ESSENTIALS OF HOLINESS

DAVID K. BERNARD

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by David K. Bernard

All Scripture quotations in this book are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise identified.

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Introduction

Holiness is an old-fashioned, irrelevant concept to most people today, even in Christendom. Yet God has always commanded His people to be holy; holiness is essential to biblical Christianity. True Christians have traditionally emphasized holiness, rejecting as unholy various aspects of worldly lifestyle. In recent years, however, many professing Christian groups have discarded much of this teaching.

In studying and developing biblical holiness it is important to address several key questions. What is holiness? What are important principles of holiness, and how are we to apply them practically in our lives? How can we be holy, and why should we? Where do standards of holiness come from? Are they biblical or man-made? Are they universal and unchanging or cultural and temporary? How can we maintain scriptural holiness while avoiding legalism and upholding Christian liberty?

1. The Call to Holiness

The Bible calls followers of Christ to a life of holiness, and it stresses the essentiality of holiness. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

The new birth is the initial experience of salvation, but

the work of salvation does not end there. There is also the continuing work of sanctification, a process of becoming progressively more Christ-like that begins at the new birth and leads to sinless perfection in the life to come. This work takes place as we submit daily to the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit (II Thessalonians 2:13).

Just as we must be born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5), so we must pursue holiness, or sanctification, in order to see the Lord. "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, NKJV). "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (NIV). The new birth will have no eternal value unless the born-again person continues to walk by faith and live after the new nature of the Spirit, allowing God to complete the process that began at the new birth.

Holiness is not an option: it is a command that we are to implement in all aspects of our lives. "But 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'" (I Peter 1:15-16, NKJV).

2. Definition of Holiness

God is holy; holiness is an essential aspect of His nature. With respect to Him, it means absolute purity and moral perfection. With respect to humans, holiness means conformity to the character and will of God. It means thinking as God thinks, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, and acting as Christ would act. It means having the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5).

The Old Testament concept of holiness was "separation from and dedication to."[1] For example, the Sabbath

was holy because it was separated from work, travel, and other mundane activities, and dedicated to rest. The Tabernacle vessels were holy because they were separated from all ordinary use and dedicated solely to sacred use.

God commanded His people to be holy (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7)—separated from all other peoples and dedicated to the worship of the one true God. The Levitical laws separated the Israelites from all other nations in diet, clothing, appearance, farming practices, Sabbath observance, sanitation, and morality. These laws taught a clear distinction between the clean and unclean, the holy and profane (Leviticus 11:47; Ezekiel 22:26). The doctrine of holiness made Old Testament Judaism unique among ancient religious, particularly in its concept of separation and in its linkage of morality with religion.

The ceremonial law foreshadowed greater spiritual truths, teaching spiritual principles by physical types (Galatians 3:24-25; Hebrews 10:1). The new covenant abolished ceremonial types, while retaining moral law and spiritual holiness (Colossians 2:16-17).

Building on the Old Testament concept of holiness, the New Testament teaches a corresponding twofold definition of moral holiness for God's people: (1) *separation* from sin and the world system and (2) *dedication* to God and His will. Just as a person forsakes all other romantic relationships, actual or potential, to enjoy the total commitment of a marriage relationship, so we renounce worldly living as part of our new life in Christ.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:1-2). "Wherefore come out from among them and be