

Sanctification (on becoming Holy).

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January 2019

Basics

This article covers:

- Basics: What it means to be called “Holy” ;
- Next generation: How today’s Christian can continue to be holy like those saints of old in the bible; and
- Your turn: Next steps for you to make holiness something to aim to.



Part 1: What does it mean to be holy?

The primary Old Testament word for *holiness* means ‘to cut or to separate.’ Fundamentally, *holiness* is a cutting off or separation from what is unclean, and a consecration to what is pure.”

By comparison in the New Testament the word for holy, *hagios*, is the same root word for *saint- and sanctified*. When Jesus told his apostle Peter “upon this rock I will build my church” the Greek word used to mean church - “ecclesia” denoted a people who were “set apart”.

The word Holy itself is first used in the bible in Exodus 3:5 ⁱⁱwhen it describes the place where Moses is standing. The bible explains thatⁱⁱⁱ:

“When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!” “Here I am!” Moses replied. “Do not come any closer,” the Lord warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.”

Why does God take Holiness that serious?

Here is a shocking story in the bible to help you understand.

God has just ordained Aaron and his four sons as priests. The turbans on their heads even bear the title: “Holy to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36-38). The story then continues in Leviticus 10:1-3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.’” So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.

Sobering isn’t it?

Part 2: And what is sanctification?

While we (born again Christians) are “*positionally*” holy (“set free from every sin” by the blood of Christ, Acts 13:39), we know that we still sin (1 John 1:10). That’s why the Bible also refers to sanctification as a practical experience of our separation unto God.

This process is aptly summarised as follows^{iv} being past, present and future.

- **Past:** In the past, God granted us (born again Christians) justification, a once-for-all, positional holiness in Christ.
- **Present:** Now, God guides us to maturity, a practical, progressive holiness.
- **Future:** In the future, God will give us glorification, a permanent, ultimate holiness.

These three phases of sanctification separate the believer from the penalty of sin ([justification](#)), the power of sin ([maturity](#)), and the presence of sin ([glorification](#)).

Holiness in the bible

When someone reads the bible in books like Genesis, Matthew or Luke, you will see a genealogy of names - many of which are difficult to pronounce and for many of them, except for their names, we know nothing of them - but God does, having divinely appointed each of them to maintain the chain that would lead to the Holy One anointed for his purpose.

From Adam, to righteous Noah who rescued mankind. From Noah to Abraham the father of faith who spared not Isaac his promised son but believing God would raise him and From David to Joseph, Mary’s husband, God maintained a chain of many generations, a Godly Line so he could give the world his Holy Son, Jesus the Christ, our redeemer.

All these various men and women of Holiness, they were the weirdos, the freaks, the “idiots”, zealots, the ones who were alone - in wildernesses, on roads, in new countries, in lonely gardens, in tempestuous seas. The ones who did not consider this world their home but looked to a heavenly city and so God was not ashamed to call them his children.

Moreover each of these people were remnants in their generation for God has always been a God of remnants, branches, the stone which builders reject, the God not of the religion peddling Pharisees and self-righteous but of publicans and the adulteresses, of The lepers and the Samaritans.

In each of these cases, it is safe to assume that as a general rule the fathers taught their sons and daughters to be holy - to pray, to worship, to read the scriptures, to call on God’s name so as to maintain the Godly line - the Holy line. The sons taught their sons and daughters and on and on the chain continued - Hence the father is not afraid to call God his God and the son and daughter likewise when his/her time has fully come also learns to call on the God of his/her father as his/her own.

If this how the men and women of old practiced holiness, how about in our generation?

Sanctification in our generation today.

Everyone who is a true Christian is an Heir with Christ and so bears the name of God, who is Holy. This means they bear his DNA and as such they must be Holy - as he is Holy.

A good tree bears good fruit and so the Spirit bears fruit in the children of God - who are Holy, saints.

Christian, when someone encounters you for the first time - what do they see? Do they see you set apart?

Light and darkness have no business together and so the children of the light and the children of the darkness have no business together - this is your calling.

Everyone who calls themselves a child of the light must therefore set themselves apart from all uncleanness which the sons of this world practice.

The one who is sanctified once he separates himself from the world (being in the world but not of the world) makes himself available to be used by God as a "vessel of honour".

The one who doesn't sanctify themselves will be used as well - but as a vessel of dishonour or for common use, a chain that is quickly skipped over, until the next Holy one.

No one who is "set apart" does the things of those past - how then would they be "set apart"? They would simply be "part of" the world.

Warning: If someone looking can't differentiate you from everyone else as easy as light is differentiated from darkness then take heed - it means you are likely to be lukewarm and for such, God Spits out.

What then must you do to be sanctified or Holy (set apart)?

1. You must love God more than the world - considering your treasure to be heavenly or else your heart will always be here for the heart follows where the treasure is kept.

Our generation is not called Holy because our treasure is here in the world - we have accumulated names for ourselves here, we have wealth here, we have friends in the world - is it a surprise then that we don't see ourselves as set apart?

2. You must dedicate yourself to seeking God and being with him in lonely places.

The bible shows that the more time Moses spent in God's presence, the closer he became like him, so much that as described in Exodus 34 when he came back to the Israelites from the mountain after 40 days his face shone - reflecting God's glory. He then had to hide his face behind a veil.

Holiness can only be found in the One who himself is Holy. You cannot necessarily expect to become more Holy by attending church camps or attending fellowship or even busying yourself with church administration. You need to do the more important thing - sit at the feet of the one who wraps himself in light as a garment. Only then can you start radiating with His holiness.

3. You must approach God with humility.

God, the source of Holiness hates the proud, but gives grace to they who humbly come to him – for in him we move and have our being for God is light and in him is no darkness. The one who approaches in humility - in awe, in fear - he will never turn away but will reveal to him deep secrets he never knew.

As the bible says in Isaiah 57: 15:

“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.””

4. You must be willing to be burnt up. Everyone who God considered righteous had to give up their life so they could take it up again.

Noah gave up his and his family’s lives to God, trusting that God would carry them in the ark even as perhaps fear gripped them for that one year plus when they were inside and the rains poured.

David gave up his life into the hand of God so he could be delivered from Goliath the Giant of Gath.

John the Baptist gave up his life and became less as the Lord became up more so that the Messiah could be revealed and give him life - the title of the greatest of the prophets of Old. Higher than Moses and Elijah and Abraham and David.

The life laid at God’s altar can be burnt up by the Holy Spirit who does the work, thus transforming you to be like Jesus and so a sweet smelling aroma to the Glory of God the Father who is praised forever and ever by the Seraphim who never stop crying: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty.”

5. We continually work at it until we are called to him.

The Christian life is one of sanctification until the end and so in some ways *sanctification* means—a “complete” or “ultimate” sanctification. This is the same as glorification. This glorified state will be our ultimate separation from sin - for “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

A Christian who is not becoming like the son of God - growing in Holiness will inevitably become like the son of the devil - spiralling into sin and sin when fully matured leads to death, even the second death which is reserved for devil and his angels and all who hate the blessed God who reigns forever and ever amen.

Hear this warning and blessing for those who seek the Holy God vs those who hate him.

“Therefore I will number you for the sword, And you shall all bow down to the slaughter; Because, when I called, you did not answer; When I spoke, you did not hear, But did evil before My eyes, And chose that in which I do not delight.” Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, My servants shall eat, But you shall be hungry; Behold, My servants shall drink, But you shall be thirsty; Behold, My servants shall rejoice, But you shall be ashamed; Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, But you shall cry for sorrow of heart, And wail for grief of spirit.”
Isaiah 65:12-14 NKJV”

Your turn.

1. Which of the 5 examples above of how to practice holiness do you struggle with? How can the bible examples help you?
2. Who will you have as an accountability partner, someone to walk with you to help you on your sanctification journey?
3. What is God telling you to do next to become more like him - Holy?

Notes

ⁱ Matthew 16: 18

ⁱⁱ <https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/june-2007/what-is-holiness/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 3:4-5 NLT

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/sanctification.html>

^v Isaiah 57:15 NKJV <http://bible.com/114/isa.57.15.nkjv>

^{vi} <https://www.bible.com/114/isa.65.12-14.nkjv>