of their limitations, they do help us understand God better.

But, suppose you were given the task of describing God in a single word of human language. There is only one word in human language that attempts to do it. That word is “Holy.” That word includes all of His attributes. The root meaning of the word “Holy” simply indicates that God is “different.” He is in a category all by Himself. There is no other being that qualifies to be in that same category. God alone is Holy in the absolute sense. All other holiness is relative to Him and is judged by likeness to His nature.

It is the nature of God that defines holiness. He is not Holy because He conforms to a standard of holiness outside Himself. He Himself is the ultimate standard of holiness. There is no other standard for it. All holiness must be judged by the plumb-line of His holiness.

God Wants Us To Be Like Him

God created us in the first place because He wanted to enjoy us. That was the main motive for creating us. The only way this could happen was if we would be in harmony with His nature. “So God created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Previous to the Fall of mankind there was no conflict in the Garden of Eden. The fellowship between God and our first parents was perfect.

God Wants Us To Enjoy Him

God also wanted man to enjoy Him. His goodness and His love incline Him to bless us. He did not spare anything in the provisions He made for our blessing and happiness. The Garden of Eden was a perfect environment. Adam and Eve apparently did not fully understand that God’s plan of blessing for them depended on their obedience. God cannot bless disobedience and rebellion. The road to blessing and fellowship with God is to seek His guidance and to obey Him. Holiness is what ultimately leads to blessing and joy.

Where Can I Obtain Holiness?

So, how does a person obtain holiness? We must first recognize that only God is Holy. He is Holy by nature. His holiness defines who He is. If that is the only place it can be found, then that is the only place it is obtainable. The only way a human person can be made holy is if God

would be willing to share His nature with us. Fortunately, that is exactly what He wants to do! The Bible expresses this in a variety of ways. For example, "...he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world ..." (2 Peter 1:4). This is accomplished through a miraculous transformational act of God in which He takes the "old self" of the "former way of life" and creates a "new self, created to be like God" (Ephesians 4:17-24, emphasis added).

The Theological Controversy

To be fair, I should recognize that there exists some disagreement among theologians as to how this transformation takes place. On one side there are those who contend that our sinful nature is not actually changed, but rather just covered up by the righteousness of Christ. The idea is that when God looks at us He sees only the righteousness of Christ that covers or hides our sinfulness. In technical terms our sinful nature is not really changed, it is Christ's righteousness that is "imputed" to us.

On the other hand there are those who disagree with the above concept and say, "No, God does not deal in theological trickery. He deals with reality." It reflects on the integrity of God to even think that He would base His plan of salvation on fooling Himself into believing something that isn't really true. He does not say, "Pretend to be holy;" He says, "Be holy" (1 Peter 1: 15-16). The glory of the experience is that God actually cleanses our nature and transforms it into His own likeness. In other words, He "imparts" His holiness to our hearts. In that way His holiness becomes our holiness.

How Great Is Our Salvation

It staggers our imagination to believe that it is really true, but the Bible speaks very clearly about this miracle, and it is what makes salvation so glorious. When God proposes to solve a problem He really does a great job. He gets to the very bottom of the problem and fixes it. It is not a superficial treatment dealing only with symptoms. He solves the problem at the root level. It is to be expected from an all-wise, all-powerful God who does everything with excellence.

HOLINESS IS DOING GOD'S WILL

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Thessalonians 4:3a).

God’s Will Is Manifested in a Variety of Ways

God’s General Will

God’s general will is the same for everybody.

His will is expressed through His commands. If it is something He wants us to do, He may put it in the form of a command. He does not command things that are impossible. A command is accompanied by a promise of the ability to fulfill it.

It is God’s will for us to stop sinning: “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:6). It can never be God’s will for a person to sin!

Some texts speak directly of God’s will. It is not His will that anybody be lost. He desires that everybody might repent and be saved. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: (1 Thessalonians 4:3). “Sanctified” in this context means to be cleansed and made holy.

It is God’s will for us to bring glory to Him: “...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isaiah 43:7). This verse goes to the very reason for which we were created. God Himself makes it plain. We were created to bring glory to Him. That is why we are here.

It is God’s will for you to go to heaven: He has made every provision to make it possible. All of the requirements are easy to reach. If you miss heaven it is not God’s fault. You can only miss it by turning your back on God’s plan and going your own way.

Other texts reveal His will by what He calls us to: It is God’s will to be in harmony with Him, with a nature like His. “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’” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

It is God’s will for us to live a holy life. He has called us to it. “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

It is God’s will that we be in fellowship with His Son. He has called us to it. “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

All of these texts give us a clue as to what God’s will is. They are only representative; many more could be added to the list.

God’s Specific Will

When it comes to His will for individual persons, it is individualized to each person. God has a special plan for each person. It includes such things as the person you marry, your career, the location where you live, and your children. These decisions will have a powerful long-range impact on your life. You would be wise to approach them with seriousness and prayer.

God May Call You to a Special Service

We should not forget that God may have a specific work He wants us to do and He “calls” us to it. It could be some kind of special ministry but not exclusively so. He may want you to be a public school teacher, an engineer, or a scientist, among many other options. You should seek His guidance, but be sure you keep your mind open and let Him do the choosing. He may not reveal the entire plan from the beginning. All you really need to know is the next step. It would be a good thing if all Christians would consider listening for a call to His service.

The Connection Between Seeking His Will and Holiness

There is a natural sequence in the dealings of God with men. Some of His works of grace are basically preparatory for other works that will follow. For example, God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. But that was not the end of the plan. God’s real purpose was to lead them into the Promised Land. He brought them out of Egypt so He could take them into Canaan.

Likewise, there is a natural sequence in God’s first works of grace in the life of a Christian. They are the foundation, not the complete structure. They are the steps that are necessary before God can proceed to finish His plan. God first solves the problem of guilt from committed sins, so He can then cleanse, sanctify, and impart His righteousness. Tragically, many believers stop the process at the halfway point, and never go on to complete victory.

Look at this Scripture: “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God [initial salvation], the benefit [there’s more] you reap leads to holiness [the goal], and the result is eternal life [the final result]” (Romans 6:22).

The Holy Spirit will lead all believers who seek holiness to it. That is His job. That is why we can confidently assert that those who sincerely seek holiness will be led to the experience.

If a person has sincerely formed the habit of seeking God’s will in all things, it is almost inevitable that he/she will end up with a pure heart living a holy life. Why? Because it is the will of God. At this point in Christian experience, seeking God’s will means seeking holiness. Therefore the title of this section: “Holiness Is Doing God’s Will.”

HOLINESS IS A CHANGE OF NATURE

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:5).

The Human Race Has a Serious Problem

It is a fundamental problem that is the root of almost all other problems that affect human beings. It is a universal problem that impacts every member of the human race. It is the problem of the sinful nature of mankind (sometimes called the carnal nature).

There are only two options: A person is either controlled by the sinful nature, or controlled by the Spirit: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (Romans 8:9). It is either one or the other that controls a person: the sinful nature or the Spirit. The two natures are opposites and are in conflict. They cannot coexist in the same heart. The change of control from the sinful nature to the control of the Spirit requires a radical in-depth change that can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. The language the Bible uses to describe how to handle it is violent: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (Colossians 3:5).

The Essence of the Problem

The basic problem is that at the very core of human nature there is a leaning toward sin. It is sometimes called a “bent” toward sinning. This inclination is the cause of sinful acts. We are born with this problem, which is sometimes described as “inherited,” or “inbred” sin. Because of this nature we are considered sinners even before we make a choice to commit an act of sin. Sinning is so universal that the Bible affirms that everybody has sinned.

How Did We Get This Problem?

It began because God endowed our original parents with freedom of choice. They conspired to misuse that freedom to disobey God. With that choice their basic relation to their Creator was greatly impacted. They had become rebels against God and the authority of His laws. From then on the laws of genetics came into play that determines that offspring inherit the characteristics of their parents. For human beings it includes spiritual or moral characteristics. Therefore, when we come into existence we are already sinners. The good part is that God in His love and mercy has provided a wonderful solution to the problem.

There Is Much Clinical Evidence to Support this Doctrine

Just suppose that a rational being from a far-distant place in the universe should find a way to make a visit to Earth. What would be his reaction to his observations of the human race? He would no doubt read our newspapers. Every edition is loaded with the stories of how horribly we treat each other. There is robbery, fraud, cheating, rape and murder. The TV newscasts are almost all about violence and heinous crimes. Our courts are jammed with criminal cases and our jails and prisons are overflowing with convicts. Our history books are primarily about one war after another. Any rational being would have to come to the conclusion that there is something drastically wrong with the human race. Why have we not been able to solve these problems? It is because the problem lies within the nature of man himself! Throughout history our efforts have been directed to the symptoms of the problem, without treating the root of the

problem itself. The only way this situation can be solved is to change the nature that is the root cause of our bad behavior.

The Manifestations of the Sinful Nature

The Scriptures are clear and forceful in their descriptions of the results of the sinful nature:

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious:

sexual immorality,

impurity

and debauchery;

idolatry

and witchcraft;

hatred,

discord,

jealousy,

fits of rage,

selfish ambition,

dissensions,

factions

and envy;

drunkenness,

orgies,

and the like

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

I have listed each manifestation separately in order to show the impact of this long list. But, the list is only representative. It could go on and on. Other biblical writers have expanded somewhat on this list. That is why Paul ends up by saying, “and the like” (everything else such as these things).

The Sinful Nature Is Dangerous

While a person may be unaware of it, the sinful nature is what controls a person who is under its influence. “For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the

law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death” (Romans 7:5).

The worst part of being controlled by the sinful nature is that there is no possible way that we can please God while we are in this condition. “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Romans 8:8).

It is not surprising that a person cannot please God while he/she is under the control of the sinful nature. God hates sin because it is what can destroy His creation. It is so insidious and deceptive that a person under the influence of a sinful nature is capable of going far beyond anything he/she ever imagined being capable of doing. Hideous sins are the product of the sinful nature. To be under the control of a sinful nature is extremely dangerous and unpredictable.

Thank God, there is a solution! “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (Romans 8:8).

The Solution to the Sinful Nature

The Scriptures use strong radical language when describing how to deal with the sinful nature.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13).

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

Crucify it! Put it to death! Kill it! Get rid of it! There is no room for tolerance in this language. This is warfare. You either kill the enemy or he will kill you. There is no other option.

The good news is that there is a remedy! The sinful nature can be defeated. Yes, crucifixion is painful, but it is the path to victory. That terrible old sinful nature can be exchanged for a new nature that is in perfect harmony with God: “...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

The Two-Fold Nature of Sin

Sin exists in two forms: (1.) Sin is an act of disobedience to a known law of God. It results in guilt. It is solved through repentance, faith, and forgiveness. (2.) Sin is also a principle or state of being. Sin in this form is not an act, but a nature. It cannot be forgiven; it can only be cleansed. Sin in both of these forms must be dealt with for salvation to be complete. Full salvation is a two-step affair. Many Christians make the mistake of having taken only the first step. It can lead to frustration and failure. Salvation is not full or complete until both problems have been solved.

HOLINESS IS PREPARATION TO ENTER HEAVEN

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

“Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Revelation 22:11).

Heaven Is a Wonderful Place

Everybody should want to go to heaven. Anyone who rejects the offer of heaven is out of his/her mind. The descriptions of heaven given to us in the Bible, even though limited, are awesome! “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The beauty of the place is beyond description: gates of pearl, streets of gold, walls of precious stones, the crystal sea – and yet when human words have been exhausted, the Bible adds: “However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’” (1 Corinthians 2:9). The best part is that it will last forever.

Not Everybody Will Be Allowed to Enter

Entrance into heaven will be restricted. “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27). This gives us a pretty good idea of the condition in which a person will be welcomed into heaven. If nothing impure will ever enter, that implies that all sin will be banned there. The only way you could be comfortable as you stand before God on the Judgment Day is to have a pure heart. Jesus also made it plain: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). The writer to the Hebrews also spoke with absolute clarity: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

How to Prepare to Enter Heaven

If a person wants to go to heaven, he/she should be interested in how to qualify for a pass through those pearly gates. As a missionary for many years, I often approached the immigration officer when returning to my home country. He always wanted to see my passport to prove that I was a citizen and had the right to enter the country. Likewise, only those who are citizens have the right to enter. The passport to heaven is a pure heart. Nothing else will be acceptable.

False Teaching about the Passport

Some religions falsely teach that it is impossible to attain holiness in this life. That simply means that some other provision must be made to fulfill that requirement after death. The problem is that it is a false hope that cannot be found anywhere in Scripture. What the Bible teaches is that holiness is attainable in this life, and that there will be no change in our character after death. We will simply continue the other side of death in the same moral condition we attained in this life. “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Revelation 22:11).

The Assurance of Salvation

One of the great things about salvation is that it is entirely up to you. You can settle your eternal destiny before you die, and live with full assurance that you know where you are going. It is interesting that the same experience that prepares us to die is the same one that prepares us to live victoriously in this world.

Some People Will Be Surprised and Disappointed at the Judgment

Not everybody who thinks he/she is prepared in reality is. "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles'" (Matthew 7:22). These were obviously religious folk, who had even preached, driven out demons, and done miracles. Their response indicates they thought they were prepared, but they were not! All that they had done was not enough to get them into heaven. Sadly, they were turned away. You cannot earn access to heaven by doing good things. Nobody will be able to sneak into heaven without a pure heart.

There Is No Substitute for Holiness

Heaven is a holy place, the home of a Holy God. He has generously invited holy people to come there and share His home for all eternity. But, He is not going to risk another failure of His plan. Sin is rebellion against God. If He let one sinner into His home it would not be long until Eden would be repeated. The only guarantee for the perpetuity of heaven is to allow to enter only people whose sinful nature has been radically transformed into a total love for Him, and who share in His nature (holiness). There will never be a conflict in heaven. There will be peace, harmony, unity, worship and joy forever.

HOLINESS IS BEAUTY

“Worship the LORD in the splendor (KJV “beauty”) of his holiness” (Psalms 96:9a).

God Creates Beautiful Things

Sunsets: Have you ever stood in awe as God paints the heavens in magnificent colors as the sun is going down? Occasionally, it sends us scrambling to quickly find a camera in order to preserve what will soon be gone forever. Without proof there would be no way to describe it later. There are no words big enough to contain that kind of beauty. God is the Master Artist.

Flowers: Only God could create a rose. But, He didn't stop with one species. He created thousands of spectacular species and filled the earth with them. Every one displays a unique beauty.

Snow-capped mountain ranges. They cross the continents: The Andes, the Rocky Mountains, the Himalayas, to name just a few. We have a large gorgeous view of the majestic Teton Mountains on the wall of our living room. We lift our eyes to these scenes for inspiration.

Waterfalls: I have seen a wide variety of them in Yosemite National Park. I have gazed upon the marvel of Niagara Falls. I have hiked the trails around Iguazú, perhaps the most amazing falls in the entire world on the border between Brazil and Argentina (not far from Asunción, Paraguay). I only regret that there is no way I can describe them for you. You would have to go there to see for yourself.

Heaven: According to the Bible, it is beautiful beyond description. It is the home of God to which He has invited us to spend eternity with Him. Make sure you don't miss it!

All of the above is just a small, limited effort to show that God loves beautiful things.

The Most Beautiful Thing in the Universe

The Bible repeatedly describes the nature of God, His holiness, as being beautiful.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” 1 Chronicles 16:29).

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (Psalms 29:2).

“My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long” (Psalms 71:8).

“Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth” (Psalms 96:9).

“Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty” (Psalms 104:1).

“Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above

the earth and the heavens” (Psalms 148:13).

In all cases in the Scriptures above where it speaks of His splendor the King James Version translates this word “beauty.” The meaning is the same for both words.

God cannot be outdone by anybody or anything on any of His attributes. Any quality that exists in Him exists in its maximum form. When the Bible speaks of the beauty of His holiness, it is legitimate to claim that it is the most beautiful thing in the universe.

God Wants to Make Our Lives Beautiful

If God’s holiness is beautiful, and if He shares His holiness with us (see Hebrews 12:10), then our lives should be beautiful too. Rightly understood, there is something attractive about holiness. The Gaithers expressed it well.

“Something beautiful, something good;
All my confusion He understood.
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife,
But He made something beautiful of my life.”

The beauty that comes from God is special. It does not come from the application of clothes, paint, or adornment. It comes from the inside. “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Why Is Holiness Beautiful?

Holiness is beautiful because it puts you into harmony with God. You were created to fellowship with God. It is a wonderful thing to be in harmony with Him. The prophet Amos asked the question: “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3). There must be harmony between two persons for real fellowship to occur. It is revealed in Scripture that God wants us to be holy because He is Holy. When that is true there is no possibility of a conflict. We will always be in perfect agreement.

Holiness is beautiful because it offers the best possible way to live. We were designed to live in holiness before the race was created (Ephesians 1:4). Holiness is good for us. It is a life of virtue. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8). How wonderful our world would be if everybody followed this pattern of thinking.

Holiness is beautiful because it leads to eternal life. “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness” (Romans 6:22). Holiness brings many blessings but the best part is that it ends in eternal life.

Sin Is the Opposite of Holiness

There is nothing beautiful about sin. It is ugly! It deceives, enslaves, and destroys. It is the cause of much suffering in this world. It is the root of murder, adultery, rape, lying, violence, war, and everything else that is bad. It destroys beauty! It wrecks marriages and homes. It causes many tears and much suffering. Worst of all, it separates a person from God. It will be responsible for taking people to hell. There will be no holiness in hell. Neither will there be any

beauty there.

Promises of Help

There is a vast difference between the believer and the sinner. God has promised to be with us and to help us handle our problems. You will have problems – everybody does! You have two options. Handle them by yourself or handle them with the help of God. If you ever feel that you need God’s help, here are some scriptural promises in which you may find encouragement.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (Isaiah 43:2).

“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (Isaiah 58:11).

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

“For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you; you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalms 23:4).

“Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay” (Psalms 40:17).

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1).

“Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me” (Psalms 54:4).

“Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you” (Psalms 102:1).

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

“...who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

“With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall” (2 Samuel 22:30).

“O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me” (Psalms 30:2).

“In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears” (Psalms 18:6).

“Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help” (Psalms 30:10).

“I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word” (Psalms 119:147).

“My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalms 121:2).

God Wants Us To Trust Him

It is easy to trust when we understand the reasons for what is happening to us. It is harder when the reasons are hidden from us. (Just ask Job.) We keep asking, "Why me?" We tend to think "This isn't fair." But, God wants us to trust Him whether we understand or not. Our faith in His goodness must go beyond our capacity to understand. God has good reasons for what He does, and everything that happens to us comes with His permission.

A Word of Caution

Sometimes when Christians (especially preachers) talk about the wonderful Christian life people may get the mistaken idea that after they are converted everything will be rosy, they will be prosperous, and will have no more problems. That is simply not true! No place in Scripture are Christians promised exemption from problems, sickness, or pain. There are some TV preachers that promote that, but they are dead wrong! The sad part is that when people discover that what they have been taught is not true they give up their faith and fall away.

HOLINESS IS CHRISTLIKENESS

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...” (Romans 8:29).

“And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:49).

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

A Progressive Revelation

Revealing His plan of salvation for the lost human race was complex and difficult. It actually took a number of centuries to complete. It began with simple things and continued in a progressive way.

There were a few things that could be deduced about God from His creation: His power, majesty, love of beauty and order.

His revelation continued in the Law of Moses where He introduces His moral claims, and basic requirements for redemption.

Much was learned about God in His dealings with Israel in their history as recorded in the twelve historical books of the Bible.

There was more revelation in the architecture of the temple, in the rituals of worship, and in their poetry and music (Psalms).

Then came the prophets with their strong denunciations of evil.

Finally, “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law” (Galatians 4:4). This was the culmination of God’s revelation. It was complete now. Nothing more was needed. Jesus paid the price for our redemption by His once-for-all death and resurrection, thus fulfilling the law. The message had been delivered to His disciples along with instructions to make disciples of all nations. Now a New Covenant had been initiated which changed many things and opened the door to new possibilities of grace. We will look at some of them.

In Jesus We Were Given a Perfect Example to Follow

It was difficult for man to understand what God was like. But, God had this wonderful idea to make God (His Son) a man and send Him to earth. He really became a man. It was not just a temporary disguise. Looking at Jesus we could easily understand what God would be like if He were a man, because He actually became one. This opened the door for man to follow His example and to become Christlike.

Jesus Is Truth Personified

Where would you go to find truth? To a philosopher, a university, a government, a friend, a

library, the Internet? None of these can guarantee you the truth. The ultimate standard of truth is in Jesus. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The ultimate source of truth is not a book, or even a creed, it is a person! You can count on Him. He will never lead you astray. He will never deceive you. Follow Him. Seek His likeness. It is a good thing to be like Jesus.

Jesus Is the Ultimate Expression of God

In the Bible, before the creation of the world, Jesus was known as The Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Words are the symbols through which we communicate. Jesus was the medium through which God the Father communicated to the world. Therefore the appropriateness of the name The Word for Jesus. God the Father spoke through Him.

What Was Jesus Like?

In order to cultivate Christlikeness we need to study His life to understand the characteristics for which we should strive. I am going to look through the gospels and list here some of His most notable characteristics that call my attention.

Compassion: High on the list of His most notable traits is His compassionate lifestyle. Needy people always touched his heart. He not only felt sorry for them, He always responded with action. He was never too busy to stop and heal the sick or to open the eyes of the blind. He cared about people.

Mercy: He was always willing to forgive. He spoke tenderly to a woman being accused of adultery. He reached out to the demon-possessed. He spoke kindly to everybody, and even asked His Father to forgive His executioners. He only spoke harshly about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Tenderheartedness:

At the tomb of Lazarus, He saw the pain of those who had lost a love one. The Scriptures simply says, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). He felt the pain of those who were hurting.

Humility: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8).

This Scripture records the greatest possible act of humility when God made himself nothing and came to earth to die on a cross.

Acceptance of God's Will

We see Christ on His knees in Gethsemane struggling with the knowledge that He was about to be arrested and crucified. It was not easy. He sweat drops of blood. He even asked if there was any way out. But in the end, saying "not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He was willing to sacrifice Himself for the sake of others.

Personal Devotions:

Jesus was faithful to His personal devotions. We find Him regularly getting away alone to pray. Sometimes it was early in the morning, sometimes at night. On occasion He prayed

throughout the entire night. If the Son of God needed prayer like that, how much more do we need to follow His example.

Tireless Work: There is no record that Jesus ever turned anybody away. At times He worked to the point of exhaustion. On one occasion: "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered. It got so bad that day that there was no time to eat When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind'" (Mark 3:20-21).. His family was concerned and went to rescue Him. For Jesus the work of the Kingdom was more important than His personal comfort or physical well being.

The list could go on and on forever. We hope that the reader will be inspired to make a specific effort to become more like Jesus, so that others will see Jesus in you.

HOLINESS IS “GOING FOR THE GOLD”

“I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ” (Romans 15:29).

Let’s listen to an imaginary conversation between two Olympic Athletes:

Jack: Hi Bob. I haven’t seen you around for a while. What have you been doing these days?

Bob: I am in training for the Olympics.

Jack: Oh, that’s interesting. Tell me about it.

Bob: It is pretty tough. To get into shape it takes many months of hard work. My entire life is dedicated to that one thing.

Jack: What is your goal?

Bob: I want to enter the 1500 meter race, and I hope to come in around seventh place.

What is wrong with this conversation?

It is highly unlikely that a seriously dedicated athlete would have that kind of goal. You would normally expect him to say, “I am going to do my best to win a gold metal.”

In essence, some Christians treat the Christian life like Bob. Their expectations are too low. They settle for less than the best. They live below the level of their potential. They are not “going for the gold.”

How much of God do you really want?

Should your desire not be to receive the maximum of what He wants to give you? Has your first experience of God’s grace been so unpleasant that you shrink from any more? The possibilities of God’s grace are without limit, but to experience the best part you must go all the way.

The Christian life is built on stages.

Each stage is built on the previous stage, and is better than the last one. There is a cumulative effect, but there are no shortcuts. The stages must be experienced in their proper sequence. The rewards of living in continued obedience over a long period of time are rich.

What are the typical stages of the Christian life?

1. Stage one, lost: You are a sinner, separated from God, guilty, lost and without hope.

2. Stage Two: Conviction: The Holy Spirit begins His work in your heart. He uses different methods with different people. It may happen while you are reading a Bible or while listening to a sermon. It may happen through the testimony of a friend. It could be through a Christian radio program. The result is the same: you become aware that you are a sinner, condemned before the law of God.

3. Stage Three, Salvation: If you respond favorably to the work of the Spirit you will repent of your sins and put your faith in Christ for your salvation. A miracle will take place. You will be transformed into a new creature. Instantaneously and simultaneously, your sins will be forgiven (justification), you will be given new spiritual life (regeneration), and you will become a child of God (adoption). The burden of guilt will be lifted and you will be freed from the penalty of the sins you have committed.

4. Stage Four, Basic Discipleship: All new converts should immediately be put into a program of discipleship. At this stage it may be called primary growth. New converts are a special target for Satan. They need to learn basic survival skills in order to resist his efforts. For example, they need to learn how to pray, how to use their Bible, and how to deal with temptation as well as other aspects of spiritual growth. This stage could be thought of as the “boot camp” for new Christians. It should lay the foundation for rest of the journey.

5. Stage Five, Going Deeper: At some point it will become evident that something more is needed. It goes by a variety of names: being filled with the Holy Spirit, entire sanctification, a deeper spiritual life, heart cleansing, fullness of the Spirit, and the Pentecostal Blessing as well as others.

“The fullness of the Spirit” may be a little misleading since in truth it is not that you get more of the Spirit as it is that the Spirit gets more of you. The primary requirement for this experience is complete consecration. It may take place over a period of time. As an act of love, you give more and more of yourself to God, until He has all of you. There is nothing left to give. At that point you have fulfilled the command of God to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). That implies that He has access to every part of you, and is in complete control of your life.

6. Stage Six, Secondary Growth: In this stage you will continue to grow towards Christian maturity, but the growth can occur at a deeper level and more rapidly because some of the hindrances to growth have been removed in Stage Five.

7. Stage Seven, Christian Maturity: Unfortunately, not all Christians reach this stage. It has little to do with chronological age. However, this should be the best and most productive stage of your entire life. Some Christians reach it much younger than others. Some of the characteristics of mature Christians are:

A stable relationship with God (Ephesians 4:14).

A consistent devotional life (Romans 12:12; Psalm 119:105).

Being able to articulate basic Christian beliefs (2 Timothy 2:15).

Discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14; Philippians 1:10).

Faithful attendance to the means of grace (Hebrews 10:25).

A compassionate lifestyle (1 Peter 3:8).

The avoidance of every kind of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6-7).

Sensitivity to divine guidance (John 16:13; Isaiah 30:21).

Discovery and application of spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 14:12).

Faithful stewardship (Psalm 24:1; 1 Chronicles 29:14; 1 Corinthians 4:2).

Proper priorities (Matthew 6:33).

An exemplary life for others to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1; Titus 2:7-8).

Blameless conduct (Philippians 2:15).

A willingness to sacrifice for weaker brothers (1 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 15:1).

Childishness left behind (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Christ likeness (Ephesians 4:13; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

8. Stage Eight, Glorification: At this point there is nothing more you need to do. God will take over for the rest of the journey. Somewhere between death and our entry into heaven we will be given a resurrected body. It will be a spiritual body but nevertheless a body. This will be the final full redemption of the body, and our final preparation for heaven.

9. Stage Nine, We pass through the pearly gates: What a day that will be! Our first glimpse of heaven will be awesome. "However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"(1 Corinthians 2:9). It will be beyond anything that we have imagined. Peter summed it up by saying, "and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11). The exciting thing about Stage Nine is that it will last forever. Whatever you do, don't miss it!

Where Are You On This Journey?

It is important for every Christian to locate where he/she is on this journey. It is only if you know what stage you are in that you can determine what you need to do to move on to the next stage. Keep track of your progress.

The Main Point of This Entire Lesson

Go for the gold! To experience God's best you must decide to get it all. Don't try to skip a stage, they are all important. Don't get lost on a detour. Don't get stopped in a parking lot. Keep moving ahead. Make it your goal to experience the maximum of God's blessings. Don't be satisfied to live below your full potential. Go all the way. Never give up. The entire process is designed to lead you to a life of holiness and spiritual prosperity.

HOLINESS IS UNENDING GROWTH IN VIRTUES AND GRACES

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The Awesome Possibility of Spiritual Growth Forever

Once a person's sins have been forgiven and he/she has entered a relationship as a child of God, a period of spiritual growth begins that will never end. There will never come a time when there is not something new that you can learn. There will always be new experiences you may have with God in which you will learn to know Him better. The knowledge of God is a subject so vast that it can never be exhausted. There is even evidence to believe that the process of growth will continue in heaven after life, throughout eternity. The Christian life should never be boring. It is an exciting adventure with God that is open-ended.

Caution! Some Things Cannot Be Reached by Growth

It is important to understand the difference between the goals or achievements that can be reached by growth, and those that are the sovereign acts of God that happen instantaneously when His conditions are met. For example, you cannot grow into the forgiveness of sins. You may grow towards it while meeting the conditions, but only God can forgive sin. The same is true about being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is an act of the Spirit that happens when a person's consecration is complete. You cannot grow into the fullness of the Spirit gradually.

Specifically, What Are the Areas in Which Christians Can Grow?

Growth can take place in the areas of virtues and graces.

Virtue relates to moral excellence, and right actions or thinking. It includes such things as strength or courage. In the early stages of the Christian life, for example, a person's conscience may not be fully developed. The Spirit will work with the young Christian to develop a sense of right and wrong. In this process a person may stop doing some things that previously did not bother his/her conscience. Under the guidance of the Spirit personal convictions will be developed.

The Christian graces relate more to the beauty or charm of the Christian life. The Christian life should be attractive. Another definition of grace is to decorate or adorn. These are the things that make the Christian life beautiful or attractive. There is no limit to the ways that we can do it, such as thoughtfulness toward others, doing what is proper, good will, cheerfulness, hospitality, and many others.

Let's Take a Look at the Biblical Areas of Growth That Challenge Us

The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

Love: Paul begins with the greatest of all the virtues. The rest of the list is the result of this

kind of love in action.

There are four words in Greek for love. The first speaks of the love of a man for a woman. The second applies to our nearest and dearest (like brotherly love). The one translated here is agape which is God's kind of love. It is unconquerable. With this kind of love, no matter what a person may do to you, you will seek only his/her highest good.

Joy: This is a joy that comes from God. It does not depend on circumstances. You cannot find it in earthly things. It comes from knowing your sins are forgiven and that you are on your way to heaven. It results from the Christian optimism that God is with him/her and will always be there. The Christian has joy because of what he/she believes (reality).

Peace: This is more than the absence of trouble. Like shalom in Hebrew it includes everything you need for serenity, knowing that your life and your destiny is in the hands of God.

Patience: The most outstanding thing about this word is that it is commonly used in the New Testament to describe the attitude of God towards mankind. God could have justly wiped out the human race many times. But God has been patient with us beyond anything we deserve. As we deal with others we are exhorted to display this same kind of loving, forgiving, patient attitude of God toward us.

Kindness: This is a beautiful word. In one version it is translated sweetness.

Goodness: The word here translated goodness is exclusively used in the Bible. It is not found in secular Greek. Sometimes a Christian may need to speak words of rebuke, correction, or discipline, but even then he/she should do it with a goodness that is strong, but kind.

Faithfulness: This word is used in secular Greek to mean trustworthiness. It is applied to the person who is reliable in all he/she does.

Gentleness: In the New Testament it is used to mean submissive to the will of God, teachable, and considerate. The adjective form of this word is used to describe an animal that has been domesticated. We all need to be treated gently. Sometimes we are the roughest with those we love the most (spouses, children, siblings). In all of our relationships we should treat people with courtesy and respect.

Self-Control: This is the spirit of the person who has mastered desires and pleasures. Paul illustrates it by the athlete's discipline of his body.

Things to Be Added to Faith (2 Peter 1:5-7)

Faith: This is the point where we begin. It is by faith that we are saved. Some people feel that at this point they have arrived at the destination. However, it is not the end, but only the beginning. There is a lot to be learned, a lot of growth to be experienced, and different levels to be achieved in our relationship with God. We are still in our spiritual infancy. Faith in Christ as Savior is important, but there is much to be added as we start the journey towards spiritual maturity. Here Peter gives us a preview of some of the steps in the process of building Christian character on the foundation of our saving faith. Faith in Christ implies that we believe what He taught is true. We can count on His promises.

Goodness: The KJV translated this word virtue. It includes such things as excellence, courage, and moral goodness. This virtue will motivate a person to be true and faithful in performing his/her Christian duty. It is the force that will hold a person steady during a time of severe testing. It is a repetition of one of the fruits of the Spirit.

Knowledge: This is the knowledge of God and spiritual things. It is the wisdom that it achieved by living by faith.

Self-control: To maintain control of desires and appetites. To live a disciplined life within the bounds of biblical ethics. To not be carried away by passing emotions.

Perseverance: This virtue enables us to deal with trials and suffering. It is the strength that keeps us from giving up. It is the determination to be faithful no matter what comes our way.

Godliness: The quality of seeking to be in harmony with God; to fulfill the command to be holy because God is holy. To have the mind of Christ so that we think like He thinks.

Brotherly Kindness: Kindness is also one of the fruits of the Spirit. It is qualified here by adding the word brotherly. This would seem to apply more specifically to our treatment of others within the Church. Many offences would be avoided if we would always speak kindly.

Love: The virtues reach their climax with agape-love. This is the first fruit of the Spirit. The rest of the fruits are love in action. In the case of the virtues it is the last one mentioned. It is the culmination of all the virtues that we add to our faith. There is nothing greater than this kind of love.

There are enough of these suggested areas of growth in the Bible to keep most of us busy throughout our lives. No matter where you are when you start the possibilities of what you may become are limitless.

HOLINESS IS THE ABSENCE OF EVERYTHING UNHOLY

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Ephesians 4:22).

Positive and Negative Actions

In a life of holiness there are two actions, which must take place: one negative, and one positive. The negative has to do with the things that are incompatible with holiness. If you want to live a holy life, you must get rid of them. The positive action relates to the virtues and graces that must be cultivated and added through growth in grace. Both of these actions are necessary in order to maintain a truly holy life. We will deal with them separately.

Things to Get Rid Of

There are four places in the Scriptures that give us a specific list of what we need to get rid of. One other list presents a list of what we must “put to death” (which is the equivalent of “get rid of”).

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (Ephesians 4:31).

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips (Colossians 3:8).

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you (James 1:21).

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind (1 Peter 2:1).

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

The Combined List Looks Like This:

Get rid of: Bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, malice, filthy language, moral filth, the evil that is so prevalent, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, and idolatry.

I do not believe that these lists were intended to be exhaustive. It probably had more to do with contemporary problems in the Church at the time the lists were made. However, it does give us a clear insight into the kinds of things that are incompatible with holiness. There is only one solution: get rid of them or kill them.

The Word “Unholy” Appears Only Three Times in the Bible

1. “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts,

for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me” (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

In this case it is used in the context of a stern warning against false teachers of the law, who teach what is contrary to sound doctrine. They are placed in the same category with murderers, adulterers, perverts, slave traders, and liars. Unholy is a very serious thing!

2. “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

In this case Paul is describing the godlessness that will occur in the Last Days. It will be a sad time. Holiness will be replaced by “unholiness” (the opposite of holiness). We are exhorted to, “Have nothing to do” with this kind of people.

3. “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29).

What is the most serious sin that a person could commit? No, it’s not murder, or adultery, or robbery. It is to trample under foot the Son of God, and to treat His blood as an unholy thing. That is an insult to God! It is clearly implied that this sin will be judged “much more severely.” To emphasize the point it adds, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

Holy and Unholy Cannot Mix

There is no such thing as “almost holy” or “mostly holy.” They are mutually exclusive terms. You are either holy or unholy! If you want to be holy, you need to start by eliminating everything from your life that is unholy. As you have seen in this lesson, the Bible gives us a lot of help as to what needs to go. The Holy Spirit is also a big help to those who sincerely want to seek holiness. If you do your part, God is always faithful to do His part. One thing is certain; God wants you to be holy. He has commanded it, called you to it, and made all the provisions to make it possible.

HOLINESS IS SINGLE-MINDEDNESS

“But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (James 1:6-8).

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

“I hate double-minded men, but I love your law” (Psalms 119:113).

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| Definition of “Single-minded”: With only one aim or purpose. (Webster’s New World Dictionary). |
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Only One Top Priority

It is impossible to have more than one top priority in your life. You can only serve one master. You can only be committed to one supreme purpose. You can only have one major aim. God wants to be your top priority. He wants to be your Master. He will not play “second fiddle” to anybody or anything.

Everybody has a list of priorities whether or not it has actually been written into a numbered list. Priorities are determined by choices. For example, when two or more activities lay claim to the same time slot, the choice between them indicates which one has the higher priority. The big question is who or what is at the top of the list – your highest priority. God wants to occupy that place. Nothing should be more important to you than God.

God Wants to Be First

The best way to proceed on these matters is not to dream up your plan and then take it to God for His approval. Go to Him first. You may be prejudiced by your own ideas. Many people have missed God’s best by putting their own plan ahead of His. Later they may discover their error and find they have to settle for second-best, which will never be as good as the first-best would have been.

First in your love: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). There has been much confusion as to the technical distinction of these terms. However, it is sufficient to say that they are used together to indicate the totality of a person. There is nothing left out. We are to love God with everything that constitutes our personhood. It includes every aspect of our being.

First in Service: The purpose of our creation was to glorify God. To glorify God should be the objective of everything we do. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). You must make a choice of whom you will serve. You cannot serve two masters. “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Luke 16:13). God deserves the best we have to offer in His service. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men”

(Colossians 3:23).

First in Loyalty: You can only have one God! “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). He is God. He is our Creator. He has the right to demand our exclusive loyalty and faithfulness. Loyalty to any other god (something that takes the place that belongs to the real God) is idolatry.

First in Obedience: God requires obedience. But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). There is no acceptable substitute for obedience.

First in Trust: God takes great delight in the fact that we trust Him. It shows a serious lack of faith if we do not trust Him. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Our God is worthy of trust. Look at His record; he has never failed in the past. Joshua looked back over his life and then testified: “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed” (Joshua 23:14).

“Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled” (Joshua 21:45).

“Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (1 Kings 8:56).

First in Planning

There are some choices that will have a tremendous impact on your entire life: The person you marry, the life-work you choose, where you get your education, and where you will make your home. The correct way to proceed is to start with God and ask Him to give you guidance to His plan for you.

Manifestations of Double-Mindedness

Doubt is a sign of double-mindedness (James 1:6-8 top of page). The double-minded person is never sure about anything. He is easily influenced by the latest fad. He finds it easy to change his mind about what he believes.

Instability is also typical of the double-minded person. The direction he is going depends on the way the wind happens to be blowing at the moment. He is like a wave in a restless sea. He just bounces around in every direction. You can’t count on him. This kind of service will not be rewarded. “That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:7).

The Solution to the Problem

The Scripture is clear about what this man needs: “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

A Simplified Life

The double-minded life can get complicated. It is characterized by conflict, uncertainty, and confusion.

It is a great advantage to live a simplified life: only one aim, only one purpose. It is easier to make decisions because your priorities have already been determined. You don't have to start from scratch every time a decision is needed. You have already decided once for all what your priorities are. You need not struggle with a conflict. You have already decided that the Bible will be the maximum authority in your life. If the Bible clearly says it, you will believe it, and that settles it. Period.

HOLINESS IS EMPOWERMENT TO SERVE GOD

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”(Acts 1:8).

The Importance of Power

For a moment, put yourself in the place of a person desiring to purchase a new car. You go to your preferred dealer and begin to look over the shiny new models. They are all very impressive with the latest technologies. In the course of your examination, you raise the hood and look inside. Your mouth drops open in astonishment! The space is empty – there is no motor there. You think, “What could be more ridiculous than trying to sell a new car without a motor? It is incomplete without a source of power. How can it fulfill the purpose for which it was made?”

The Great Commission Is Given

Jesus is aware that His time on earth was running out. He had fulfilled His part in providing redemption for mankind by His work on the cross. Now it was time to let the disciples know what their part would be. In concise words: He commanded them, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). With these words He gave the Church its mission in the world. It was an awesome job with a worldwide dimension. Everything would depend on their faithfulness.

Their Chances of Success

Jesus looked at that ragged little group of men and wondered what would happen. He remembered that just recently he had heard them arguing about something. He asked them about it, “But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest”(Mark 9:34). Luke also remembers the incident: “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest”(Luke 22:24). The evidence was scary. Chances of their success were very slim. They needed something they did not yet have.

What happened at Pentecost was absolutely essential to the success of the Church! Jesus had just explained to them what their mission was. They were to “make disciples of all nations.” It was a gigantic task. Jesus was fully aware that they would not succeed in their present condition.

The Solution

Jesus knew just what they needed. First, they needed a drastic change in their own hearts. Their selfishness and carnal ambition had to be eliminated. Then they needed a new source of power that they didn’t yet have.

The Birthday of the Church

The Day of Pentecost is celebrated as the Birthday of the Church. That is because it was on that day that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a way they had not previously experienced. The Church now had its source of power. The Church without the Holy Spirit is even more unthinkable than a car without a motor. Until the Holy Spirit came the Church was

incomplete. Now it had all it needed and was ready to take on its task in the world.

Nothing Has Changed Since Then

The need of the Church in the twenty-first century is still the need of Spirit-filled, fully empowered Christians. The mission of the church is the same as it was on that first Pentecost Sunday. There are even many more non-Christians in the world today than there was when Jesus gave the command to “make disciples of all nations.” It still requires the same power to do Kingdom work. There is no substitute for the power of the Spirit..

The Element of Purity

The power comes from the unhindered presence of the Holy Spirit. Our weak efforts are much more effective when directed by the Holy Spirit. He lives in us and has taken control of our actions. He guides us and provides wisdom and direction. It is His continued abiding presence that makes the difference.

However, it is interesting to note that there is something more that goes along with the power that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Listen to the testimony of Peter speaking of the Gentile Pentecost at the house of Cornelius: “He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). It is perfectly clear that there was something more than a new measure of the Holy Spirit they received. There was a new work of God in their hearts as well. “He purified their hearts!”

There is a teaching that emphasizes the power, but ignores the purity. Nothing could be more dangerous than putting power into the hands of a person under the control of the sinful nature. The Holy Spirit does not enter the heart to coexist with the sinful nature. He cleans up His new abode before He moves in. This act of purifying the heart is sometimes referred to as “Entire Sanctification.”

Was This Pentecostal Empowerment for the Apostles Only?

What does the Bible say about that? “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). That seems to be clear enough. It is available to all who seek it – all who respond to the call of God.

HOLINESS IS EXCELLENCE

“But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way”(1 Corinthians 12:3).

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things”(Philippians 4:8).

“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone”(Titus 3:8).

The God of Excellence

Everything God does, He does in an excellent way. He could be called the God of excellence. It is His nature. He cannot do otherwise.

Just think of His creation. He made earth such a beautiful place. There is the grandeur of lofty snow-capped mountains, the majesty of mighty rivers, the colors of amazing sunsets, the beauty of uncounted varieties of gorgeous flowers, the delicious flavors of wonderful foods, the marvelous machine of the human body. It is all a work of unimaginable excellence.

Excellence in the Plan of Salvation

It should be expected that the God of excellence would continue His excellent work when He formulated a plan of salvation for lost mankind. He made it broad enough to include the entire human race. He made it efficacious for all sin. He made it durable enough to last for all eternity. He made it simple enough that a child can experience it. God’s plan is perfect in every aspect. Nothing is lacking. Let’s take a little more detailed look at the excellency of holiness.

Holiness Is Moral Excellence

Holiness is the highest possible standard of morality. Morality has to do with right conduct. The Christian standards of conduct are determined by God and are in accord with God’s nature. The most comprehensive standard of human behavior is the command of God, “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’” (1 Peter 1:15-16). The fulfillment of this command puts a person into harmony with God and the divine law.

Other Scriptures as well point us to holiness as the key to moral excellency:

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

Paul urges Timothy to pray “that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”(2 Timothy 2:2).

Peter assures us that “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (holiness)”(1 Peter 1:3).

Peter reminds us that life is serious business and that “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives” (2 Peter

3:11).

Paul exhorts us again; "...let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God"(2 Corinthians 7:1).

Luke speaks of an amazing transformation that can take place in which we put on a new self "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"(Ephesians 4:24).

The highest standard of Christian living is holiness of heart and life. It is God's will for everybody.

Holiness Is Excellence of Love

God has clearly defined the kind of love He desires and requires. He says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30). It is interesting to note that this command is found also in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 6:5. The intent of this description is that God wants total love. It includes every constituent aspect of our being. This is love at its best. It is perfect love. It means to love God more than we love anything else. When we get to the point of fulfilling this command, all of God's requirements have been met.

For example, would it be possible for anybody that has attained to that extreme level of love to violate any of the Ten Commandments? Love would not permit it! Love is the fulfillment of the law. (See Romans 13:8.) If you have perfect love for God you will not have to worry about keeping His commandments. You will do it naturally, not because you are required or forced to do it, but simply because you love Him so much you would never consider offending Him. It is perfect love that leads to a perfect relationship with God.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

"To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices"(Mark 12:33).

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"(John 13:35).

"If you love me, you will obey what I command"(John 14:15).

"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us"(Romans 5:5).

"Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law"(Romans 13:10).

"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14).

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death"(1 John 3:14).

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love"(1 John 4:8).

Holiness Is the Excellence of Cleansing

In the Bible sin is spoken of in two forms. First, there is committed sin, an act of the will violating a law of God, and resulting in condemnation and guilt. Then there is the sinful nature with which we are born as a part of a sinful race. Both of these problems must be resolved before salvation is complete. Committed sin is resolved by repentance, faith in Christ as Savior, and forgiveness. The sinful nature must be dealt with in an entirely different way. It can't be forgiven because it is not something you have done. The Holy Spirit in response to a complete consecration must cleanse it.

The disciples experienced it on the Day of Pentecost. Reflecting on what had actually happened to them, as well as to the Gentiles at the Gentile Pentecost at Caesarea, Peter said that their hearts had been purified by faith (Acts 15:9). Peter also made it clear that this experience was not exclusively for the disciples. He said, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). That includes you and me!

What a difference it made in the lives of the Apostles. Just a short time previously they had been in a heated argument about which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Now they had been cleansed from carnal pride and selfish ambition and were serving God with pure motives.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God"(Hebrews 9:14).

"...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water"(Hebrews 10:22).

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"(James 4:8).

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"(1 John 1:7).

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart"(1 Peter 1:22).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"(1 John 1:9).

"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure"(1 John 3:3).

Holiness Is Excellence in Service to God and Man

Holiness is what prepares a person to serve God effectively. Jesus made it clear when He gave the Great Commission that the disciples were not yet ready to take on the task. There was something important that they still lacked. He commanded them to not leave Jerusalem, but to wait until they had received the "promise of the Father." Jesus knew that in their present

condition they could never be successful. As a matter of fact, anyone who aspires to be a servant of God needs the help of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The need involves both empowerment and cleansing. Both are important, but they must work together. Power alone, without purity can be dangerous. It is heart cleansing that qualifies a person to handle power in a proper way, and always for the glory of God alone. There will always be risk involved in the service of the person who is under the control of the sinful nature. These people have done great damage to the Kingdom.

Excellence in the service of God is most likely to be achieved by the person who is totally consecrated to God, filled with the Holy Spirit, under His control, and cleansed from every unworthy motive. Every Christian worker ought to be committed to seek excellence in every aspect of his/her work. Only our best is worthy to offer to God.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul”(Deuteronomy 10:12).

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD”(Joshua 24:14).

“He gave them these orders: “You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD”(2 Chronicles 19:9).

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Ephesians 6:7).

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms”(1 Peter 4:10).

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve” (1 Peter 5:2).

“to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days”(Luke 1:74-75b).

Holiness Is Excellence in Worship

The requirement for a person to become holy is a complete consecration to God. As long as a person is holding something back from God his/her worship will be deficient and incomplete. Consecration is a constituent element of worship. When consecration becomes complete it permits God to do special things for us. Things that hindered true worship are removed and we are able to worship God on a higher level. Worship is about commitment to God, obedience to His commands, seeking His will, and glorifying Him. If you are not doing these things you are not worshipping Him. The fullness of the Spirit will also bring us into a greater intimacy with God that will lead to more meaningful worship.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever– the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

Holiness Is Excellence in Theology

Occasionally, we hear somebody downplay the importance of Theology, as if it doesn't matter much. But, Theology is a search for the Truth and Truth does matter! One of the greatest threats to Christianity today is the postmodern philosophy that there is no such thing as Truth. That way of thinking is having serious consequences on the church and society. What you believe does make a difference! In fact, believing the truth is one of the requirements to be saved. “God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13b).

Wesley said that to be acceptable, good Theology must have certain characteristics:

1. It must be solidly based on Scripture.
2. It must use discipline and good methods of exegesis.
3. It must pass the test of reason. (It must be logical and make sense.)
4. It must conform to human experience.

Across the centuries many attempts have been made to take the truths of the Scriptures and organize them into systems of doctrine called Systematic Theology. There have been many interpretations and viewpoints. Some are good, others are bad, and still others are mixed. We will look at some doctrines that are controversial and contrary to the holiness tradition. Our motive is not to foment controversy and division but rather to call attention to the excellence of holiness theology, and point out how it outshines other options.

Some False Doctrines to Be Aware Of

1. A False Doctrine: Sin in the Life of a Believer

There is a theology espoused by some evangelical denominations that claims that born-again Christians continue to sin in “word, thought, and deed every day.” I have heard them say that when God forgives sin, it includes all sin “past, present, and future sins.” I believe that this is an extremely dangerous doctrine. It offers a false hope that one can violate God's laws and escape the consequences. There is absolutely no toleration of sin in the Bible under any circumstances. Here are some examples:

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:7-11).

“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin”(1 John 5:18a).

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:4-6).

Anybody who believes in the “sinning Christian” theology must completely ignore these and other clear statements from the Word of God.

This false doctrine also fails the test of logic. We say that the born-again Christian has been saved. The question is, saved from what? True salvation is salvation from sin. There is no such thing as salvation in sin. It is a contradiction. Sin is incompatible with holiness. Salvation is the remedy for sin! Any “salvation” that leaves us in sin is a false salvation.

2. A False Doctrine: Predestination

The false doctrine of predestination teaches that God in His sovereignty has determined who will be saved and who will be lost. It completely eliminates the role of human freedom in the matter of salvation. There is nothing you can do to change your predetermined destiny. However, the operative word used in the Bible when dealing with the availability of salvation is the word “whoever.” It is used repeatedly.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“It got so bad that day that there was no time to eat and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36).

If you wish, you may find this same word in other places like Mathew 10:32; 1 John 6:24, 37; 10:9; and 11:26.

3. A False Doctrine: A Limited Atonement

If the eternal destiny of every person has already been determined, then when Christ died in the cross, He provided for the salvation of only those who would be saved. The atonement was limited. It does not cover those condemned to be lost.

The question here concerns the merit of what Christ did on the cross. Shedding his blood is symbolic of giving His life. Giving His life had infinite merit because of who He was. The Scriptures testify to the value of His blood:

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from

God's wrath through him!"(Romans 5:9).

"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

...

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Ephesians 1:7-8).

"And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:12).

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood..." (Revelation 1:5d).

This error is especially egregious because it denigrates the work of the Savior. There are many Bible texts that speak of the importance of the shed blood and the benefits that come from it. I have not been able to find a single text that even remotely hints that the sacrifice of Christ is limited or inadequate to cover the entire human race!

4. A False Doctrine: Once Saved, Always Saved

This doctrine teaches that once a person is saved he/she can never be "unsaved." You can go back into terrible sin, but you can never lose your salvation, because God chose you to be saved, and what God wants must be carried out. However, the Scriptures teach that it is how we finish the race that counts, not how we begin it.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

Many other Scriptures clearly indicate that human choice is involved in salvation. We come into our relationship with God by choice and we can leave it the same way. God who hates sin will not let sinners into heaven.

Summary

In this section on the Excellence of Holiness there is a contrast in the options that are outlined. It offers the opportunity to make choices between the options. Let's take a look at them.

Which is better, to be completely delivered from the guilt and power of sins committed and to have the freedom to choose not to sin, or to be left in the struggle against sin and to continue sinning every day?

Which is better, to believe that your eternal destiny has been predetermined by God and that there is nothing that you can do about it, or to believe that you have the power of choice to choose Christ as your Savior, and have the assurance of salvation?

Which is better, to believe that the work of Christ on the cross only applies to certain selected people, or to believe that it is available to every person who repents and has faith in Christ?

Which is better, to believe that after you are saved you can continue to commit sin and God will ignore it, or to live a life of obedience and conformity to the laws of God?

Which is better to struggle with the sinful nature all your life, or to claim God's offer of complete cleansing, and live victoriously?

The second option wins in every case. It leads to the best experience and the safest road. All of these false doctrines are dangerous, and may lead to false hopes of salvation. A careful study will reveal that the Bible does not support them. The way of holiness is the way of excellence.

The Best Possible Theology?

God's complete plan of salvation involves several steps or stages. It begins with the work of the Holy Spirit convicting the sinner of his need of forgiveness. After repentance, beginning with forgiveness, there is a series of gifts from God, including justification, regeneration, adoption, cleansing, empowerment, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. These gifts are progressive, each one leading to a new level of Christian experience, and each one being a preparation for the next step. When it comes to the final step, God wants to do something very special. God Almighty could give a variety of wonderful gifts. But, He chose to do something extraordinary. He chose to give Himself in all His fullness.

Relevant Scripture Confirmations

"...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19).

There is nothing better than God! Therefore, there is no greater gift that He could give than Himself. So He sent His Holy Spirit (the Helper) to take up residence in the hearts of His disciples to cleanse, guide, comfort, encourage, and strengthen them. It is an incredible gift! It is the best possible experience that could happen to a human being. It is the culmination of the steps in the salvation plan.

This is the essence of holiness theology. There is no way to improve it. It is the best possible

theology. Nothing could ever surpass it. It can be a reality in your life if you seek it with all our heart.