

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord . . . Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”* Heb. 12:14; Lev. 11:45

## **HOLINESS OR WHOLENESS?**

by Craig Marlatt

Holiness! Now there’s a word that will get some attention in the right circles. Because of its controversial connotations today we hardly know what to do with this word ‘holiness’, let alone the concept that it conveys. And yet, “. . . *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.*” If you consider this to be a Bible truth, then the question of holiness becomes one of vital importance.

But what is holiness? Perhaps to best answer this question it would be profitable to first discuss what holiness is not: it is not the way you dress, or wear your hair. It is not what you do or do not eat or drink, neither is it to be found in any specific form of religious duty or service. It is not the way you talk, nor is it the company you keep. It is none of these things, and yet it encompasses all of these and more.

Actually the word ‘holiness’ in the original language of the New Testament, carries the same implication as sanctification does, which is “A state corresponding to the nature of God.” When holiness is seen in this light, it does away with the thought that it is primarily something external, accomplished in lifestyle or outward appearance. Since God has no ‘outward appearance’, so to speak, things corresponding to Him in nature cannot be externally obtained.

To begin with, it is imperative that we make a clear statement from New Testament doctrine: Holiness is a state of being or condition which can only be obtained through Jesus Christ, and He gives it to whomever He will by an act of Sovereign choice, based upon no deserving merit on the part of the recipient to whom it is given (2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:4-6; 2:8,9; 2 Pet. 1:3,4).

This clearly is the biblical position on the sanctifying work of Christ toward and upon the believer. It is imputed grace and stands as a sovereign work of God based upon the sacrificial death of his Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit as designated by the Father. It is a positional perspective, to be sure, but biblically correct as a basis for any other ongoing work that might proceed from the initial act of sanctification. Without question, this position is supported by the larger body of New Testament scripture, and though it does not necessarily hold current popularity among evangelicals, (especially in Pentecostal/charismatic circles), it is clearly supported by Scripture as being the true position on holiness.

The difficulty with understanding holiness, and realizing its benefits in a practical sense comes not in interpretation, but in delineation. When we properly present the differences between ‘imputed’ and ‘imparted’ sanctification, then we can approach practical holiness with realistic goals in sight.

To do so, we must first divide the Christian experience into two distinct and separate categories:

1. Regeneration
2. Daily Walk (Christian Life).

This distinction reduces many of the problems that automatically occur without this separation.

Although this may be a common pre-supposition to Theologians and Church leaders, I believe that many Christians have not viewed things from this perspective. From this position there are two clear statements that arise:

1. God alone is the author and finisher of my salvation and He has accomplished it without any participation on my part. Working through his Son Jesus Christ, He has made me “. . . *holy and without blame before him in love*” (Eph. 1:4). God the Father has imputed the Righteousness of his Son upon me and sees me perfect in every way as viewed in and through Jesus Christ. This is a positional statement and is as true today as it will ever be throughout eternity. “I am complete in him.”

2. The by-product of this *imputed* righteousness is a very real *imparted* grace which works in me on a moment-by-moment basis, conforming me into the image of that which I have already received by imputation. As I yield to this working of the Holy Spirit in me, I am participating in the work of Christ in my life. If I resist this grace, I may never realize, in this life, the full blessings and power that are available to me.

To put it more simply: salvation is a work of Divine Sovereignty alone, but the Christian walk is a work in which Divine Sovereignty and human responsibility work hand in hand. Salvation and sanctification are the basis upon which God has given man the opportunity and privilege of developing a personal relationship with Him. Without the blood of Christ applied to our lives, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, there can be no fellowship. Christ alone can remove the wall of partition that sin has placed between man and God.

But beyond the initial act of sanctification in regeneration is His imparted grace, which is the power of God to fulfil, in this life, that relationship which our heavenly Father has made possible for us in the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. Whether it is labeled as Sanctification, the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, the Baptism with Fire, the Spirit Filled Life, the fullness of the Spirit, etc. it is God’s desire for every Christian to experience this in his or her life. Yet it is different from the former in this way: that it is given to those who ‘ask’ (Lk. 11:10-13), and, “they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mt. 5:6). “If ye seek me, ye shall be found of me”, says the Lord.

Without a doubt, this experience will cause every area of your life to change. It will affect your appearance, your conversation, your goals, and your entire daily approach to life. It will impose itself upon everything you hold dear, but will do so by invitation, not for the sake of law.

Therefore holiness is not a result of that which we do or do not do in outward appearance, but rather that which occurs externally as a result of that which we have received internally from God. Then we are operating out of love and obedience to God. Not fear! Not bondage! Our surety is in Christ, and upon this solid Rock we live. And no one can take us out of his loving hand, while moment by moment He gives us power to experience life in the Supernatural realm where human ability fails. Looking forward to eternity in the heavenlies, but experiencing in this life, a foretaste of Glory Divine.