

ON BEING HOLY

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Church, I hope that you've been enjoying the promises that have been coming to you every day. We're coming up on three weeks now, and 20-21 promises have gotten to you. I hope you are memorizing them, because as the song says, "Standing on the promises of God." Somebody once remarked that you can't stand on promises that you don't know. So, memorize each of these promises and they come back to us when we need them to reinforce our faith in the Lord. but it's been a joy for me to curate this, cull them from scripture and send it to you. I thank you for that opportunity and privilege.

Last week, we looked at the glory, the holiness, the magnificence of God. We were looking at Isaiah 6, and we saw this vision that Isaiah had of the Lord, sitting high and lifted up, and the train filling the temple, smoke everywhere, and the seraphim on either side singing antiphonally, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory." What a glorious picture! And at the end of it, we said that even as God is holy, we came to a very interesting, though sobering, statement – that the holy God invites His people, you and me, to also be holy. And we ended there, asking the Lord to help us to have that kind of a yearning to be like Him, to see His glory, to be holy in all our ways, so that we could be good reflectors of the Almighty God.

Today, I want us to push this a little further and see what it is that we need to understand about holiness that will help us in our own lives to be holy. I would like to read a few scriptures from the Old Testament and then from the New Testament.

Leviticus 19:2 *Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.*

Leviticus 20:26 *You shall be holy for I the Lord, am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.*

Leviticus 21:8 *You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of Your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the Lord who sanctifies you, am holy.*

Exodus 19:6 *And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel*

1 Peter 1:16 *For it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

1 Thessalonians 4:7 *For God has not called us for impurity but in holiness.*

As we look at these various scriptures, we see that the command, the mandate for us is to be holy. I want us to look at different aspects of holiness and begin to understand it, so that as we understand the magnificence and the holiness of God and also that we are called to be holy, we can understand from our perspective, from a human, finites understanding, what it means to be a holy people.

But first, I want us to have a working definition, or some way of understanding what holiness is. For this, I want to draw your attention to Dr. John Oswald who is a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, and who's done wonderful work in the Old Testament. He talks about holiness and he says that there are two distinctives about holiness as we understand God.

1. Identity
2. Character.

In the Old Testament times, only identity was used in terms of understanding holiness of gods. As people looked at God, they looked at God as something other, something different from them, something they couldn't understand or comprehend, something other than them. And so, worship

came and the identity of a holy God was given to them. However, the aspect of character came in with the Old Testament Yahweh, God, because Yahweh had a covenant with the people, told them if they would do this, He would do this. And He invited them to be holy as He was holy. So, holiness in terms of character can only be seen in terms of community and behavior. So, character comes out only as it is used in conjunction with people. So, the whole idea of identity and character in terms of holiness has come to us from an Old Testament perspective.

What does it mean to identify with a holy God?

For example, something was taken and given to the temple; that became a holy thing because it was used in the whole area of holiness. Also, it belonged exclusively to the temple. It couldn't be used by anybody else for anything else. And so, this expression of identity means that as we come before a holy God, as we say that we too are part of who You are, then our identity gets wrapped up with His.

What are the things that I need to reflect that are part of the character of God?

What are the attributes of God that must be seen in me? We look at God and we see how He created the world, how He treated all the things that were there, how He treats people, how He treats sin – all these things for the character of a holy God.

It is these two things that must begin to inform us about identity and character. Remember, as we look at identity, that God is saying that we belong to Him. And therefore, our identity must be wrapped up in His, because His is the holy identity. And character – how we relate to others must be exactly how God relates to us and to the community around. And yet, this was so difficult in Old Testament times – for the people to be holy.

And then Jesus came. And Jesus cleansed the temple, as it were. What do I mean by that? The Holy Spirit was needed in our hearts for us to be able to have the power to live the kind of life that God was expecting us to live, a holy kind of life. And yet, the temple that I am, or you are, was an unholy temple, and that temple needed to be cleansed. Jesus came and did that. He did that historically; we understand that from the gospels. But He also does it every day as He clears the temple of our lives, as He forgives the sins that we bring before Him, so that the temple that the Holy Spirit resides in is a holy place, a place that He can show us how we can be holy as God is holy.

So, we have the Holy Spirit now residing in our hearts. That's a good time to pause and understand that only those areas that He has control of can be holy areas for us to be able to have a holy identity and a holy character. The other areas which we hold on to dearly don't come under His purview. So, it might be a good time for us to say, "I want to be completely holy. I want to let God have every part of me." Remember that if we belong to Him, then we are exclusively His. We can't have any part that we say is ours only. Maybe today is a good day for us to say, "Lord, I've been holding on to some things that I haven't yielded to You. Would You take it? Holy Spirit, I give You that place. Lord Jesus, would You forgive me for that sin? And Holy Spirit, as the Lord cleanses it, take charge of that space and make it completely Yours and holy."

That's the understanding – that there's an exclusivity that we are God's, and that we must take on the character of God. Now let's ask the question: How does that play out in our lives? How do we understand that? How do we understand this exclusivity, this character that must be part of who I am? Allow me to offer you a few points in that respect. Let's look at what it means?

1. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 from the Good News translation says, *“Surely you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you! God will destroy anyone who destroys God’s temple. For God’s temple is holy, and you yourselves are His temple.”*

The Holy Spirit resides within us. What kind of a dwelling are we offering to Him? Because God’s temple is holy. We have what we call this positional holiness, and that holiness or righteousness comes from the imputed righteousness of Jesus that settles upon us when we accepted Him into our hearts, accepted that He paid the penalty for us. But that’s a positional righteousness.

But there’s a holiness that needs to come into our lives every moment of every day, in every situation, every circumstance, every encounter with people. And we allow the Holy Spirit complete access by making sure that His dwelling place is a place that is devoid of me, or us, or my ego, or the things that I want. Rather the things that God wants – an obedient heart – is where His dwelling is.

So, the temple is holy; we are His temple and we ought to make sure that His dwelling is a good holy place.

2. Our Calling.

1 Thessalonians 4:7 *For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.*

Not called us for the purpose of impurity – that’s not our call when God tapped us on the shoulder and invited us to be part of His family, invited us to know His Son as our personal Savior, and we accepted. He didn’t call us then for us to walk in impurity. He called us to walk in a pure life just like the life His Son lived.

Sanctification – and I want to make sure that we don’t use these words synonymously, because they’re not. Sanctification and holiness are two different things. Holiness is what God has called us to; sanctification is the process of holiness. As we continue each moment to allow the purging of our hearts and our souls and our minds by the power and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit, we are sanctified each and every moment, and we walk along that path or that objective of holiness. Paul is telling the church that we have been called not to walk in impurity, but to walk in sanctification, not to look out for impure things but to keep our eyes fixed on the things that are pure.

3. We become a new creation.

When we become part of the family of God and we are exclusively His, then we become a new creation, a new self.

Ephesians 4:24 *We put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

Genesis 1:26 *Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.* The Hebrew word is *demooth* and likeness meant phantom or an illusion – that people would think it was God and then say, “Oh no, it’s not. It’s just an apparition, looks like God.” That was likeness and that’s what we are expected to have – the likeness of God, that people can even mistake us for God.

As I thought about that, I said, “This redeemed self of ours, the redemption that has come through the cross that Jesus paid the penalty for us, takes us all the way back to the garden of Eden where God is trying to bring it back together; that pristine, beautiful garden where there was so much of communion between Him and Adam and Eve. He trying to bring that back for us. What a glorious day when we can have that, when this is finally fulfilled in every way, to be in the likeness of God.

Paul says that’s what must happen in this process as we try to be holy as He is holy. We ought to be able to assume the likeness of God. We are a new creation recreated in the likeness of God and the

holiness or purity of truth. In other words, we are to be aware that we are created in the likeness of God and then let our behavior manifest holiness and truth as befits someone who is in the very likeness of God.

I keep on repeating this because I think it is so important that we don't lose sight of what a magnificent thing is this redemption that we are a part of, this whole redeeming plan, this saving plan that brought Jesus in. What all it entails for us, what it is giving back to us – the very likeness of God, to walk in truth and holiness and purity. What does that look like?

Ephesians 4:25-32 (Good News Translation) *No more lying, then! Each of you must tell the truth to the other believer, because we are all members together in the body of Christ. If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day.*

Don't give the devil a chance. If you used to rob, you must stop robbing and start working, in order to earn an honest living for yourself and to be able to help the poor. Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free. Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ.

Beautiful! Tells us exactly those things that we need to stay away from and those things that we need to press into. Make sure that after you are done through the day, that you look at this list again. Ephesians 4:25-32. Keep looking at it so it becomes a litmus test in a way, for you to look at your own life and say, "Oh! This doesn't add up. This is something that I need to get rid of, or these are the things that I need to pursue." We are a new creation, living in the likeness of God, and these are the things that must be reflected.

What other things must be reflected in our lives?

Our Bodies: How must our bodies line up in terms of holiness?

Romans 6:13 *Nor must you surrender any part of yourselves to the sin to be used for wicked purposes.*

Don't surrender any part of yourself to sin that can be used for wicked purposes. Instead, give yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and surrender your whole being to Him to be used for righteous purposes. Not wickedness, beloved, but righteous purposes.

Then in vs. 19 he says, *"I use everyday language because of the weakness of your natural selves. At one time you surrendered yourselves entirely as slaves to impurity and wickedness for wicked purposes. In the same way you must now surrender yourselves entirely as slaves of righteousness for holy purposes.*

So, get rid of the slavery that you had, the enslavement that you had to wicked purposes, of yielding your body, offering your body for things that were wicked. Now with that same kind of passion, give it to the things of righteousness and holy living. Allow and use yourself for righteous, holy purposes alone.

Our Behavior:

1 Peter 1:13-16 *So then, have your minds ready for action. Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Be obedient to God, and do not allow your lives to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant. Instead, be holy in all that you do, just as God who called you is holy. The scripture says, "Be holy because I am holy."*

Our Desires:

So, let your behavior be shaped by godly desires. What kind of desires? In Philippians 4:8, Paul gives us a list. He says, *"In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable."*

These are things that we need to think about so that our desires would be holy desires and the key to seeing this happen is of course, obedience. As he says: Be obedient to God.

Our Fruit:

Then, finally beloved, if you are putting all of this together and we are trying to give the Holy Spirit as much complete access as we can, we then need to be able to look at our lives and say, "Is there fruit?" because holy living will cause fruit.

J. B. Phillips, in his translation of John 15:8 says, "This is how My Father will be glorified – in your becoming fruitful and being My disciples." We must be fruitful, beloved. What does that mean for you and me? When you look at your life, the time when you first started, to now; Are you a calmer person, less prone to anger and rage and bitterness and all of those things? Can you see that you have travelled from that point to now? Has your love for the word increased and improved? Are you praying more? Are you caring more for people who need care? Are you giving yourself to the things of the Lord? Are you doing things for Him, using your gifts, your talents, your spiritual gifts for His glory? Is there fruit, beloved, in your life?

"Be ye holy as I am holy." A command that has come to us from God. And when God tells us to do something, He knows that we can.

As we look at all of these things that we have talked about, maybe there's something here or there that has got your attention, and you say, "That's still an unholy part that is lurking in my life." Or maybe you're looking at your life and saying, "I haven't really yielded complete control. Maybe I'm not completely obedient to God, or maybe I'm clinging on to the old self and haven't realized that I have a new self." Or maybe you just haven't believed that you are exclusively His, that the likeness of God is what we pursue. The Holy Spirit within us is yearning to bring us into that perfect right relationship with God that will help us fulfill that command of His to be holy.

Beloved, we come to the table now, and what a beautiful place to be, to rest there and to say, "Lord, I know that there are many things in my life that are not consistent with Your word. But Lord, as I come to Your table and feast on the bread which reminds me of the body of the Lord, and the juice that reminds me of the precious blood of Jesus shed for me, I want to dedicate my life, renew the call that I had earlier. Maybe I didn't have it all, to pursue holiness, for You ask it, and want to give it.

So, shall we pray and prepare our hearts to come to the table of the Lord?

Almighty God, You have called us to a path of holiness, and You have given us Your word that has instructions on how we can pursue holiness. Lord, we know that if we haven't, it is because we have been faithless and unfaithful. We ask for Your forgiveness. But Lord, we come to You and say that we want to do it from this moment on. Lord God, would You help me; show me the things that I need to get rid of from my heart, my life. allow me to give full control to the Holy Spirit and let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. Holiness, Lord, is what we want to go after. Help us. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.