

JACK HAYFORD Explains What Holiness Really Is

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As often as the word *holy* is used by Christians, you'd think that we could all agree on a uniform understanding of its meaning. We read our "Holy" Bibles. We receive "Holy" Communion. We sing the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy" and acknowledge the "Holy" Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. We understand the word generally to mean "divine" or "of God."

But when Christians start to discuss *holiness*, they discover that the implications of the word vary widely. It seems that holiness can mean anything from a name for the pope to teetotalism and not wearing makeup.

What do you think it means? What does the word *holy* (or the closely related words *sanctify* or *sanctification*) suggest to you? The word in some form—*holy*, *holiness*, *holiest*, *allow*, *hallowed*—occurs nearly 700 times in the English Bible. Certainly, it's an important word. The average believer seems to feel threatened by the idea of holiness. He tends to see it as something unapproachable, a demanding standard of life that seems to be well beyond him. Believers tend to define it by "feel" more than by fact, and the feeling seems to be, "Boy, that's way beyond me (although I sure want to try my best!)."

The Holy Spirit desires to bring each of us to complete personhood. This practical pursuit—our partnering with Him as He comes to help—is geared to make us whole or holy. That's what "holiness" is really about—wholeness. What the Holy Spirit is up to is bringing the *whole* life of Jesus Christ into the *whole* of our personalities so that the *whole* love of God can be relayed to the *whole* world.

The word *holy* is derived from the medieval English *hal*, an 11th century word that is the root to such contemporary words as *health*, *hale*, *whole* and *holy*. Obviously, holiness is more than an esoteric spiritual attribute, and it relates to more than merely the invisible. Holiness involves the completion in all parts of the human being. As the Holy Spirit rebuilds you to the depths of your being ...

*Your spirit can be revived to life in God (made holy).

*Your soul can be restored in mind and emotions (made whole).

*Your physical body, habits and conditions can become disciplined, recovering to well-being (kept healthy).

Now, doesn't holiness look like a far more desirable goal, even a practical, attainable reality? God wants to make us holy—just as He is.

Because both terms—holiness and sanctification—have become smothered in religious verbiage, we must uncover the truth about holiness if holiness is God's goal for us. If full sanctification is something each of us should truly desire, and if you and I are not likely to hunger or thirst for something that we don't understand or feel intimidated by or have a distorted idea about, then we need to explore the real meaning of holy some more.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul prays for the believers in Thessalonica: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NKJV). His words reveal three aspects of sanctification or holiness, which is the same as full recovery of the three-part nature of man (spirit, soul and body).

1. Holiness/sanctification is for *now*.

2. Holiness/sanctification is something *God Himself will do* in you.

3. Holiness/sanctification involves your *peace, completeness and wholeness*.

In short, God is ready to do everything He can to put you fully together, starting today! Paul's prayer holds a tremendous promise: "May the God of peace ... sanctify you." The essential idea of the word *eirene* (peace) is unity, of fragments or separated parts being brought together. This is a wonderful promise, relevant to our own broken hearts.

Holy as He Is Holy

The phrase "be holy as He is holy," far from being a prohibitive summons or unattainable goal, actually gives us a glimpse into the Father's heart and desire for us. The phrase is used first in Leviticus: "For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate [sanctify] yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). It's used again, in essence, in Jesus' words, recorded in Matthew's Gospel: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (5:48). Here are both an Old Testament and a New Testament summons calling you and me to be *perfect*. How can this be? How can we possibly measure up?

A divine call that was intended to beget hope instead produces fear and condemnation. We will never really gain ground until our sense of being "failures before we start" gets broken. If the walls of our personalities are going to be rebuilt, we must come to a place of comfort and confidence about both the goal and the process.

Nothing hinders the pursuit of holiness more than a sense of condemnation, which always includes guilt, unworthiness and the sense of impossibility about ever being able to truly measure up to God's standards. We must fully "own" the truth that our holiness has been secured before God by virtue of our position in Jesus Christ. Jesus' sinless record was credited to your account. The epistle to the Romans often uses the word *justified*, a word indicating that God has made a positive

legal judgment about you.

By the standards of the highest court in the universe, He regards you as holy when you put your trust in Jesus Christ.

✖ God's Word also gets specific about holiness in practice.

God wants us to get on with lives that are lived "holily," lives in which we practice holiness in thought and conduct. This implies growth. It's as if we grow up into the holiness that Jesus has provided for us. Once we grasp this, we are on the way to understanding "be holy as He is holy" in a new way.

What is the Lord Jesus really saying here, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"? I used to think this was solely a commandment, but I have come to see it as more of a *promise*. Here's what it really means: "Because your Father is holy, you are assured already that you are en route to holiness."

We come to understand two important points: (1) holiness in God's changeless nature, and (2) His promise about our new nature. These understandings bring us to a settled confidence about our future.

Holiness is that attribute of God by which He preserves the integrity of His own being. This means God never needs to be reminded to be good, loving, wise or wonderful. He doesn't labor to accomplish what most of us define as "being holy." Instead, because God's very nature is holy, He will never be less than what He is already. His holiness guarantees the changeless integrity of His own being.

What does that mean for you? It means He'll never be without love for you. He'll never be less than merciful. He'll never be anything other than just. And He'll remake you so you can reflect His integrity of being in your own personality and actions.

I don't need to tell you that the human personality falls far

short of God's integrity of character. Our integrity has been shattered, smashed and damaged, reduced to far less than it was made to be. The good news is that we don't have to remain that way. Here comes our Savior! He comes not only to forgive us but also to restore us. His plan is to give birth to each of us all over again and, through this new birth, to place in us a new seed. It's like a new genetic principle: We are to be "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

First John 3:6, 9 says: "Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he [is] born of God."

I used to read those verses and want to give up. I would say: "Well, I think I'm born of God, but this says that if you are, you don't sin. But sometimes I still do. I don't want to, but I do. I love the Lord, and I'm trying to become more holy, but I sin."

Then the words of verse 8 would haunt me: "He who sins is of the devil." Doubt and futility would grip me: "Since I'm not sinless yet, am I really saved? So in reality, I must be 'of the devil'?" Years went by, and no one ever told me differently. Like many people, repeated trips to the altar and the prayer room seemed to be the only way I knew to assure God's acceptance. But one day I learned that the same verses that had confused me held a mighty truth.

My misunderstanding was overcome simply by discovering the tense of the Greek verb. In this verse, the original language actually says, "Whoever is born of God does not *keep on sinning*." In fact, the chapter immediately preceding already establishes the idea that it's only by the help of the Spirit of Jesus that we can grow in our ability to resist sin: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may

not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

So what the Bible is really saying is this: "Whoever is born of God does not keep on sinning." Those of us who have been reborn just don't make good sinners anymore. The more we grow, the harder it gets to keep at it the same way we did before. The message is also this: The seed of His new life in me assures me that my destiny is to conquer sinning.

How often, before you knew Christ, did you sin and feel justified in doing so? Remember feeling free to retaliate, to let your temper flare or to serve yourself selfishly? Have you noticed since your rebirth that an inner sense of wanting to please God has begun to predominate? Are you more sensitive toward doing His will?

Here's why: What is born of God doesn't want to keep on sinning because He has planted His seed in you. God's seed is in you! He says, "I birthed you into My life, and therefore, the attributes of My personality *will* be forthcoming in you."

As any photograph of me reveals, I have a receded hairline. I didn't plan to be balding. In my early 20s I didn't make a decision: "I think I'll start losing hair." But I did begin losing it, and anyone could've predicted that it would happen. Both of my grandfathers and my dad had precisely the same hairline, and the same genetic principle that caused them to be balding was transmitted to me. My brother and I have patterns of baldness similar to our forebears. The biological genetic "seed" transmitted to us.

This rather silly illustration points out how God is saying to you and me: "My seed is in you, and since I am holy, increasingly you are going to be holy too." We shall be holy for He is holy. We shall become perfected just as He is

perfect.

Holiness—His holy nature—is progressively going to fill my broken, weak and damaged parts. The character and constancy of my Father will grow in me.

Why the Holy Spirit Won't Rest

The Holy Spirit is after that growth and rebuilding in each of us, no matter how long it takes. We see this exemplified early in the story of Nehemiah, who oversaw the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer (i.e., a respected adviser) for King Artaxerxes, who ruled the 127 provinces of the massive Persian Empire. When the king asked about Nehemiah's sad countenance, the Israelite explained his desire to complete reconstruction of the city walls and gates.

The king replied, "How long will your journey be?"

"And I set him a time." Nehemiah registered his request (Neh. 2:5-6). How long a time did he ask for? As we learn later in the account, Nehemiah asked the king for 12 years! I can imagine a man asking, "May I have a two-month leave of absence?" or "Well, King, Sire, I would like the opportunity to be there. Could I possibly have a year?" But 12 years?

Amazingly, the king agreed to Nehemiah's request. From his reaction at the time he first received Hanani's report of the dire condition of the Jews in Jerusalem, through his willingness to risk his life asking for the king's permission to leave his position, and now to his request for an incredibly long leave of absence—more than a decade—Nehemiah exemplifies the character and heart of the Spirit of God. Nehemiah could not be content until his people were taken care of.

In this way, the Holy Spirit will not rest until you and I are taken care of. He comes to work in us and with us to rebuild

the walls of our God-ordained personalities, and He will not be deterred by the probable length of the task. As the king agreed, so it is today: "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever" (Ps. 138:8).

Whatever time it takes, He is committed to your completion, and that completed work will be a work of holiness unto the Lord—worked in you by the Holy Spirit of God. He will complete the job of restoring your personality. He will "reprogram" you.

The Gospel of Matthew reports that as many as touched Jesus were made whole—thoroughly whole (14:36). John indicates that a well of the water of new life will bubble up inside you (John 4:14). By the direct action of the Holy Spirit, God will cause that well to burst open so that rivers of the Spirit will flow out of your inner being. That flowing is designed to work a full restoration of the real you.

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