

The Importance of Holiness

Today, many people in the Christian world do not think that holiness is necessary or is required when living for God. There are various reasons for this thinking. Some people tend to think of holiness as old fashioned. Some think holiness is a part of the Old Testament Law and that, since we are under grace, it does not apply today. Others think that that holiness is just being legalistic. Some may have had a bad church experience, so they reject holiness. Regardless of all the reasons that we may come up with concerning holiness, in the end the only thing that really matters is: what does the Bible say about holiness?

Holiness Needed to See God

The book of Hebrews makes this statement in Hebrews 12:14-15:

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail the grace of God...”

This verse, if taken at face value, indicates that a person needs to live holy if they want to go to heaven (to see the Lord). The word “follow” means to “earnestly endeavor,” so that means we have to put effort into living holy. It also says, “Looking diligently lest any man fail the grace of God”. This says that even though we live in a dispensation of grace, we can still fail to obtain what God’s grace offers if we don’t live holy.

Some people would reply saying that the book of Hebrews was only for Jewish Christians. First, even though the book of Hebrews was written to Christians with a Jewish background, the principle of living holy still applies to the church. Second, since holiness was a normal part of Jewish living, Paul would not need to remind Jews to be holy. This would also indicate that Hebrews 12:14 applied to the church at large and not just Jewish Christians.

Be Holy For I Am Holy

In the first epistle of Peter, he also tells the church to be holy because God is Holy in 1 Peter 1:15-16.

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

Peter is reaching back into the Old Testament and quoting from the book of Leviticus verses 11:45 and 19:2. Peter is not writing to Jewish Christians but Gentile Christians. When we look at the introduction to 1st Peter it says,

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout...” (1 Pet 1:1)

“Strangers” is a term for the Gentiles. These Gentiles were living in the area of the world which today would be Eastern Turkey. The use of these verses written to Gentiles indicates that the principle of holiness still applied to the New Testament church, even though it was part of the Law. The term “conversation” means “manner of living” which includes clothing, speech, action and attitude.

I Peter 1:14 also helps clarify what Peter means by being holy. He says, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts (desires) in your ignorance." In other words, these Gentiles used to dress, live, think and act according to their own desires, but now they are to live differently, they are to live holy. They are to be changed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. There should be a change in a Christians' life which distinguishes them from the world.

Peter is also saying that, before we were saved, what molded or fashioned us was our desires. Our desires before we were saved were mainly driven by our sinful nature. Now that we are saved, we need to obey God's Spirit and not our desires. Since God's Spirit is the Holy Spirit, it should influence us to live holy.

Basic Concept of Holiness

The basic concept or idea of holiness is separation from the world and sin unto God. The separation from the world that the Bible is conveying is not a physical separation but a separation of purpose, thinking, attitude and lifestyle. When a person becomes filled with the Holy Ghost (Spirit), they should not want to act the same way they did before they were saved, because they now have the Spirit of God in them. The Bible tells us that certain types of relationships or agreements should be avoided by Christians.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God..." (II Corinthians 6:14-16)

The Bible plainly states that believers should be separate from the world.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:17-18)

Notice it does not say that God will bring us out but that we need to come out. This reveals that holiness will take effort on a believers' part. To live holy, a person will have to change their thinking and way of living. II Corinthians 6:17-18 also shows us that, if we want to be children of our heavenly Father, we must come out. Finally II Corinthians 7:1 shows us that holiness involves both our body and spirit.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (II Corinthians 7:1)

Paul stated in Romans 12:1 that we should present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. Paul goes on to say that we should not be conformed to this world (Rom 12:2). Living for God is a holy calling.

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace..." (II Tim 1:9)

Does Holiness Only Refer to Our Heart?

Some people like to state that it doesn't matter what the outward appearance looks like because God knows the heart. Some will even use this scripture found in I Samuel 16:7.

"...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

This verse actually shows us that the outside is important. A Christian is not trying to witness to God but to other human beings. Other human beings can't see our heart, but they can see the way a person dresses and acts. The way a person dresses, acts, and speaks actually reflects our heart. If we want to show others that the Lord really has saved us and delivered us from sin, then our outer appearance shouldn't be modeled after people or ideas that are not Christ-like.

Our appearance says a lot about what we value and who we are. The Bible tells us that we should avoid the appearance of evil.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil." (I Thessalonians 5:22)

The Bible also indicates that our attire should reflect modesty.

"...That women adorn themselves in modest apparel..." (I Timothy 2:9)

The word "modest" means well arranged, decorous, of good behavior, orderly. The Greek word for "modest" is derived from the Greek word "kosmos" which refers to the world and the orderly arrangement of the world. The word "kosmos" can also mean "an apt and harmonious arrangement or order." In other words the Bible is saying that our clothing should be in harmony with the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) which dwells in us.

Questions to Ask Ourselves

- Does my outward appearance convey holiness, godliness and modesty or does it convey another attitude?
- When someone sees me from a distance would my outward appearance cause them to associate me with the world?
- Does my outward appearance imitate the styles of dressing made fashionable by ungodly people or those who are caught up in the world?
- Would my clothing or appearance make me feel uncomfortable if Jesus was standing there with me?

- Do I think that holy dressing and appearance is just for Sunday or church?
- Does my appearance or clothing convey pride, sensuality, materialism or holiness and wholesomeness?
- Does my dress associate me with rebellious attitudes or attitudes that are not godly?

The answers to the above questions are important because the Bible says we must live holy.

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“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (II Corinthians 6:17-18)