

# Holiness

GOD's HOLINESS is nowhere definitely defined in the Scriptures, yet many of their details teach it. As a whole they demonstrate it as the fact which ensures the ultimate attainment of God's purpose, and thus His holiness sustains His love and justice and grace, for it dispels any idea that He could fail to reach the intentions formulated in His heart. Sin's existence cannot thwart or disintegrate the triumph of God's love, for He is devoted entirely to the achievement of the goal He has purposed, and His ways, leading the universe to its destiny, manifest His holiness.

## WRONG DEFINITIONS

The general understanding which expresses God's holiness as His *purity*, or His *love*, or His *justice*, or His completeness of *moral excellence*, is far from correct. Such definitions cannot be accurate, since they are themselves actualities and merely change the terms used without adding anything to our discernment. At the same time there is a complete disregard of the fact that these words must express something which is distinct from holiness; they cannot belong to the same category, whatever association there may be amongst them. Nor, in viewing holiness in the saints, is the position different, for the cause of holiness is rarely discovered, and the *effects* and *accompaniments* are mistakenly given as its explanation.

## CURRENT USAGE NOT HELPFUL

Theological expositions form the basis of our dictionaries, and so we cannot receive assistance from them as to the significance of holiness. We will get the best help from consulting the dictionary, if we note the etymology of the word, and we hope to show that this is much more agreeable to Scripture than are theological dissertations. Etymology teaches us that the word holy comes from the old English *halig*; *hal* being equivalent to *whole*, and *-ig* to *-y*; *wholly* is doubtless the basic idea which we must amplify by our investigations in the Scriptures. The Authorized Version translates the Hebrew *qdsh* by *wholly* in one instance (Judges 17:3).

## NEGATIVE CONCERNING HOLY

It will assist our apprehension if we first discover how holiness should *not* be explained. In the Scriptures the common designation for a believer is saint, the same word in Greek as *holy*; that is, a *saint* is a *holy one*. Believers are so named eight times in Romans, six times in 1 Corinthians, five times in 2 Corinthians, nine times in Ephesians, three times in Philippians, four times in Colossians. This term is used regardless of any worthiness or purity in the person so called. A saint is holy because of being in touch with God, either by means of the ritual of the Hebrew Scriptures, or because of the facts of the evangel as given in Romans.

Because holiness *results* in the separation from sin, this result or effect has been taken as the cause, and so holiness in common usage has come to be regarded as having a moral significance. But many features and details fully preclude our accepting this definition.

## THE LORD JESUS WAS MADE HOLY

The verb *hallow* ought to convince us that holiness is a non-moral matter, for do we not read in John 10:36, "are you saying to Him Whom the Father hallows and dispatches into the world that 'You are blaspheming'?" This should satisfy us, for God surely did not purify the Lord Jesus, or separate Him from sin. His moral excellence was not increased by His being hallowed by God. The hallowing defined the special relationship which the Lord Jesus had to His God and Father; it made Him objectively holy. This He displayed subjectively when saying, John 17: 19: For their sakes I am hallowing Myself. In this He was not purifying Himself from sin. His spiritual purity and freedom from sin is thoroughly unquestionable. Holiness in the Lord Jesus was the relationship to God, given Him by the hallowing of His God. Such scriptures as "Christ is God's" and "the Head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 3:23, 11:3) express this relationship, which is holiness. His devotion to the will and work of God demonstrates His holy relationship to God. Israel disowned the holy One of God, despite the fact that He was hallowed by God for His mission to them.

## INANIMATE OBJECTS ARE HOLY

In keeping with the fact that a *person* is holy, who is set apart to God for His use, so also *things* are holy, which God requires for any part of the ritual which He gave to teach Israel. In fact, the verb *hallow* signifies to set apart or devote a person or thing to God. This dedicating gives the relationship which is termed holiness. There is nothing of change as to moral quality, for the Scriptures predicate holiness of things which can have no moral quality. A most notable feature is the command to hallow (A.V. prepare) the nations against Babylon (Jer. 51: 28). The destroyers of Babylon are said to be hallowed ones (Isa. 13:3), since they are given a relation to God as instruments of His indignation against that city.

## ISRAEL TAUGHT HOLINESS

Hundreds of passages speak of holiness, and Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers have as one of their functions to teach Israel the significance of holiness. We cannot but note that both persons and objects are stated to be holy, and in this we have an intimation of the real significance of the term holy, and consequently of holiness.

Jehovah claimed all the firstborn, both of man and beast; they were to be hallowed to Jehovah and passed over to His possession; they were His, without any regard to their personal purity. This is further confirmed when we consider that the tabernacle and all its furniture are described as being holy. It is quite obvious that objects have no moral qualities. Even the censers of sinning men became holy to Jehovah. The ground on which Moses stood was holy. The mount from which the law was delivered became holy. We read of holy garments, a holy crown, holy anointing oil, holy ointment, holy bread, holy vessels, a holy linen coat. All these are articles which, though without any vestige of moral quality, can be put into a relationship with God, and called holy.

[The Authorized Version renders *qdash*, HOLY, by *sodomite* (Deut. 23: 17, etc.) and *unclean* (Job 26: 14). For the feminine form *qdshe* it has *harlot* (Gen. 38: 21, etc.) and *whore* (Deut. 23: 17). In order to convey this to the English reader, the proposed CONCORDANT VERSION will have *hallowed harlot*, or *sodomite*. This should show that the most immoral may be "holy" in devotion to their god.]

It is a notable detail that in the book of Genesis, covering a period of two and a half millennia, the subject of holiness is hardly mentioned. The only reference in the book is to the seventh day (Gen. 2:3).

## HOLY DISTINGUISHED FROM ITS ACCOMPANIMENTS

The Scriptures discriminate other qualities which mark holy persons. Jesus Christ is "the holy and just One" (Acts 3:14); "the holy and true" (Unv. 6:10). Saints are to be "holy and flawless" (Eph. 1:4), "pure and holy" (Eph. 5:27) describes the incense (Ex. 30: 35). The law is holy, and its precepts are holy and just and good (Rom. 7:12). Consideration of these scriptures shows that the holy person may also be just and true, flawless and pure. Such characteristics, therefore, are not included in the word holy. They are not holiness, though they may be accompaniments of it.

## JEHOVAH IS THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL

When Israel received sufficient instructions in regard to holy persons and objects, then Jehovah declares He is their God and that He is holy. The assertion "I am holy" by Jehovah became the imperative "be ye holy" for Israel. If we carefully examine the record in Leviticus 11: 44, 45 we observe that "I am Jehovah your God" is the basis for the next clause which, in the Hebrew, is introduced by "also." Upon the fact that Jehovah is Israel's God rest the words "hallow yourselves also." To this is joined "be ye holy," the reason for which is "seeing that I am holy." Our understanding can only be that each party, Jehovah and Israel, are holy in the same sense. The details show that Jehovah's holiness consisted in His being their God, wholly devoted to them, and so Israel's holiness would be in their acknowledging Jehovah's claim to be the Possessor of Israel. God insistently requires His people to be holy, and this corresponds to the holiness which His people unflinchingly find in their God. Holiness in God or in man cannot be radically different.

## HOLINESS EXPRESSES A RELATIONSHIP

The relative basis of holiness should be readily discernible, when God says, "I am profaned among them." This is the very opposite of holy, and yet it should be thoroughly obvious that God was neither essentially nor intrinsically affected by the position which called forth the words "I am profaned." What the statement did

signify is, that God's relationship to Israel had been denied and rejected by their actions. As with God, so in regard to a holy place, it can be polluted and yet it remains holy.

Holiness was God's relationship to Israel. It was not a moral or spiritual quality. And this relationship, first taught to Israel, is something that concerns all of God's creatures, and will ultimately become evident to them, when they also will respond to God's holy relation to them. The universe will come to realize its relation to God, and gone will be the estrangement entailed by sin. With the passing of the eons, the necessity for teaching holiness will cease, for then God will be All in all, and His creatures will be established in the great fact that His holiness has been demonstrated, for they have been brought to its recognition. God's holiness will then be understood through the great truth that He is our Father; and holiness itself will be a past fact, viewed in the universal relationship of God as the Father of all.

#### **THE ULTIMATE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOLINESS**

During the eons, God's holiness has given stability to His purpose, showing that what was conceived in His love, could not be disintegrated by the entrance of sin, for behind all the seeming opposition and division in creation, the fact of God's holiness remained. When the Deity revealed Himself to Israel by the name Jehovah, then it was that His holiness reached down into their affair's to make them understand His relationship to them. To Israel God was making a particular application of His holiness, and by this sought to arouse their responding holiness. The world is confounded by Israel's permanence. Some marvel at it in a patronizing way, yet it is a demonstration of the holiness of their God.

The revelation to Israel was due to the way which God took in prosecuting His purpose, but in this economy, God is not the holy One of Israel, that is Jehovah. God is related to believers in the body of Christ in the same way in which He is related to the Christ Himself, viz., as God and Father, which names express all the devotion and close relation set forth to Israel by holiness. The holy One of Israel and Jehovah have been titles exclusive to Israel, and so have been connected with a stage on the way to the ultimate, when God will be truly known and realized as Father (Phil. 2:11, 1 Cor. 15:24).

#### **PRESENT MEANING FOR THE SAINTS**

Meanwhile holiness for the believers in this economy is divorced entirely from any connection with ritual. Christ is our holiness; in Him we have become enslaved to righteousness, which gives fruit *into* holiness (Rom. 6:18,22). Holiness should now be a definite subjective fact for us. It is displayed when, in the words of Romans 6:13, the saints present themselves to God as if alive from among the dead. This calls for our obedience and immediate devotion to God, and as the epistle unfolds the evangel, we come to see that our hallowing to God in Christ Jesus signifies that we have the spirit of sonship which cries "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Our holy relation to God exists in Christ and obligates us to live in accord with the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. This is holiness attained, giving - the vital relationship which accords with the term saints or holy ones, for we are in touch with God our Father, called and claimed by Him in Christ, our Lord.

Justice is love, protecting itself; mercy is love, treating leniently the guilty, but holiness is God, claiming His own, proving He is the Lord possessing heaven and earth in its entirety. For the saint, holiness is the response to God's claims in Christ Jesus.

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