

How Can I, a Fallible Fallen Human, Be Holy?

(The meaning of holiness)

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Scripture¹: 1 Peter 1:13-16: ¹³Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

Outline:

1. The **Command** to be holy.
2. The **Characteristics** of holiness.
3. The **Constraints** of holiness on our daily lives.

Introduction:

Peter is writing his Epistle to people who were saved. They had repented of their sins and were walking with God. To establish this fact, let's read verses 1-9 of chapter 1. I have placed in boldface type and underlined the phrases that reveal Peter believed his readers to be saved.

1 Peter 1:1-9: ¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are **chosen** ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by **the sanctifying work of the Spirit**, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, **reserved in heaven for you** ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that **the proof of your faith**, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸and though you have not seen Him, **you love Him**, and though you do not see Him now, but **believe in Him**, you greatly rejoice

¹ Scripture is from the New American Standard Version, 1995 edition.

with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as **the outcome of your faith** the salvation of your souls.

A message on the importance of holiness frequently evokes a negative response from people who do not really understand what the Bible means by the terms “holy, holiness, and sanctification.” On one memorable occasion, as I concluded a Bible study on this subject, the leader of the organization concluded the service with words that went something like this: “Thank you, Dr. Brown, for your message on holiness. We do need to remember, however, that no one is perfect.” Thus he summed up and dismissed the entire concept. What I learned from his comments is that in the future, before I deliver a message on holiness, I need to see if I can achieve some unanimity of opinion on the following two propositions: 1) no one’s perfect (incapable of improving), and 2) we are only fallible, fallen humans (limited and frail). If we can agree on these two propositions, perhaps we will be able to hear God’s Word speaking to our hearts. It is to imperfect, limited, frail humans that God commands: “Be ye holy.” And I think it is reasonable to believe that when God issues a command to fallen humans, He will also supply the necessary grace and power to enable them to obey!

- I. **The Command to be holy**: vs.15 “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior”

There are at least four Biblical reasons why God’s people are to be holy.

A. God’s creative purpose is for His people to be holy:

Ephesians 1:4: Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

B. God’s expressed will is that His people be holy:

1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7: For this is the will of God, your sanctification [your holiness]; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

C. God’s people must be holy in order to enter heaven.

Hebrews 12:14: Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord.

D. God commands His people to be holy.

1 Peter 1:15: But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;

“As oxygen is necessary to sustain physical life, so holiness is necessary to sustain spiritual life.”

II. The Characteristics of holiness.

There are three essential components to consider when discussing human holiness. In order for a human to be holy in a salvific sense, he must first be connected to the source of holiness, God Himself. As a result of this connection with God, he is separated (or set apart) unto God from that which is sinful or defiles. This connection and resulting separation enables him to share in the life of a holy God with the goal of becoming as Christlike as possible. Let’s examine these three essential components of human holiness.

1. To be holy I must be CONNECTED to the SOURCE of holiness—God Himself.

All holiness finds its origin and source in God alone. Revelation 15:4 says, “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy.” Nothing is holy in a biblical sense until it is connected to the origin and source of holiness—God himself. There is no holiness independent of His holiness. The holiness of persons, things, days, and places is derived and sustained only by being in a special relationship with the holy God.

For this reason, all born-again Christians are said to be holy. They are connected to the source of holiness, the holy God, through the new birth. For example, in Colossians 1:27 Paul writes, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Again, we read in Colossians 3:3, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” If you are born again, Christ is in you and you are in God and that relationship makes you holy.

God desires His children to understand that their primary identification as Christians is the descriptor “saints,” literally meaning “holy ones.” This description occurs sixty times in the New Testament.

2. When God makes me holy, God separates me (“sets me apart”) in three important senses:

a. I am SEPARATED TO God as His possession – His special treasure.

When God brought His redeemed people to Mt. Sinai, God said to them, “You shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people ... a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5-6). The relationship the nation of Israel had with God as a result of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery made the nation holy. And as an integral part of holiness, God claims that which he sanctifies as His special treasure. He sets apart that which is holy for Himself.

That holiness involves the concept of separation is seen in Leviticus 20:24, 26, “Hence I have said to you, ‘You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you (אֲשֶׁר־הִבְדַּלְתִּי)

from the peoples. . . . “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart (וַאֲבִדְלָהּ) from the peoples to be Mine.”

When a person gets saved, he is connected to the source of Holiness, God Himself, and God separates that person unto Himself thereby claiming him as His own property. Paul communicated this truth to the Corinthians when he wrote, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

God has a right to do what He wants with His property! This means, He has the right to tell us how to live. And He tells us that we are to live out the holy position He has given us by becoming holy in every aspect of our life.

b. God requires those who are holy to SEPARATE FROM that which is sinful or defiles.

Because we are connected to the source of holiness, God himself, and as such are separated unto God as His personal possession, God requires that you and I be separate from that which is sinful or that which defiles us in His eyes. In Leviticus 10:3 we read, “By those who come near Me I must be sanctified [regarded as holy]; And before all the people I must be glorified.” In Exodus 19:22 God warned the priests, “Let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate [sanctify] themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” In order to draw near to a holy God, we must be holy.

The Israelites evidently understood this principle, for we read in Ezra 6:21 that the people who wished to participate in the Lord’s Passover “separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel.”

The truth that God requires those who are holy to separate from that which is sinful or defiles is also emphasized in the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians that it “is God’s will that you should be sanctified [be holy]: that you should avoid sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3). After further instruction about how to properly conduct oneself, he explains, “God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thess. 4:7). Holiness requires moral purity.

To the Corinthians believers Paul wrote, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 6:16-7:1).² Notice

² Underlining added for emphasis.

the connection between the call for separation from that which is not in harmony with being a temple of God and the call for personal cleansing from anything that would defile us and the on-going responsibility of “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

God demands moral purity from Christians because separation from that which is sinful or defiles is an integral aspect of being a holy person. In harmony with this principle, Peter wrote, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives” (2 Peter 3:10-11).

c. God has the right to ask those who are holy to SEPARATE FROM anything in the area of the common or ordinary if He knows it will hinder a Christian’s spiritual growth and development, or hinder the Christian’s testimony.

The Biblical connection between holiness and separation from the common or ordinary is seen in the historical event of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). A common, ordinary bush, rooted in common, ordinary ground was changed into a holy bush, and holy ground. What caused the change? The manifest presence of the Holy God came into contact with the common and ordinary, thus transforming it into the category of the holy.

God commanded the priesthood within the nation of Israel to learn how to discern the difference between the common and the holy. In Leviticus 10:10 we read, “You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean.” That the priesthood failed to learn this difference and also failed to teach Israel the difference between the holy and the common is revealed by Ezekiel. He writes, “Her [Israel’s] priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them” (Ezekiel 22:26). Ezekiel urged the priests to correct this serious omission. He further wrote, “They [the priests] are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23).

This aspect of separation from the common or ordinary which is associated with the concept of holiness means there does not have to be something intrinsically wrong or sinful with an attitude or action or pursuit before God has the right to ask a Christian to stop it. God has the right to separate His holy people from any common or ordinary thing that He knows will not be good for them spiritually, or that He knows will hurt their testimony and consequent usefulness in His kingdom.

3. To be holy means I SHARE in the nature of God – I partake of the divine nature with the goal of becoming Christlike (2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:29).

Holy living is a way of behaving, patterned after the character of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and is expected of all Christians. Peter writes that God's "divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Pet. 1:3-4). As partakers of the divine nature, we are privileged to share in the very life of God Himself. Such participation with a holy God requires that we be holy in every area of our lives.

It would be difficult for us to understand fully what God expected from imperfect, fallen humans in His requirements for holiness if it were not for the example of Christ. Jesus, through his incarnation and life on earth, has shown us what holiness in human flesh looks like. He is the exact image of his holy Father (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:3). Therefore we may say that human holiness expresses itself in Christlike attitudes and behavior.³

What was the attitude and behavior pattern of Jesus? His fundamental passion and purpose was to do the will of God. We must remember, however, that a passion is more than a willingness. Listen to these statements that Jesus made. "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given me to do" (John 17:4). "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9). At the foundation of Christlikeness is a passion to fulfill the will of God.

The will of God for our lives is primarily revealed in Scripture. Leviticus 20:7-8 teaches us that there is an inseparable relationship between holiness and obedience to Scripture. God said, "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God, and you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you." Again in Leviticus 22:31-32 we read, "you shall keep My commandments, and do them: I am the LORD. And you shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel: I am the LORD who sanctifies you." In the very same breath that God commands us to be holy, He commands us to obey His word. Holiness is displayed by obedience to God's Word.⁴

A holy person is a person who is obedient to Scripture. You can't knowingly be violating the Word of God, and say, "I am holy." It's a contradiction of terms.

III. The Constraints of holiness. 1 Peter 1:13-14: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance."

³ For a scriptural description of how we should display Christlikeness, see 1 Peter 2:20-24, Ephesians 5:1-2, and Philippians 2:5-8.

⁴ Leviticus 19 is an explanation by various examples of how to translate holiness into every aspect of human behavior

Peter tells us that holy people are obedient people. Further, they are committed to stop being conformed to this world. Conformity to the world came as a result of the desires they sought to satisfy before they were saved. Holy people, says Peter, are “not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance.” Peter’s statement is similar to Paul’s statement in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Both Peter and Paul are warning against worldliness. Worldliness may be defined as any attitude, action, or behavior that does not conform to God’s Word.

Summary of basic concepts:

1. The basic idea of holiness or sanctification is “SEPARATION” – to be “set apart.”
2. Holiness begins the moment I am connected to the SOURCE of holiness—God himself.
3. Holiness involves a three-fold SEPARATION: separation to God as His possession; separation from that which is sinful or defiles me in God’s eyes, and separation from the common, the ordinary.
4. Holiness means I SHARE in the nature of God— I partake of the divine nature with the goal of becoming Christlike (2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:29).
5. Therefore, holiness defines an association with God, a life of separation, and a way of behaving—“be holy in all your behavior” (1 Pet. 1:15, 16).