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WHAT IS TRUE HOLINESS

Much is said about holiness in some religious circles. But, what is it? Do you know? The Bible has a lot to say about holiness, but few people understand. Read this article to find out.

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Holiness is important to God and should be to us, because without it we will never see God (Heb. 12:14). But what is holiness? Before we can even understand the Bible teaching on the subject, we must understand what the word means. Some who talk a lot about it don't know!

The word "holiness" is a noun which means "state or character of being holy." Holy is an adjective which means "belonging to, derived from, or associated with a divine power" and also "set apart to the service of God."

In other words, that which is holy belongs to God, or conversely, whatever belongs to God is holy. It is "sanctified," because sanctified means "set apart for a holy use or purpose".

God can make an article or person holy when he claims it or becomes its owner. An individual can devote or give an object to God. The ownership then passes to God, and since He is now the owner, it becomes holy.

Why does God make an object or a person holy? He makes it holy so that He may use that object or that person to achieve His divine purpose, fulfill a specific function, or accomplish some task.

Whatever is holy is not only set apart by or for God, but God will not use it if it does not meet the standards He sets. He selects the "tools" that can fulfill His purpose, and if they do not, He will select another tool instead.

God expects the very best for His use. This should be expected as He is the Great God of all the universe. The sacrifices commanded under the Levitical Priesthood were to be perfect and without blemish. Only the highest quality materials were to be used in the tabernacle and in the temple. Anything dedicated or devoted to God was to be the best. When anyone gave inferior gifts to God, it was not acceptable (see Mal. 1:13,14). All of these physical things were typical of spiritual perfection that would come later.

That spiritual perfection should be evident when you realize that one of the synonyms for holiness is "godliness."

Hebrew and Greek words

Those previous quotes from various dictionaries relate to English words. We also need to

understand a little about the Hebrew and Greek words from which these were translated.

In the Hebrew the word for holiness is *qodesh* which is taken from a similar but different primitive root word *qadash*. These two Hebrew words are translated holiness, holy, and sanctify (or sanctified). These English and Hebrew words mean essentially the same thing, except some are used differently in the sentence and therefore are translated differently. In the New Testament Greek we discover a similar situation. The Greek word is *hagios* with its variations.

How can people become holy?

"...You shall be holy; for I am holy," said God to ancient Israel. (Lev. 11:44). Not only did God expect that of those people, but He expects it of Christians, too, as Peter said. "Be holy, for I am holy" (I Peter 1:16). That implies more than just being set apart. In the context of both chapters in Leviticus and Peter, it includes living in a special way that is different from the rest of the world.

To live that special way we need to be and can be partakers of some of God's holiness (Heb. 12:10). Christians should be more like Him from day to day, and then in the first resurrection be literally like Him (I Jn. 3:2).

God has selected His servants and called them to come out of this world, to be different, and be separate from the rest of the world.

Jesus said, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:14-16).

The Christian must live in this present evil world, but his life must be different from the rest of the world. He must come out from any of this world's ways that are sinful or evil. He should come out from the religious and spiritual "Babylon" that engulfs this whole world (Rev. 18:4).

Christians should be different, because as Paul said, you are bought with a price" (I Cor. 6:20). That price, Christ's sacrifice, makes it possible for us to be forgiven of our past sins and to receive the Holy Spirit. But, "...If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9).

When you receive the Holy Spirit, you become a holy temple. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (I Cor. 3:16).

We receive the Holy Spirit by repenting (Acts 2:38), and then, we must be baptized. After that the Holy Spirit is promised. But, what does it mean to repent? It means be sorry for past sins, ask forgiveness, turn around, determine to quit sinning. When we quit sinning, we begin to obey God's spiritual law, as sin is the transgression of that law (I Jn. 3:4). God will only give His Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

Is love only needed?

Some believe that all they need is love, and that is true if you understand what that kind of love

is, what it means and how it is expressed. It is much more than affection or fondness for others. Love is even more than worship of God. Christ said that many worshipped Him in vain, teaching and following the commandments of men rather than God's commandments. (See Mark 7:6-7.)

John also emphasized that point. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments..." (I Jn 5:3). The right kind of love includes obedience to God and His commands.

When God calls us we are 100 percent carnal, unconverted and imperfect. But God wants perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48 KJV). "...Walk before me and be thou perfect [blameless]" (Gen. 17:1 KJV).

God wants a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). He wants change from imperfection to perfection. He wants us to begin to change, to live holy lives, to live a life of holiness. That means a new way of living, which is more and more the kind of life that He lived. We need to walk holiness, not just talk holiness.

"...Hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9), Jesus said. To hallow is to make holy. The word "hallow" is actually from the same root Greek word *hagios* translated "holy" elsewhere. We should hallow God's name in all our thoughts, words and deeds.

Living a life of holiness and coming out of this world and being separate from the world involves every aspect of life. Paul said: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you'" (II Cor. 6:14-17).

The Holy and the Profane!

Today there are many devout people who do not see any difference or make any distinction between what is profane and what is holy. One example that some have either not seen, or rejected, is found in I Timothy 4:5. In this place we see that there are foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving because they are sanctified by God's word for that purpose.

The word sanctified comes from the same root Greek word *hagios* which as we have seen, is elsewhere translated holy and sacred. What food has God's word sanctified, or set apart for human consumption? The answer is found in Leviticus chapter eleven where God told Moses the difference between the holy and profane, the acceptable and the abominable. It is in that context that God said, "You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (verse 45).

This distinction that was made personally by God has never been changed, contrary to what some people try to read into the New Testament scriptures. A detailed account of what the Bible teaches on this subject is included in the article, *Is All Animal Flesh Good for Food?*

Making such a distinction and living by it is another of the many ways that God's true servants are different from most of the rest of the world.

Instead of being immersed in the lawless and sinful ways of the world, we should put our thoughts on better things. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

From the way some people live, this verse would read: "Whatever things are false, whatever things are ignoble, whatever things are unjust, whatever things are impure, whatever things are unlovely, whatever things are of a bad report, if there is any evil, and if there is anything despicable--meditate on these things."

This scripture should clarify the fact that we should avoid filling our minds with "entertainment" that is sinful, lustful, illicit sexually, that is filled with murder, hatred or evil.

Some may say, "It's only a song, it's only make believe, it's only a movie." On the contrary, Paul said we should be "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor.10:5).

Live a life of holiness!

Christians need to be DIFFERENT and say NO to sin, to evil and to wrong things. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 7:1).

We will continue to be holy, as long as we live a life of holiness. That is the way of obedience and conformity with God's ways and spiritual laws.

Here are some examples of what was holy in the past, but is no longer today, because of failure to measure up to God's standards.

Ancient Israel was a chosen and holy nation, but they rebelled against God and His laws, turning to idolatry and sin. God cut them off, and they are not now His chosen and holy people. Instead God has called out His church, which is a holy nation.

The Levites were holy, but they failed in what God assigned them to do, so they are no longer holy and have been replaced by the priesthood of Melchizedek.

The temple was holy, but Israel and Judah polluted it by their sins and wickedness, so it was destroyed. It is no longer in existence. It has now been replaced by a new and holy spiritual temple, which is the church.

There are other biblical examples of what was holy in the past and is still holy today.

The tithe was and is still holy to God (Lev. 27:32, Mal. 3:8-12). It belongs to Him, and He has never made it un-holy.

The weekly sabbath (Lev. 23:2,3; Mark 2:28; Acts 17:2) was and is still holy to God. Will we remember and keep it holy, or forget what Almighty God commanded forever. It is holy time, and

we should keep it that way.

There are many other scriptures that relate to true holiness that are not included here for lack of space. To live a life of holiness, one must continue to learn from the scriptures about the nature and way of our Great God. As we learn, we must change to those better ways of God.

From all these scriptures it should be plain that holiness is not a sentiment or a feeling "in your heart." It is not following the religious traditions of men.

To walk in holiness, a person must first be called of God, or set apart from the world. He must then repent, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Following this he must be obedient to the commandments and ways of Almighty God. Then he begins to fulfill the holy use and purpose for that calling.

What is a saint?

The Bible mentions saints many times, but there are many misconceptions about what saints are. Do you know what a saint is? The Bible nowhere says or even implies that it is a good religious person who died many years ago. It is not a person who has a halo around his head, or God's word would have said so!

A saint is a person who is holy to God. It is a person who is sanctified or set apart by God and lives a life of holiness. In the New Testament the Greek word for saint is the same word that is also translated "holy." In the Old Testament it is sometimes the same word, or a derivative of the same word.

God's servants are "called *to be* saints" (Rom.1:7). Notice that the words *to be* are in italics. This means that the words were added by the translators. They were already saints! Saints are sanctified (I Cor. 1:2), but not yet perfect as they still need to be perfected (Eph. 4:12 KJV).

Saints are described by the Apostle John in Revelation 14:12. "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Reward of the saints

The saints have been set apart for God's holy use and purpose. We had better be fulfilling that purpose. If we do, we will meet Christ in the air at His second coming (I Thess. 4:17) and then return with Him to the earth (Zech. 14:5), at which time the saints will possess God's Kingdom, under Christ, so that they may rule all of the nations on this earth (Dan. 7:18,22 Rev. 5:10).

That is the glorious future that awaits the saint who truly walks in holiness; who is truly sanctified and made holy.

It should now be evident that there is a lot more to holiness than most people realize, including those who may talk a lot about it.

Don't have a counterfeit "holiness." Have the real thing. Give your life to God as a living sacrifice, HOLY and acceptable to Him, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:1,2).