

## PRAISE THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

Prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris – June 14, 2012

2 Chronicles 20:21

*“And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should **praise the beauty of holiness.**”*

The serious questions that must be asked is:

***What is wrong with holiness that so many should either despise it, fear it, or reject it?***

The answer probably lies in a combination of factors:

1. Unrealistic expectations such as thinking that by the term “holiness” one means “absolute or sinless perfection.” This, however is the result of failing to understand holiness from the Biblical perspective.
2. Unrealized expressions of holiness, as observed in people who profess to be sanctified or Spirit-filled. This is the result of failing to recognize that “*we have this treasure in earthen vessels.*”
3. Unresolved explanations of holiness that leave doubts in our minds that it is a true Biblical teaching.

The words of God are clearly spoken and recorded and should leave no doubt in anyone’s mind. Hear the Word of the Lord:

***“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”*** (Leviticus 19:2)

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The Apostle Peter understood this even to the extent that he quotes it in one of his letters:

***“As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”*** (1 Peter 1:15, 16)

The Apostle Paul understood this Biblical teaching equally as well, for he wrote as follows:

***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”*** (Ephesians 1:3, 4)

Therefore **holiness** is not a teaching that began in the ministry and writings of John Wesley, nor in the preaching of the great American Holiness Camp Meeting evangelists. Holiness does not originate in the New Testament as taught by Peter or Paul. We dare not fall into the trap that attempts to divide Old Testament truth from New Testament truth, suggesting we are only New Testament Christians. No, we are **BIBLICAL Christians**, knowing that **holiness** is that which we understand to be the very essence of the nature of God Himself.

In this message I want to set forth three truths that I firmly believe are absolutely essential for understanding the Biblical teaching on **holiness**.

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1. **The Demand for Holiness.**
2. **The Design of Holiness.**
3. **The Destination of Holiness.**

**1. THE DEMAND FOR HOLINESS.**

What is it that makes *holiness* so important that God Himself not only declares it to the very essence of who He is, but follows that with the command that we are to be holy?

The problem focuses unmistakably on sin. We turn to **Leviticus 16:20-21**. Here we discover **three** Hebrew words of deep significance when considering the nature of sin as understood in the Bible. In speaking of the role of Aaron, representing the office of the high priest, the Bible declares:

*“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the **iniquities** of the children of Israel, and all their **transgressions**, concerning all their **sins**, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.”* (Leviticus 16:20-21)

The three significant words in the English text are: *“iniquities,” “transgressions,”* and *“sins.”* It is the Hebrew text that illuminates the meaning.

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First, we find the English words *“all the iniquities”* translate the Hebrew compound word כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹת. The word means *“flagrant misdeeds,”* in reference to offenses committed against the holy standards of God.

Second, we note the English words *“all their transgressions,”* and these translate the Hebrew compound word כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם. The word refers to *“acts of rebellion”* against God’s holy standards.

Third, the English words *“all their sins”* is the English translation of the Hebrew compound word לְכָל־חַטָּאתָם. This is a compound word that indicates *“unwitting offenses”* against the holy standards of God. And so we have a Biblical definition of sin. All of these required atonement by means of God’s appointed means, as stated in the text of Leviticus 16:20-21.

This message is not an attempt to create a so-called “list” of activities and attitudes that may be classified as “sin.” Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, and who may rightly called *“The Mother of Methodism,”* wrote the following to her son John when he struggled with the problem of sin.

*“How would you judge the lawfulness or unlawfulness of ‘pleasure?’ Use this rule: ‘Whatever weakens your conscience, impairs the tenderness*

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*of your conscience, obscures your sight of God, takes from you your thirst for spiritual things or increases the authority of the body over the mind, that thing to you is evil, however innocent it may seem in itself. By this test you may detect evil not matter how subtly or how plausibly temptation may be presented to you.”*

On that foundation, it is helpful to note some things about the character or nature of sin.

**Sin** is an unwanted intruder into the heart that was made as the dwelling place of God!

**Sin** is a poison in the mind and a destroyer of common decency!

**Sin**...

- \* deadens the conscience concerning right and wrong,
- \* deceives the sensibility that governs decisions,
- \* diverts the will away from intimacy with God,
- \* deludes the mind on moral convictions.

**Sin** has run rampant through the course of human history...

- \* ruining human lives around the world;
- \* devastating the dreams of a bride and groom;
- \* heartlessly destroying marriages;
- \* murdering innocent unborn babies;
- \* leaving mothers and children helpless;
- \* breaking the hearts of mothers and fathers;
- \* destroying the futures for billions of young men and women;

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- \* bringing innocent, illegitimate children into a cruel, hating world;
- \* throwing life's greatest hopes into the pits of despair.

**Sin** has stood against all that right, pure, decent, kind, gracious, and honest.

**Sin** has polluted the decisions of world governments.

**Sin** has raised up hateful dictators with oppression and murder in their hearts.

**Sin** has marched its iron heels of destruction across the peace-loving people of the world.

**Sin** has shaken its ugly fist of rebellion in the face of a Holy God.

**BUT** one day...one glorious day...the God of Glory, the God of Grace, the God of Goodness...sent His own Son, and from the Cross that eternal, uncreated, equal-with-the-Father, one-of-a-kind Son cried "***It is finished!***" At that moment sin was conquered, and no longer has dominion over the children of God, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit! Forgiven! Free! Triumphant! Anticipating!

No wonder then that the **Demand for Holiness** is real. No wonder then that the **Demand for Holiness** is appealing to people caught in the ugly snare of sin's enticements, enlistments, and enslavements. With this we move forward to observe the Bible's declaration for:

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## 2. THE DESIGN OF HOLINESS.

How can we best understand Biblical *“holiness?”* We must turn to the one Book that is the final authority for all matters of faith and practice, the Bible, the Word of God. Whereas we have a unitary Book composed of both the Old and the New Testaments, we must begin where the Bible begins. *“Holiness”* is not something discovered by the John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, and that has become the hallmark of our sacred Articles of Faith. Holiness must be understood from the meaning of the Old Testament word *קֹדֶשׁ* - **Qadosh**, and its counterpart in both the Septuagint (*the Old Testament translated into Greek*), and the New Testament in the word *ἅγιος* – **Hagios**.

We turn now to God’s initial statement found in the Book of Leviticus:

*“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2)

Now let’s look at the Prophet Isaiah’s strong declaration:

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to*

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*another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.’”*

(Isaiah 6:1-3)

The angelic declaration is very revealing:

**Qadosh, Qadosh, Qadosh.**

But what does this Hebrew word connote? Three clearly defined terms:

1. **Distinct from...**
2. **Different from...**
3. **Distanced from...**

The God who declared *“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,”* is

**A. Distinct** in contrast to all that can be conceived or done by human ability. He declared to Isaiah that there is nothing in the realm of human knowledge to which God can be compared. Listen to Him:  
*“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? ... To whom shall I be equal?’ says the Holy One. ... ‘Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.”* (Isaiah 40:18, 25, 28)

Search as you may for some remedy, some relief. None! This is a part of what we are to understand by the term *“the beauty of holiness.”* But again, the God who declared

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***“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,”*** is also

- B. **Different** from the very best that can be crafted in the mind or by the hand of any Person. No wonder David’s heart cried out to God. Hear the Sweet Singer of Israel:

*“You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.”* (Psalm 69:19, 20)

**We may travel** through the islands of the seas, climb earth’s highest mountains, soar through the brilliance of the blue skies;

**We may search** through the annals of earth’s greatest courts, parliaments, congresses;

**We may interrogate** the histories of this world’s powerful monarchs ... kings, queens, czars, presidents, dictators;

**We may research** in the libraries of the great universities and colleges of this world; ... looking for the statutes, the edicts, the laws, the commands, the judgments, calculated to alter, to correct, to bring relief from the horrific condition

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that plagues the world caught in the life-choking tentacles of sin, but to no avail! Lump together all the solutions devised in the laboratories, the libraries, the classrooms, the halls of justice and legislation and together they fall terrifyingly short! This is because the God who declared ***“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,”*** is

- C. **Distanced** from anything that has the character of the unholy, the impure, the contaminated, the defiled. We slowly but with determination enter once more into that glory-filled room and hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

*“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.”* (Isaiah 6:1)

Or let’s move to a later point in the Prophecy of Isaiah, and hear God’s Words to the prophet:

*“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’”* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

The operative Hebrew word here is highly significant. It is גַּבְהוּ – *gabehu*, a third

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person plural noun in reference to *“the heavens.”* It means *“exalted, high, lofty, majestic.”* While it is wonderfully true and powerfully comforting to know that God has come down to dwell with His people, it is likewise true that His holiness is distanced from all on earth that may be thought worthy to receive such accolades.

Thus we have the **Design of Holiness**, that it is contrastingly **distinct**, consistently **different**, and contextually **distanced** from all that is common on this earth. And from that perspective we move to a third consideration:

### 3. THE DESTINATION OF HOLINESS.

We face briefly the question: *“Where does holiness find its residence?”* The answer is found in the covenant that the God of purity, the God of holiness, made with His people Israel, and stated it clearly in the prophecy of Ezekiel:

*“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”*

(Ezekiel 36:23-27)

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Lest one think that promise from the Lord is limited to Israel, we look briefly at one verse in the Book of Hebrews:

*“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **through the blood of the everlasting covenant**, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* (Hebrews 13:20)

Through Jesus, the Holy One, who shed His blood, the blood of the everlasting covenant, the heart of a Spirit-filled person is no longer a heart of stone, bent toward the enticing, allurements of the unholy, the impure, the denigrating, the devastating, the destructive. It is no longer bowed under the soul-shattering forces of hell’s controlling power. It is a new heart ... a heart that has been

...**crafted** by the hand of the Divine Artisan, restoring the image of the holy to the heart;  
...**covered** by the fingerprints of deliverance to identify the One to whom all is now owed;  
...**conformed** to the image of the Holy One of God, the Eternal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We move now to a concluding thought lying deeply within the text. Its focus is on two English words, *“praise”* and *“beauty.”* The Chronicler

has stated clearly that we should **“praise the beauty of holiness.”** Here we look at the Hebrew words translated **“praise”** and **“beauty.”**

**“Praise”** is a form of **“hallelujah”** from the Hebrew הַלְלֵה – **“halal...”** It means **“to shine,” “to boast,” to celebrate.”** So, we literally **“celebrate”** by **“shining forth”** God’s holiness in all it means!

**“Beauty”** is a part of the compound word: **“the beauty of holiness.”** The word is לְהַדְרֹת־קֹדֶשׁ - *lehaderath-qodesh*. The first part of the word is the verb. It is הִדְרִיךְ and means **“to adorn,” “to decorate,” “to honor,” “to reverence,” “to respect.”** Now we have at least some understanding of what King Jehoshaphat meant by **“the beauty of holiness.”**

We are to celebratorily adorn, honor, and respect God’s holiness by decorating it with loving obedience and respect, and thereby shining forth His holiness in and through our lives. Hear the Scriptures: **“Who is like you, O LORD, glorious in holiness.”** (Exodus 15:11) **“Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”** (Psalm 96:9) **“Holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever!”** (Psalm 93:5)