

Holiness is still the requirement!

I John 3:1-3

“For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.” Leviticus 11:44

"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Heb. 12:14)

John speaks of the privilege by grace of being children of God. Anyone who rests his hope in God purifies himself as He is pure. It is our call of obligation to purity. John teaches five things: (1) what sin is; (2) what sin does; (3) why sin is; (4) where sin comes from; and (5) how sin is conquered.

A man may go great lengths and yet never reach true holiness. It is not knowledge—Balaam had that; nor great profession—Judas Iscariot had that; nor doing many things—Herod had that; nor zeal for certain matters in religion—Jehu had that; nor morality and outward respectability of conduct—the young ruler had that; nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers—the Jews in Ezekiel’s time had that; nor keeping company with godly people—Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that. These things alone are not holiness.

There are clearly **two aspects of holiness** – the attainment of holiness (call it the finished or completed aspect) and the maintenance of holiness (which is the present continuous aspect) – both of which require the active participation of the individual. We attain holiness by the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary by the cleansing of His precious blood. The writer of Hebrews noted that “*we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Heb. 10:10).

Having been brought into personal relationship with God and made holy, there is the aspect of maintaining the state of holiness. Talking about this aspect, the writer of Hebrews said “*by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*” (Heb.10:14).

Clearly holiness is not an attitude of the mind, a feeling or an emotional or psychological trip into the unknown spirit world but rather it is a result of conscious choices made by the will of man.

Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.

I Thessalonians 4:1-7 (The Plea for purity); 9-12 (The Orderly Life)

Characteristics of a holy man

A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. He will not only live the life of faith in Him and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength, but he will also labor to have the mind that was in Him and to be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us; to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself; to walk in love, even as Christ loved us; to be lowly-minded and humble.

A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. He will labor to mortify the desires of his body, to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts, to curb his passions, to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose. Oh, what a word is that of the Lord Jesus to the apostles: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life" (Luke 21:34), and that of the apostle Paul: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). A holy man will follow after purity of heart. He will dread all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit, and seek to avoid all things that might draw him into it. He knows his own heart is like tinder and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation. Cor. 9:27).

A holy man will follow after the fear of God. I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because he is afraid of punishment and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father's face, because he loves him. What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became governor at Jerusalem, he might have been chargeable to the Jews and required of them money for his support. The former governors had done so. There was none to blame him if he did. But he says, "So did not I, because of the fear of God" (Neh. 5:15).

A holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten: "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord": "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Col. 3:23; Rom. 12:11). Holy persons should aim at doing everything well and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no "occasion" against themselves, except concerning the law of their God (Dan. 6:5). They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbors, good friends, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good by their firesides.

Why is holiness so important?

1. We must be holy, because the voice of God in Scripture plainly commands it. The Lord Jesus says to His people, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). "Be you . . . perfect, even as your Father which

is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Paul tells the Thessalonians, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). And Peter says, "As He which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, 'Be you holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15, 16). Why is holiness so important?

2. We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15); and to the Ephesians, "Christ . . . loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it" (Eph. 5:25, 26); and to Titus, "[He] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

In I Peter 1 reduces this aspect into a few practical steps that the individual, by choice, can take which will result in daily holiness hence his call to believers, to those who have attained the first leg of holiness to “*prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed*” (v13).

The principles of substitution demand that we deliberately replace the things that defile or facilitate defilement with the things that provide the enabling environment for the nurture of holiness. These include:

1. **The management of the source of defilement** (v13). The Lord Himself had earlier warned that “*What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him `unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him `unclean’*” (Mat.15v11). Peter therefore calls for self discipline to consciously refocus our personal antenna that receives signals into our inner man from the rut and junk that defile to “*the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed*” (v13). Paul was more direct, speaking to the Colossians he said “*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*” (Col.3v1-2).
2. **Travel light** (v17). He challenges us to live our lives here as strangers in the fear of God, pilgrims who are passing by to the home He has gone to prepare. He even uses the word aliens in 2v11 to describe the frame of mind we should tune ourselves to as we march on home. When you are in transit, you do not get unduly entangled with the affairs of the transit point.
3. **Keep godly company** (v22). The Lord said that Christian testimony will stand out by the love they show to themselves (John 13v34-35). When we spend ourselves loving one another, there will not be room for the active display of the things that defile such as “*all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind*” (2v1).

4. **Watch your spiritual diet** (2v2-3). The word crave is used to drive home the point that it is of utmost importance that we feed well if we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Paul's instruction to the Colossians is also instructive here: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God*" (Col.3v16).

Holiness is a process that requires time. The history of the brightest saints that ever lived will contain many a "but" and "however" and "notwithstanding" before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross, the light will never shine without some clouds, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

The holiest men have many a blemish and defect when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world and the devil; and sometimes you will see them not overcoming, but overcome. The flesh is ever lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and in many things they offend all (Gal. 5:17; James 3:2).

The heart's desire and prayer of all true Christians is to press towards the mark. They may not attain all the time, but they always aim at it. It is what they strive and labor to be.