

Uncrossable

I was a goner. All it took was one look and WHAM-O; yep, when I first met my wife, I was instantly attracted to her (we won't get into what she first thought about me.) And it was a unique attraction. She wasn't (and isn't) just pretty – she seemed to me to be glowing, radiant in beauty. Her voice was like a song and her eyes like deep mysterious pools. She danced as she walked. Forty-five minutes later, I asked her to marry me. That was 30 years ago.

And what does that have to do with holiness? A LOT. Hang with me now – you'll see what I mean.

Holiness is from the Hebrew word pronounced 'qadash' and it means *to be separate, set apart and sacred*. Importantly, it is derived from the word meaning *to be or to make clean*. Thus, it is far more than simply a separateness; it points to a quality or essence of being that is absolutely without imperfection, without the slightest hint of impurity. But this definition is a mere shadow of the reality and a fuzzy one at best.

Let's search the scriptures to better understand it.

"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy." (Rev 15:4) God alone is holy in and of Himself. Seventy people, places or items are declared in the Bible to be holy. But, anyone or anything in scripture that is declared truthfully to be so derives that attribute solely because of a relationship with God Almighty.

Scripture clearly portrays that although there is a 'binary' status with holiness (either someone or something is or isn't – see Lev 10:10 as an example), there are also 'degrees' of holiness. This is pictured quite clearly in the design of the tabernacle and later, the temple.

While in the wilderness, the congregation of Israel camped outside the tabernacle. Within the outer court area of the tabernacle, came those seeking to worship. Within this court, was the Holy Place in which the priests alone ministered. Then, within the Holy Place was the Holy of Holies into which the High Priest alone could enter and that only once per year. So as you can see, there is portrayed in its design a greater and greater association with holiness moving from the camp to the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place (i.e. the presence of God). At this point though, the holiness 'curve' takes an asymptotic turn and shoots right off the graph so to speak. Let me explain...

Occasionally, we find double-declarations in the original languages for emphasis such as "peace, peace" (Isa 26:3) or "grace, grace" (Zech 4:7) or "Truly, truly" (John 1:51, 3:5, 5:24) but there is only one triple-declaration in all of scripture – "Holy, holy, holy" (see Isa 6:3 and Rev 4:8). God's holiness isn't just perfect; it's in a class by itself.

And so, conceptually or pictorially, within the congregation of believers (the camp) is found the holy place of worship (the court) within which is found the even more holy place of ministry to God (the Holy Place)

within which is found the intimate place of one on one fellowship (the Holy of Holies) with the only One who is Holy, Holy, Holy.

"God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, but His holiness he cannot even imagine." (A.W. Tozer)

This fundamental point must be accepted and underscored – God alone is holy. Nothing, no one, no place is holy apart from its connection to God's presence, His Spirit. If you don't hold to that, your understanding of holiness will be superstitious and misled.

Now, here's a stunning and breath-taking truth: God, contrary to what Satan suggested in the Garden of Eden, WANTS you to be a partaker of His holiness (1 Pet 1:15,16). This does NOT imply hair-buns or black hats. I'm not knocking those expressions – you simply cannot equate them with the divine holiness.

When you catch your breath, consider how significant this is – God wants you to share in the characteristic which mesmerizes the highest of His created beings. *"The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"* (Rev 4:8)

You see, God calls His people a holy people and a holy nation. (See

Deut 7:6, Ex 19:6) and this serves at least three great purposes:

1. To testify to the world
 2. To bless and protect us individually
 3. Most importantly, to bless God
- First, set apart and clean from the world, we are to be a visual display of what our Lord and His heavenly home are like in character. Thus, when the church is indistinguishable from the world, it is failing. When we are consumed with self-gratification, we only betray the gospel no matter what T-shirts we wear, which church we attend or ministries we pursue.

Now, being distinguishable from the world doesn't necessarily mean being 'weird' (though the only man in the Bible apart from Christ who is specifically named as holy was clothed in camel's hair and ate bugs – John the Baptist). Holiness may seem strange to the world of the spiritually blind, but it's not because of our trying to appear outrageous. I was recently told by a pastor in France that a wide spread perception of the evangelical church there is as a bunch of 'crazies looking for a comet to be beamed up to' – that's clearly a misrepresentation, and it's certainly not the distinguish-ability of holiness.

But the world, when it sees true holiness, is utterly convicted and reacts by either accepting or rejecting it.

Second, in partaking of God's holiness, we remain 'salty'. That is, the continual work of His Spirit in separating us and cleansing our hearts creates an inward condition that is suited to spiritual growth like a weed-free garden; in addition, it

frustrates and 'de-fuses' the attempts of the enemies of our souls (the devil, the fallen world and our own sin nature) to seduce, intimidate or otherwise extinguish our distinguish-ability.

Third, it just amazes me that God would actually enjoy my fellowship (hey, you don't need to agree with me so quickly!) But He does! Yours too! He wants us to see Him and know Him as He is, but it's not a casual deal. The Bible tells us to "*Pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*" (Heb 12:14) That word "pursue" is actually a very aggressive word meaning to chase down in an almost violent manner, to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing.

You see, if it was solely a matter of being saved and thus being holy, we would have no command to chase it. However, in partaking of His holiness to greater and greater degrees, the Lord becomes more 'visible' to us and in us and thus more impressive.

As with the tabernacle illustration, the closer we progress from the camp toward the One who is Holy, Holy, Holy – the more intimate our fellowship with Him will be. When the temple veil before the holy of holies was torn apart from top to bottom at the end of Christ's crucifixion, God was saying that the way into His presence is now open – the entire way – all because of Jesus. He WANTS you in His presence!

So, practically, how does this happen? What is this pursuit, this swift running after holiness? Is it the result of how intense you appear spiritually or some secret 'deeper

truths' or the result of going to the right conferences? NO.

By accepting the gracious gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, you become one of God's children – adopted into His family and therefore, by association with the only One who is holy, you are a partaker of His holiness. However, there is this issue of pursuit. It's not an issue of salvation, no addition whatsoever to the finished work of the cross. It is, rather, a matter of response – "*Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.*" (Hos 6:3)

A careful word-study reveals that of the 669 mentions of the word 'holy' or 'holiness' by the 40 men used by the Holy Spirit to pen the scriptures, nearly two thirds of the mentions come from just five of the 40. Five of these guys seem to be really 'into' the Lord's holiness – Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, John and Paul. Why?

Each of these men witnessed the awesome glory of the Lord (see Ex 34, Isa 6, Ez 1, Rev 1, Acts 9). They had personal encounters with our Holy God and it clearly impacted their appreciation of the holy. Based upon their testimonies, it's obvious that once you've witnessed it, true holiness is simply not something you can be 'casual' about. As you draw nearer to the Lord, pursuit of personal holiness becomes a priority along with your appreciation of the divine.

Yet personal holiness does not and will not come from works – we must not confuse holy conduct with holiness itself. The latter results in the former and not the other way around. Peter wrote, "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.*" (1 Pet 1:15,16)

Unfortunately, we can miss that this word "be" as in "be holy" is actually "become". It is a puncticular action without regard for beginning or ending – we are to become holy in our conduct. How's that work? – Four ways:

First, "*When we put our focus on this world, it is hard not to be conformed to the world. We can still fall prey to the lust that enslaved us while we were ignorant of the devil's deception. We need to look ahead toward the grace that is being stored up for us. If our hope is in this life, we will be disappointed. I do believe that God wants to bless us, but that is not my hope. I don't know when or how God will bless me, so if my hope is in the blessing, I will be disappointed when God doesn't fulfill my expectations. My hope is in the fact that anything I lack in this life is grace stored up for me in the life to come. It is better to lack here because God will right every wrong and fulfill every shortfall if my faith endures until the end. If my hope is in the world – even if I am using the promises of God as my foundation, I will not be satisfied. God's promises are not for us to bind God, but for God to teach us to trust Him.*"

"*When my hope is in heaven and in the coming revelation of Jesus Christ, I will be drawn into the holiness of God. My focus is on Him and reaching the finish line. Those who hope in the world will hope in His delay and neglect their call to holiness.*" (Eddie Snipes)

Second, in Exodus 29:36, we have a wonderful illustration of

holiness as we find the Lord giving instruction regarding the altar of sacrifice. In this passage, there are two actions specified. The first is a cleansing which comes from the blood. That is, the altar was made clean or 'righteous' by the blood of atonement. Next, the Lord says to anoint it in order to make it holy. Recall that anointing is done with oil and is always a picture of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Here we see then an important lesson – righteous standing is the result of the blood while holiness is due to the anointing of the 'oil' or Spirit of God.

Upon receiving salvation, accepting the atonement of Christ's indescribably precious blood shed on Calvary, we are covered by His righteousness, and because we receive at the same time the indwelling of His Spirit, we are made holy – that's why the Bible calls those who are saved saints or holy – same words in the original languages for both. Paul put it this way, "*...God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*" (2 Thes 2:13)

Upon being saved, we are sanctified or made holy by the Spirit taking up residence in our hearts and as a consequence, our conduct or manner of life is to become holy. The out-working of the Spirit's influence in our lives should be more and more evident.

Third, Romans 12:1,2 says, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be*

transformed by the renewing of your mind..." Paul picks up on the illustration of the altar of sacrifice and tells us, "...present your bodies a living sacrifice..." one that is holy and clearly different from the deathly avarice of the world.

Yes, this living sacrifice is holy and it has nada, nothing, to do with somberness, monasticism or self mastication. As with salvation, personal holiness is a responsive choice on our part. God initiates, and we get to participate, but fundamentally, it is always Him at work in us by His Spirit.

The question becomes – how deep are you going to go? Just how much control are you really giving Him? – not just with the 'biggies' like 'should I take that new job?' or 'help me get through this trial.' But will you surrender each thought, word and deed?

Fourth, go ahead and read Ezekiel 47:1-12. Most scholars consider this passage as pertaining to the millennial period yet among other things, it speaks of the sanctifying work of God's Spirit.

This mighty, life-giving river is a miracle in and of itself. It starts as a small rivulet flowing from south of the altar of sacrifice and without any tributaries becomes a deep uncrossable river. The altar points to the shed blood of Christ and thus His gift of salvation – righteous standing before God. But the stream, the flowing water (literally living waters) speaks of the Holy Spirit. It's a small rivulet to start with and typifies the deposit of God's Spirit made in our hearts upon salvation.

But, Ezekiel is led down this rivulet's path a thousand cubits and

is escorted across it. It's larger now, and the water comes up to his ankles. In like manner, as we follow the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, we are led to 'walk the talk' – ankle deep so to speak. The Holy Spirit begins to change us and our walk is refreshed in His living waters.

Next, the prophet is led another 1000 cubits further downstream and again crosses it. Here, it is knee deep which speaks of humble worship and prayer. As we grow in the Lord, sincere worship and communication with Him become increasingly refreshing, cleansing and Spirit-led activities.

After this, Ezekiel is brought another 1000 cubits and again across the river which is now up to his waist. The mid-section of the body was always considered by the ancients as the seat of the soul, the inner man. As such, this pictures the disciple's life as progressing with the Lord to the point that he/she is surrendering the thoughts and intents of the heart to the Holy Spirit. As David prayed "*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord...*" (Psa 19:14)

Finally, he is brought another 1000 cubits and being led into the river, he finds it uncrossable – over his head. Here, he is purely 'in the flow' -- submerged. His guide brings him back to shore where he now finds the banks filled with fruit-bearing trees. The river heals and brings life wherever it flows.

At some point, full surrender, absolute emersion in the living waters is going to happen in the life of every true disciple of Christ – maybe here in this life, but absolutely in heaven. The living

water gets deeper and deeper to the point where its current is uncrossable and that is the point we see its life-giving force. Partaking of God's holiness gets to be more and more of a 'current' in the life of the sincere follower of the Son of Man. Every action, every word, every thought fully submitted to its 'flow' is life-giving and healing. You don't cross it anymore; you can only go with it.

"What are the qualifications of those who learn to experience Christ in the Holy of Holies? Those who are unafraid to let Him display His awesome resurrection power before their very eyes. Those who can shake off the grave clothes of the former life and enjoy the freedom of the resurrection. Those who are not satisfied with the seen things of this world. Those who are willing to have all earthly perspectives stripped away and to allow God to renew their minds to a fresh capacity for understanding. And those who are willing to fellowship in His suffering. Yes, as hard as it may be to accept, if you stop short of a willingness to fellowship in His sufferings, you stop short of the indescribable experience of His Holy of Holies." (Beth Moore)

Yes, it's a CHASE -- "*Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters,*" says the Lord Almighty. *Therefore, having these promises, beloved let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting*

holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor 6:17 – 7:1)

Perfecting holiness literally means to finish it, to complete it. But notice the "let us...". In other words, it's voluntary. It's a matter of how 'deep and far' you'll go in 'river.'

In conclusion, what does this holiness look like any way? The Bible uses just one word to describe the indescribable – we roughly translate it "beautiful" (Psa 29:2, 96:9) It can also mean pleasant, lovely or delightful. What you may never have considered is that our Holy, Holy, Holy God is thus indescribably beautiful, pleasant, lovely, delightful. Absolutely nothing compares, nothing even approaches. His holiness is a beauty that fills eternity with awe, that makes the highest sinless angels blush, that makes life...life.

And as we draw near to Him, this holiness is measured unto us and the result is just beautiful.

So you see, when I first met my dear wife, the work of God's Spirit is what I saw – and I knew it immediately. Likewise with holiness, when you see it in someone's life, you know it and there's nothing more beautiful.