

HOLY IS THE LORD

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Real Beauty

Natural beauty is only skin-deep. Spiritual beauty is deeper. But the deepest of all is godly beauty.

*“Worship the Lord in the **beauty of holiness.**” (Psalm 29:2)*

Through small-minded religious legalism, “holiness” has obtained a bad reputation, usually equated with Puritanical prohibitions, arrogant condescension, and harsh judgmentalism.

However, rightly understood and cultivated, holiness is a quality of greatest beauty and benefit to all.

Holy God

God is holy. It is not something He puts on, like a cloak; it is His essence. When He stepped into our world as Jesus, this essence remained. Jesus was God’s “holy child.” His followers recognized this characteristic about Him.

*²⁷ “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against **Jesus, your holy servant**, whom you anointed. ²⁸ But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. ²⁹ And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of **your holy servant Jesus.**” (Acts 4:27-30)*

Jesus’ service to the Father was holy (thoroughly devoted). He only did what He saw the Father do. That is holy service, the same kind we are to pursue.

Holy Children

God established a priesthood for His people to draw them to Himself in worship and lead them to live in the holy way. He told Moses to create garments for the priests that would express the holiness of their service. Among their garments was a hat that bore a unique inscription:

*“Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: **HOLY TO THE LORD.**” (Exodus 28:36)*

This quality of service was revealed to all who saw them; they wore it like a badge. Their whole lives were dedicated to God’s worship and service, and this fact was right “out front” where everyone could see it. “Set apart,” “thoroughly devoted,” and “for God’s use exclusively.”

This devotion was not limited to the priesthood; they were the leaders of a holy people. Because God is holy, His children also are holy.

*“I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and **be holy, for I am holy.** You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. **You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.**” (Leviticus 11:44-45)*

Some have felt threatened by these words, as though God stood ready to punish anyone who falls short of absolute holiness. However, that would be *everyone!* No one can make themselves holy — there is nothing you can do or stop doing that can create that quality.

Instead, look at this as a promise: “It is inevitable that you will become holy, because I Myself am holy, and my influence in your life will bring it to pass.”

Among men, holiness is not contagious, but uncleanness is. If the holy priests touched anything unclean, they were rendered unclean (their holiness was temporarily lost).

But with God, holiness *is* contagious. Everything He touches becomes holy; everything given to Him becomes holy!

While men of Bible days were forbidden to touch a leprous person or a dead body (lest they become unclean), Jesus touched both, and by His touch cleansed the lepers and raised the dead. His holiness is contagious!

Completeness

Holiness comes from the same root as wholeness. Both describe aspects of completeness, through-and-through integrity. When God offers to make broken people whole, it is similar to His promise to make sinful people holy. This is what He does for us.

From the time we receive Jesus Christ as Lord in our hearts, our lives begin to be shaped in holiness. This what theologians call “sanctification,” the process of being made complete, made holy, set apart thoroughly in devotion and service to God. Those who are being so shaped God calls “saints” or “holy ones,” because He calls those things which are not yet as though they already were.

It may not be your heritage, but it is certainly your destiny as a child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ!

Incompleteness

As I have said, sanctification is a process, and does not happen overnight. Your entire lifetime will be a period of incompleteness — pursuing holiness, even while you continue to fall short. It’s just the way it is for all of us. And holiness never comes to those who passively wait

*“Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living **so that you will become holy.**”* (Romans 6:19)

“Slaves to righteous living” means devoted to doing what God wants with our lives, even when it hurts or is not recognized or rewarded.

There is nothing you can do to generate holiness, but there are many things that you must do to reveal holiness, things that lead to completeness.

*“Now you **do those things that lead to holiness** and result in eternal life.”* (Romans 6:22)

God made these wonderful promises to us:

*“ I will live in them
and walk among them.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
And I will be your Father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,’
says the LORD Almighty.”*

(2 Corinthians 6:16-18)

As a result, Paul urged his readers:

*“Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us **work toward complete holiness** out of reverence for God.”* (2 Corinthians 7:1)

If we are “working toward complete holiness,” then there must exist what could be called “incomplete holiness.” And that is where we live today.

Genesis

All this (the journey of holiness) begins with the new birth, which is by definition a beginning but incomplete. What has been born is expected to grow and develop; it is born in incompleteness.

*“Put on the new self, **created** after the likeness of God **in true righteousness and holiness.**”* (Ephesians 4:24)

Through our new birth, we have been “created in holiness,” but that is only a beginning. From before that beginning, God called us to become holy through Jesus Christ. Having begun the journey through faith, God now (right now) calls us “holy,” because He calls us by our destiny, not by our origin.

Your spirit was born (from above) holy, all at once. There is no uncleanness in your spirit; it is new in Christ, and holy as He is.

Your mind, on the other hand, gradually is becoming holy (is being renewed), over your lifetime. This is a process we are very familiar with! Before our new birth, we did whatever we wanted with minimal interference from our conscience. But once the Holy Spirit took up residence and began to inform our conscience through the Scriptures, all sorts of havoc ensued!

Holiness is not the same as righteousness. However, they are related, like character and behavior are related.

Holiness defines who you are (internal motivating condition); righteousness describes what you do (external result). Character shapes behavior, but not overnight. Consider Romans 7 as a picture of the conflict of a holy heart and mind in struggle with the unholy (sinful) flesh to do what is right. The “want-to” is there (evidence of the motivating condition), but the “ability-to-perform” is not. Until the Holy Spirit is given control (Romans 8).

What shapes character in us?

God shapes it.

²³ *“Now may the God of peace **make you holy in every way**, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. ²⁴ God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

Christ shapes it.

*“I am writing to God’s church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. **He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus**, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”* (1 Corinthians 1:2)

Jesus’ blood shapes it.

*“So also Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates to make his people **holy by means of his own blood**.”* (Hebrews 13:12)

Jesus’ body shapes it.

*“For God’s will was for us to be **made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ**, once for all time.”* (Hebrews 10:10)

Every time we share in Holy Communion, eating the bread and drinking the cup, we may invite and receive the grace associated with the body and blood of Jesus, repeatedly shaping holiness in our lives.

God’s word shapes it.

*“**Make them holy**—consecrated—**with the truth**; Your word is consecrating truth.”* (John 17:17; MSG)

Nothing compares with a regular diet of God’s word, which is accompanied by the grace and power of God, both informing and transforming our lives. Eat the Word every day!

Your energy shapes it.

*“**Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord**.”* (Hebrews 12:14)

I have already said that passive Christians will not find completeness in their lives. We must engage with the purpose of God to see results in our own lives. “Strive for holiness” means it will not come easily, but with effort it will come. And without such striving, our hopes will be in vain.

God’s discipline shapes it.

*“Our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But **God’s discipline** is always good for us, so that **we might share in his holiness**.”* (Hebrews 12:10)

God is not angry with you. He is not punishing you with vengeance. God loves you — very much, more than words can say. He only disciplines those He loves. So, if you have felt the pinch of His discipline, know that you are loved — loved too much to leave you to your own devices. He wants you to share in His wholeness.

The Holy Spirit shapes it.

*“This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to **control his own body in holiness** and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5)

This is not control-by-self; that is useless. This is “self-control,” which is the “fruit of the Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit’s control of your self “in holiness” that is effective. Learn to recognize His gentle promptings and urgings and let Him have His way.

Revelation

Ultimately, your unholy body (that has been the relentless source of struggle) will be exchanged for a new and completely holy body at the end of your life (either in rapture or in resurrection).

*“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish **your hearts blameless in holiness** before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)

“Blameless in holiness” signals the end of doubt and shame and regret! Standing whole and unashamed before the Almighty, heads held high in adoration.

And that will be your completeness — spirit, mind, and body — holy to the Lord.

What is the sum of this theme? If, in *these* days, we devote ourselves to following Jesus, then, in *that* day, we shall be “HOLY TO THE LORD.”