

Principled Living (Part Six): Becoming Holy

Dare To Be Different!

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Most of us are by nature conformists. We tend to want to blend into the crowd and not stand out in any way—to appear not to be different.

Most cultures, but especially the Japanese, teach conformity to their children. This is done early, and often, and it lasts with them throughout their entire lives. People want to blend in. They do not want to seem to be the "sore thumb" in all of it.

Those who stray from this 'conformity' are considered weirdoes, or black sheep, or some other such derogatory term, and they are regarded somewhat suspiciously by "normal" people. People tend to avoid them.

Children tend to be the ones who are most likely to feel the need to conform. They want to be like everybody else. They do not want to stand out. They want the same clothes, same shoes, hairstyle, toys, etc. They want to be seen, as they grow older, with the "in crowd."

They want to go to the same hip movies, parties, and generally they want to be carbon copies of everyone else, especially those considered to be "cool."

Adults, if they had grown up this way, feel a similar peer pressure. But the stakes are far higher once you become an adult. It is not just clothes, and parties, but now it is cars like BMW, or Rolls Royce should they be able to reach that high. They want the Lamborghini. They want it as good as they can get.

It is homes. But, not just any old \$100,000 home will do. They have to have the \$500,000, or the million-dollar home.

It is memberships in the right club. It is certain types of investments. It is salaries. It is their resume. It is their benefit package. It is their severance

package should they be let go. It is their vacation destination. It does not matter. Add into this the toys, and gizmos, and the accoutrements. Remember the old bumper sticker? "Whoever has the most toys in the end, wins!"

Not running with the "in" crowd, though, does not seem as devastating to an adult like it might to a teen, but there is this subconscious desire to fit in with society. It is there. We used to call it, "Staying in Style." We may call it, "not wanting to fall behind," or "keeping up with the Joneses." But, whatever you call it, it is the same urge not to stand out as different.

True Christians have another ingredient to add to the mix, and that is the calling that God has given to us. God's invitation to His family really complicates matters in terms of fitting into society. Once you are a true Christian, you do not fit in at all.

John 15:19 says that He has called us out of this world, which is diametrically opposed to the cultural teaching of wanting to stay in the world, and to be like the world.

And, the purpose of His invitation is in the end, to make us different—totally different. And if we accept, we agree to spend the rest of our lives as the proverbial sore thumb of this world's hand. God sets us apart from others in the world, and as we learn we understand that He commands us to widen that gap.

You know the scriptures. Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." That is very simple. Do not be like all the other guys, but be different. And, it happens in your head—your mind is transformed into something different.

James says it also in James 4:4. He starts out very strong, "Adulterers, and adulteresses, do you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world, makes himself an enemy of God." And, we can flip that one over and say, "Whoever makes himself a friend of God, makes himself an enemy of the world." There is no middle ground. You are one or the other.

The Apostle John also had something to say about this. I John 2:15, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." These are very bold statements by these Apostles. And then, to cap it all off, our Savior Jesus Christ in Revelation 18:4 says, "Come out of her [Babylon] my people lest you share in her sins, and therefore receive of her plagues."

Now, in the Church of the Great God, we have become even more proverbially sore. We have an additional difference that now sets us apart from others in the greater churches of God. And it is this day we are keeping—Pentecost—in those years when the Passover falls on the weekly Sabbath. We keep Pentecost one week later than the rest of the church of God. We are not only different from the world on this day, but we are different from our brethren.

How does that make you feel? Do you feel isolated? Odd? Lonely? Or, do you feel as though you have grown?

Among other things, Pentecost is about being different. I do not know if you have thought of Pentecost in this light or not. It is not a bad different. It is a good different. This derives from the fact that Pentecost is the Feast of Harvest, otherwise known as the Feast of Firstfruits. And Firstfruits are different. They are special. .

They stand out from the rest of the harvest. They are not like the rest of the crowd. You could call them the cream of the crop—believe it or not—a cut above the ordinary. And from the husbandman's evaluation, the firstfruits are of a higher quality. They stand out from the crowd, and the reason is that they are holy. Maybe not very holy, but they are holy just the same. And that is a major Christian living principle.

This will be the sixth in this series. I have entitled it, "Principled Living, Part 6, Becoming Holy."

Please turn back with me to Exodus 23, and we will be reading verses 14 and 16. I want to read a couple of scriptures that have to do with this day of Pentecost. I am just going to be pulling a few details out from these scriptures.

Exodus 23:14 Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year:

Drop down to verse 16 (after he mentions the Feast of Unleavened Bread)...

Exodus 23:16 ...and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field...

So, we have the Feast of Harvest which he describes, then, as the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field.

Leviticus 23:15-16 And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed....

I read this because this is what makes us different on this particular day because we began our count exactly as it says to do it here, and we did not change it because this year [2005] tends to be a little different in that the Sabbath during the days of Unleavened Bread fell on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. And so we started the count from the day after that Sabbath, just like any other year that we count Pentecost. We count Pentecost from that same Sabbath—the weekly Sabbath.

And even though it coincides with the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, it still fits the pattern that God has set. So, we do it that way in these years as well. There is no call, biblically, for counting it from the Passover, which is the previous weekly Sabbath day, because the Passover is not a Sabbath during the days of Unleavened Bread. It is just that simple.

Leviticus 23:16-21 . . . Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath [that brings us to today]; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave *loaves* of two-tenths *of an ephah*. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the LORD . And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be *as a* burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.

Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits *as* a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

There is no call in the Bible to stop doing this just because Jesus came, and went, doing all that He did. This is something that the Israel of God must keep doing forever in all your habitations throughout your generations. It seems quite clear to me.

Let us just read Numbers 28:26 for the instructions on the offerings. I just want this first verse in the section of the Feast of Weeks.

Numbers 28:26 Also on the Day of the Firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.

(Now I am going to be speaking mostly out of Leviticus 23, so you may want to turn back there.)

So, what we have found in these three passages is that Pentecost is the Feast of Harvest—of the firstfruits of one's labor. It is also called the Feast of Weeks, because of the counting. And, unlike any other Holy Day, on this day there was a special offering made, which we found there in Leviticus 23: Two Wave Loaves baked with leaven were offered to God, and they were specifically described as the firstfruits to the Lord. We have understood these wave-loaves to represent the church of God. And, since there is the number 2, it seems to indicate the church before Christ, and the church after Christ—two distinct groups.

Off the top of my head... I believe that these loaves were pretty big. We might think of our typical loaf that we buy today from the grocery, maybe 5 inches by 12 or 15 inches long. These loaves were quite a bit larger. They could not get any wider than three handbreadths, which might be 12 inches,

if a handbreadth is 4 inches. And, no more than nine handbreadths long. So, they were quite big, like Moses carrying the 10 commandments down the mount, evidently.

And, on the four corners of the loaves they made horns that stuck out from the loaf which were about 4 inches long. So, this might give you a visual idea of how large they were. And they had tufts or horns on the four corners. Now, they were thick as well, because they were baked with leaven. They were not unleavened loaves.

Now, if we understand the symbolism, here, it becomes fairly plain. Leaven is the symbol of the corruption of sin. So, if the loaves represent two groups of people—the Old Testament church, and the New Testament church—then, these loaves represent people who have had to deal with sin. And in the end, they have overcome it, too.

But, they are made (verse 17) of fine flour. This adds more symbolism. They were not just made with any old flour, but they were made with flour that has been ground, and re-ground until it was like powder. What does that tell you? That means that these people who are represented by these loaves have been through an awful lot—they have been ground, and sifted, and ground some more, and only the finest gets through the sieve at the end to be put into the loaf. That says something about our lives and our stiff necks. We are being ground. And I am sure that we will come through just fine.

But these things happen to us all. Little trials, medium-sized trials, and big trials—a life of trials. It is all flour being ground finer, and finer, so that it can, in the end, be suitable as an offering to God. That is the whole purpose.

I am not finished yet. What happens when you bake bread? You have to put it on top of a fire. It has to be heated up. So, not only is this flour ground and sifted, etc., and water, oil, salt, incense, and leavening added, it is put into a pan, allowed to rise, and then put on the fire. This is before it is even offered! Because it has to rise. It has to be prepared.

Is that not what we say that this church of God is all about? Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God? Part of the preparation is fire, not that we do it. God is in charge of that, but it is all part of the process.

These loaves are waved with the burnt offering (but not put on the altar, see Leviticus 2:12), which is symbolic of a complete sacrifice in service to God. When a sacrifice of this type is burned on the altar, it is completely consumed. Nothing comes back from it. It is completely consumed by God.

Now, there is an ambiguity in the text of Leviticus 23:20, right at the end, "They shall be holy to the LORD for the priests," which I found to be very interesting. The ambiguity is in, what does "they" represent? Is it to the two wave loaves? Is it to the animal sacrifices? Is it all of them? Or, is it only the particular sacrifices that were just mentioned? That is why it is a bit ambiguous.

This means that, when an offering is "holy to the LORD for the priests," only part of the offering was put upon the altar as a representation of the whole offering, and the remainder was given to the priest for his consumption. It was not totally consumed, but that which went on the altar was. This also brings up an interesting idea. If "holy to the LORD for the priests" includes the two wave loaves that were offered, it means that at least part of the loaves was given to the priests, perhaps the high priest, for consumption. Does that spark any ideas?

The high priest is a symbol of Christ. Who is the church of God given to for His use? We heard that yesterday ("[The Mystery of the Church](#)" by Martin Collins). The head of the church of God is Jesus Christ. And, the church of God, the Bride, is given to Him for His use, and He directs what the church of God does. I thought that was interesting that some part of the wave loaves is used by the priest.

Perhaps. I am not all that well versed in all the ritual of the altar, here, for this particular offering. But, it is an interesting thing to think about, if indeed that is what happened.

Be that as it may, we should not get too far from the fact that the firstfruits are different. We have a sacrifice here on this particular day that represents us, because we are different. We are the firstfruits to the Lord. As it says a couple of times in these instructions regarding Pentecost.

In nature, the firstfruits are not just what ripens first. Although, they are indeed what often ripens first. But they do not have to be just that.

They are also the highest quality of fruit, vegetable, or whatever, that is produced. One could say that the strength of the plant goes into producing these firstfruits. Usually the first are if not the largest, they are best, meaning the juiciest, tastiest, most nutritious, because while this plant is growing and producing, it is putting all of its efforts and energies into those first ones made. It does not know, and neither do we, what the future may bring. So, it puts all of its energies into producing what it can first, because who knows if there will be more time for it to make more. And so, God has put into the plant that it should put out its best fruit first.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary says, "...in the New Testament, firstfruits are emblematic of abundance, and excellence, and a sample of the full harvest." And, that is exactly what we are!

It is exactly why God has made us different; why God has done what He has done with Israel, and with the church of God. Firstfruits, then, are different in that they are original (first); they are different because they are of the highest quality, according to our Savior; and because they are representative of the ultimate harvest—just a few that represent the millions, and billions that will eventually be harvested by the Husbandman.

But, He only needs a few right now to show the world what is going to come.

We can also add to these things that the firstfruits, in a Christian sense, are dedicated to God just like the firstfruits of Israel's harvests were dedicated to God, and His use. He could use them in whatever way that He wanted. And also as we saw in the ritual, He refines them, sifts them, and bakes them by fire to produce fitting sweet savor sacrifices for Himself. A lot is wrapped up in this idea of firstfruits, which we are.

Now, Jeremiah 2:1-3 provides a fitting transition into the real subject of my sermon here. This is just after Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet, and it is one of the first things that He told him:

Jeremiah 2:1-2 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown.

In a way, He is saying, "I recall fondly those days of your first love." It is very much like what He said to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:1-7.

Jeremiah 2:3 Israel was holiness to the LORD, The firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them," says the LORD."

This is how He feels about His firstfruits. And in this case, He is speaking specifically about physical Israel. But, there is a spiritual element in here that comes out very clearly. This is (in verse 3) a partial statement describing Israel. They were holiness to God. And its parallel is (there is a parallel construction here) that Israel was holiness unto the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase—meaning firstfruits of His increase describes what He means by holiness (in this case).

They were holy to Him because they were the firstfruits of His increase. They were different. They were set apart because they were the first ones that He decided to come into contact with, and to use to produce a people for Himself. So, just as in Leviticus 23 the firstfruits were holy to God, and dedicated to Him—set apart for His use.

And so we cannot get too far away from the intersection of the concept of holiness, and firstfruits. They run together. They are intimately related. Israel was different due to God's choosing them first. And that means that they were set apart, consecrated, devoted to Him, dedicated to Him—they were put into a different category by Him, and that, just in itself, made them holy. Just as there was a laver before the altar, and it was different from any other laver—it was holy—because it had be dedicated to the use of the altar for God of the priests for the rituals.

There was a candelabra inside. It could be copied hundreds or thousands of times by other people, but that one candelabra was different because it was dedicated to God's use in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

There was only one holy candelabra, because God had set it apart for His use. And there are only one set of firstfruits because God had chosen them for His use, and thus, they are special, they are very different from the rest of the people of this world. They are holy.

Now Paul, later on in the New Testament, goes to great lengths in such places as Romans 9 through 11, Galatians 3, and other places, to show that God has let Israel who was once holy go its own way. They are not totally cast off, but right now, they are just doing what they do. God has shifted His attention.

He has replaced the people of Israel by calling out individuals into His church of God, and they can be from any nation in any part of the world. Anyone that He specifically chooses; and we know from John 6:44 that no one can come unto Him unless He specifically goes out and calls a person. He taps them on the shoulder and says, "*I want you to be different. This is the Way, walk ye in it.*"

So, in Galatians 6:16 Paul names the church of God

Galatians 6:16 ... and upon the Israel of God...

...as the Israel of God. There was an Israel physically, and it is still around, but they have been replaced by the Israel of God—a higher calling than just being born an Israelite; now, they are God's Israelites.

Romans 9:6 ... For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,...

Meaning that there are whole nations of Israelites—millions of people—but not all of Israel is really Israel any more, not the way God sees it right now.

He has chosen a few specific Israelites, sure, but He has also brought into His Israel Gentiles of every nation. They are now a part of His Israel—the Israel of God.

Galatians 3:29 And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So now, it does not matter whether your birth is Israelite, it just matters whether you are spiritually regenerated as part of Christ's brothers and sisters. If you believe in Christ, and you have gone through baptism, and received God's Holy Spirit, then you are part of the Israel of God—a very select group of people—an election by grace.

How many of you consider yourself to be fairly literary, approaching the Bible in a literary way, James is a master at saying something in just a few words. And, I think that this verse is just amazing in how much he packs into this one verse:

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

When you start pulling apart what James says here, it is really amazing. First of all, we know that James appropriates the title, Firstfruits, for the church of God. It used to be Israel was the firstfruits of His increase, but James, having the Spirit of God says, "*No. We, the church of God, are the firstfruits of His increase now.*"

Notice what he includes here just in these few words. I did not count them out. There must be about only 20 words here. He says, he includes our election by God's personal choice, He says, "Of His own will..." You can refer back to John 6:44 again.

He includes God's involvement in our growth and maturity. "He brought us forth..." He did not do it by an agent. He was the One who brought us forth. And, the imagery of "brought us forth" harkens back to being begotten again, or born again.

He also mentions here the means of our nourishment. It says, "by the Word of Truth." This implies God's Holy Spirit because as in I Corinthians 2, it

says that we can have the truth up to the tips of our hair but we would not understand it except God would give us His Spirit to give us the understanding of these spiritual things.

And, in the last phrase there, He mentions our potential—"firstfruits of His creatures." Kind after kind. We are not just any old creature. We are going to be His creatures—Sons of God. So, in a nutshell, He is saying that God's choice, work, gifts, and goals make us very different. We are firstfruits. We are the first ones. We are the excellent ones. We are representative of all those others who will come later.

Now, if we would go through the remainder of James 1, we would see how he expands upon this, and he shows us what we need to do to reach the potential that he mentions there at the end of verse 18. He does this in a very succinct way like he normally does. It is like he is saying, "Because we are God's firstfruits, because we are so different, this is what we need to be doing..." And then, he mentions things like, listening—it is very important for the firstfruits to listen. What did the Voice say to Peter, James, and John when Christ was transfigured? "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him." Listen to Him. It is for your own good.

Then he says to avoid anger. "*The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God,*" and that is what we are here to do. Then he tells us to get rid of sin. "*Lay aside all filthiness,*" etc. He says, "*Start practicing God's way of life.*" It is not just the hearers only, but the doers of the Word! And then he says, "*Watch your tongue,*" because in much speaking there is no lack of sin. Be very careful of what you say.

He tells us to serve others in verse 27, and then he says, "*Do not conform to the world.*" Keep yourself unspotted from the world. Remain different. Do not blend in. Be transformed instead by doing all these things mentioned. You are firstfruits. Be different. Dare to be different.

Now, this is confirmed some more in Revelation 14, because we have another glimpse of the firstfruits. James gave us a glimpse of the present state of the firstfruits, but Jesus through John in the book of Revelation gives us the future state of the firstfruits. And, He tells us how they got to be that way.

Now, if you will notice, as we read through this, the whole passage trumpets the fact that the firstfruits are different. I am going to read it through, and then I will show you all the ways that the prose here helps us to understand just how different the firstfruits are.

Revelation 14:1-5 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb [which backs up my thoughts back there in Leviticus 23]. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Now, did you catch them? Did you catch all of the exceptions, all the differences? All the things that they alone could do, or did? I have listed six of them here.

The first: **They have the Father's name written on their foreheads.**

Evidently, no one else does. That is something that only the firstfruits get. Back in Revelation 3 in the message to the Philadelphia Era it says,

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

These letters to the seven churches of God are to the firstfruits of God. And whether this applies only to the Philadelphians, or whether to all those who

overcome... If I understand this correctly, chapter 14 seems to imply God's name is written on the foreheads of all the firstfruits, not just the Philadelphians. Those that overcome get the name written on their foreheads. Those who decide and dare to be different from the rest of the world, and overcome the world, and overcome all the sins, and whatnot that they have.

The second: **These firstfruits sing a song that no one else can learn.**

They have a special type of joy, you might say, that only they can appreciate, and participate in. That is what happens when you sing songs; normally you are pretty happy. They are also praising God, and we can look at it from that perspective as well. Only they have that certain perspective that really understands how much God did for them.

All the other people who will ever be part of the harvest of the earth, will not have the opportunity to face the things that the firstfruits faced during their calling and conversion. All of the other ones will be able to be converted during a time in which it will be "relatively easy" compared to the times of the firstfruits had to endure.

So, the firstfruits can sing this song with a certain amount of feeling and appreciation that no one else really can. Sure, the people of the later harvest will have a feeling of gratitude to God, but the firstfruits will have that feeling heightened to the Nth degree because they really understand how much God really did for them.

The third: **These firstfruits are the only ones that are undefiled by spiritual adultery, unlike the rest of humanity.**

The time setting here seems to be right after Christ returns. And so, there will be the firstfruits who are changed, who have been cleared of any kind of spiritual adultery, and will have themselves rejected it. And all the rest of humanity will still be in their sins, and still be in that idolatrous state.

The fourth: **They constantly follow the Lamb as His personal companion.**

They are the Bride. The Bride usually does not go far from her Husband. They are a couple now. They are One. And the firstfruits have the opportunity to remain with Christ for the remainder of eternity, and be His Companion and Partner in all that He sets His hand to do. That is why the firstfruits are so special. They are special to Him, and they are going to be special to the whole world because they will be part of His entourage, part of His house—that never needs to go anywhere, but we will, obviously, and will always be welcomed back as part of that special group.

The fifth: **At this time, they are the only ones redeemed from the earth—from humanity.**

"These were redeemed from among men." That has much to do with the other one, being undefiled, but since Christ mentioned is separately, I would too.

The sixth: **They are without fault.**

They are entirely justified before God. He sees no blemish in them. This leads us back to Leviticus 23 again because the sacrifices that were given to God along side the wave offering were to be without blemish. And it also shows us there in Leviticus 23 that at this present time they have leaven in them. That is a blemish there, but God accepts them, because they are given along with the lambs, rams, and bullock, etc.

At this point (in Revelation 14), after all is said and done, they are now, themselves, as unblemished as the lamb, through God's grace, His forgiveness, His mercy. And, because they have cooperated with God.

Now to sum this up, these firstfruits are holy, not just set apart, but by this time they are also on the other side of holiness, pure, unblemished, clean, and perfect.

Up to now, we have been speaking mostly about the idea of holiness as just being set apart by God's choice, calling, and election. But by the time we get here in Revelation 14, they have holiness in that they are pure. They are clean and unblemished.

So, what we have here is that their being set apart by God in His original calling and election, combined with their dedication to God's purpose and their cooperation, they together produced this spiritual perfection to the point where God can say, "*They are Virgins, and they are without fault.*"

I want you to see this in Deuteronomy 26. He intimates this all the way back here. There are other places, but I think this one is very interesting in the way that it is put. We will read from verse 16 to the end of the chapter.

The same idea we saw in Revelation where they were not only called, but also in their cooperation they became holy, is found right here:

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 This day the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that *you* should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken."

Did you notice, especially in those last two verses, that He has proclaimed them to be holy, and then He says, "...that you may *be* a holy people..."

I think that the intimation here is very clear. He was showing them that there is a holiness in the calling, but there is a greater holiness at the end of the matter. And how does that happen? He tells you right here. Be careful to observe His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments with all your heart and with all your soul."

So what do we see here? We see first that He called them, and proclaimed them holy. Secondly, they proclaimed the Lord to be their God, saying, "*OK God. We accept this calling. And now we are going to cooperate with You.*" And what was "cooperating with Him?" This is the third thing: "Keep the Commandments!"

And then the fourth thing is that God would then reward them by making them different—it says that, "He will set you high above..." not just different, but a cut above—far different, far higher quality—above all nations which He has made in praise, in name, and in honor.

And the most important thing is that He would make them truly holy, not just by calling, but by sanctification—a process of becoming righteous as He is righteous, by having them put on the image of Jesus Christ by getting them to the point where He is satisfied that they can become God. That is true holiness—one is proclaimed, the other is developed.

Thus, there are two steps to holiness. One is through God's choice, and the other is through our cooperative effort with Him in maturing in Godly, righteous character. In other words, there is our calling, and there is sanctification—justification...Sanctification. First God makes us holy by decree—legally—and then, He works with us to make us holy truly, and in reality.

Now, let us see this. I want you to see something in a real-life situation. Do you remember what Numbers 13 and 14 are about? They are about Israel's rebellion at the edge of the promised land about two years into their trek. They have sent in the spies, and they had come back, and they had given an evil report. But, there were two who gave a good report, Joshua, and Caleb. God said, "*Moses, get out of the way. I am going to destroy these people!*" Because, they had listened to the 10 evil spies.

So, Moses intercedes for the people. He gets down on his knees and asks God to spare the people. And God responds:

Numbers 14:20-23 Then the Lord said, I have pardoned according to your word. But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with

the glory of the LORD—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.

God says, "*Ok. I am not going to wipe them out today. But, you can be certain that by the time that we cross over Jordan, they will all be dead and gone. I have had enough of their rebellion these ten times, and they have not listened to me. I have had it*" This is a Parent who has just been totally exasperated, and lays down the law, and lowers the boom. Look at the next verse:

Numbers 14:24 But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.

The ten spies were the world. The two spies who gave a good report were the firstfruits at this particular occasion. Joshua and Caleb will be in the kingdom of God. They are some of the heroes of faith. Did you notice? It was because Caleb did two things: First, he had a different spirit—call it a different attitude, call it God working with him. Maybe God had given him His Holy Spirit. It is hard to say just from the word here. But, he had a whole different approach to God than all the other Israelites, except Joshua.

And then, it says, the other thing that set him apart was that he followed God—and the adverb here is important. He followed God *fully*, and he had a different approach to God. He had set his mind to do what God said, and he did it. He was not worried about the other people, whatever report that they gave, he wished that they did not do that, but he was going to tell the truth. And God rewarded him with entrance into the promised land.

He was daring to be different from those millions of other Israelites in order to secure the inheritance that was promised unto him. So, he said that he was going to have a different attitude about things, and he was going to follow God's instruction to the letter. And he did.

Of course, we know that the promised land is a type of the kingdom of God.

Let us go to the New Testament, to II Thessalonians. This is aimed directly at us. Because what is chapter 2 about? It is about the scattering at the time of the end. It is about the great apostasy. And, it says that the end will not come until this first happens—the great falling away.

Satan will be out there with all power, signs, and lying wonders to get us to conform—to make us stop being different, to give up, and to go back to him (Satan) and his way.

Paul says here:

II Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, [It sounds like an echo of Numbers 14: 24.] ...to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Caleb's case, it was for obtaining the promised inheritance of Israel.

II Thessalonians 2:15-17 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

This is very similar to James' summary back in James 1:18-27. Paul summarizes things for us; things we need to know as firstfruits of God, whom God has called, and is making us holy through sanctification.

He hits all the highlights here that we need to understand. We have been called by God Himself, and He loves us dearly. "Beloved by the Lord." And He has had His eyes on us for a very long time. And He is willing to do whatever it takes, give whatever gifts that are needed to get us to the point

where we are finished products—ripe firstfruits. His purpose is to make us holy, as it says here, "By the work of His Spirit, and our belief in the truth" (verse 13 at the end).

He has chosen us for salvation through sanctification—that is, through the process of being made different, made holy, made pure—by the work of the Spirit within us, and our belief—our cooperation—in the truth.

This, He says (verse 14) is what He has called us to. This is the aim of the Gospel that is preached. The aim is to bring us all to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, and to His glory.

So, what must we do? That is the part which comes after the "therefore brethren..." He says, (1) Stand fast. We may not be able to make much headway, because Satan is a strong opponent. But we can at least stand fast where we are, and not let him chip away at us in any way. He says, "*Do not give up any ground to him. Resist Satan, this world, and your human nature. Do not give up. Do not give in.*" And as Paul says we will see if after all these things we still stand.

He says, (2) Hold the traditions. Believe and observe the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. Believe and observe the truth of God's Word.

He says, (3) Submit unto God and Christ. Let them work to produce good words and works in us. That is what it says. Christ, and God have loved us; they have given us consolation, meaning encouragement; they do this by giving us hope through grace, through the gifts that they give us. And so, if we allow them to work in us, our hearts will be comforted, and we will be established—strengthened—in all the things that we say and do. But, they need our cooperation to get those things done; to get those fruits—produce those firstfruits.

Let us conclude in Hebrews 12, verse 14. Paul writes:

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

This is what I am driving at. Pursue holiness. If you do not have it, you will not be there. If you are not different from the rest of this world, you will not be in God's family, or His kingdom. He does not want a bunch of conformists of this world, or of the things of this world. He wants people who stand up out of the world.

So, we have been called to run counter to everything in this world. While everyone else struggles to conform to what is typically human, Christians must actively pursue—that is the verb here in verse 14—being different, or we will not achieve God's purpose. Becoming Holy—being sanctified—is essential to entering God's Kingdom as His very special firstfruits.

Will you dare to be different?

Are you willing to do what it takes to reach the goal—the reward—that is worth every effort that we could possibly think of.

So now, to "Following Christ," "Conquering Sin," "Growing in Righteousness," "Being Living Sacrifices," and "Witnessing of God," we have now added another principle of living, "Becoming Holy."