

THE NATURE OF HOLINESS

By Dr. John Wesley Slider

Based on the writings of Rev. Benjamin Titus Roberts

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without Holiness no one will see the Lord.” – Hebrews 12.14 (NIV)

The Bible has much to say about Holiness. This verse from Hebrews says two things. We are to be holy, and we cannot see or know God without Holiness.

Holiness is an attribute of God: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” – Revelation 4:8 (NIV)

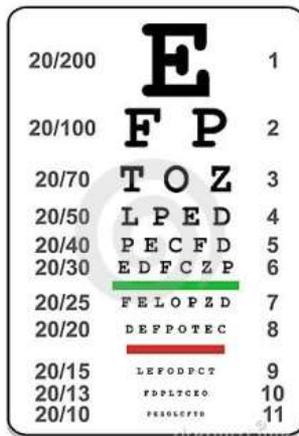
We are to worship the Holiness of God: “Worship the Lord in the splendor of His Holiness. – Psalm 29:2 (NIV).

There are many things that are convenient and useful; but Holiness alone is indispensable to

abundant and eternal life both in this world and in the world to come.

It is important, then, that we understand the nature of Holiness. If we want to hit a mark we must know where to aim.

Last Sunday some of us were having a conversation about dominant eyes – actually called ocular dominance.



Ocular dominance is also called eye preference or eyed-ness. It is the tendency to prefer visual input from one eye over the other. It is somewhat analogous to being right-handed or left-handed; however, the side of the dominant

eye and the dominant hand do not always match. There is thus no direct analogy between "handed-ness" and "eyed-ness" as lateral phenomena.

I am a member of a minority group. I am left eyed (about one-third of persons are).

The Marine Corps made me shoot right-eyed (since I am right-handed and that is how the rifles are designed), even though I am left-eyed and can see the target better with my left eye.

If I shoot right-handed and left-eyed I will never hit the target.



To hit the target I need to know how to aim. I already know where to aim and why to aim.

When it comes to Holiness – holy living – I know where to aim. I aim at Christ. I follow Christ.

I also know why to aim at a holy life. I aim at a holy life because without Holiness no one will see or know God – have a personal, intimate, and loving relationship with God. Only with that kind of relationship with God through Jesus Christ may I live abundantly, eternally, true, full, and holy.

How do I aim? How do I live a holy life? I first need to understand the nature of Holiness.

It may seem that we can all agree as to what is the nature of Holiness. As we dig down, though, we can see that there is a wide diversity of opinion as to the nature of Holiness.

As we try to describe the nature of Holiness – to understand what Holiness is – we realize how imperfect language can be and how words often fail to express ideas to others.

Look at Holiness—take it as we see it in the life of Jesus Christ and in the lives of holy persons. Well-meaning persons can misunderstand Holiness – the nature of a holy life.



For example, the Bible says that In God’s sight, Job was a holy person. In the Book of Job God says, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” — Job 1:8 (NIV).

But when the world comes down hard on Job and his good and happy life disappears, his friends come to give him comfort. In doing so, his friends labor to convince Job that he was a wicked man – not holy. One friend, Eliphaz, says

to Job, “As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.”—Job 4:8 (NIV). Eliphaz says if your life is not filled with good things then you are getting what an evil person – an unholy person – deserves.

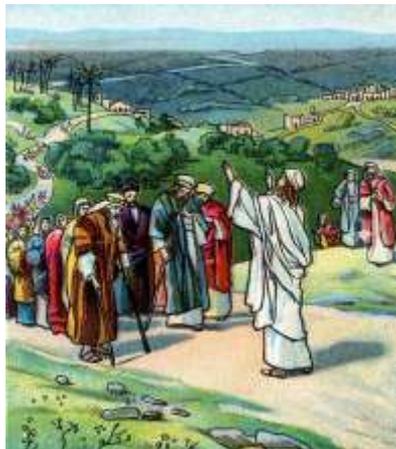
Another friend, Bildad, takes up the accusation and reminds Job, “Can papyrus grow tall where there is no marsh? Can reeds thrive without water? While still growing and uncut, they wither more quickly than grass. Such is the destiny of all who forget God; so perishes the hope of the godless.” — Job 8:13 (NIV).

A third friend, Zophar, asks Job, “Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated? Will your idle talk reduce others to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock? You say to God, ‘My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.’ Oh, how I wish that God

would speak, that He would open his lips against you” — Job 11:3 (NIV).

Finally even the fourth friend, Elihu, exclaims, “Is there anyone like Job, who drinks scorn like water? He keeps company with evildoers; he associates with the wicked.” — Job 34:7-8.

The friends of Job had a strong opinion about him because of all the bad things that happened to him. They expressed their opinions to Job himself – no matter how much Job protested his innocence, and no matter what God said.

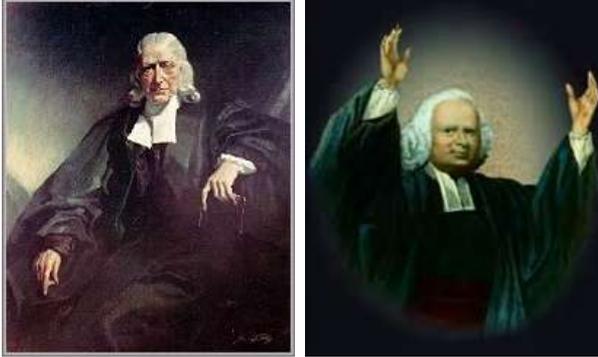


Jesus showed Holiness in its most perfect form. In His life, His conversation with others, in His attitude toward others, and in all He did, Jesus was Holiness personified. He gave the most unmistakable proofs of love to all. Yet even His holy life was misunderstood. The popular conclusion about Him is found in what Jesus himself tells us his critics were saying: "... they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' [Then Jesus observes:] But wisdom is proved right by her deeds." — Matthew 11:19 (NIV).

Jesus told his disciples that we must not expect to be appreciated any more than He was. "It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called the devil, how much more the members of his household!" — Matthew 10:25 (NIV).

From Jesus' day down to the present, Holiness in the disciples of Christ has been recognized by

only a few, even of those who call themselves Christians.



John Wesley taught and exemplified in his life the doctrine of Holiness. George Whitefield was devoted to proclaiming and living Holiness.



Yet during those days a clergyman in the Church of England, Sydney Smith said: “They (Wesley and Whitefield) were men of considerable talent; they observed the common decorum of life; they

did not run naked into the streets or pretend to the prophetic character; and, therefore, they were not committed to Newgate Prison. They preached with great energy to weak people, who first stared, then listened, then believed; then felt the inward feeling of grace, and became as foolish as their teachers could possibly wish them to be—in short, folly ran its ancient course.... The great and permanent cause ... of Methodism (Holiness) ... has given birth to fanaticism and mingling human errors with the fundamental truths of religion.”



Today, Holiness is considered a side show, a distraction at best, and a target of ridicule. A spirit of Holiness that is in its heart humble, is equated to a “holier-than-thou” attitude. This

contemporary response to Holiness only shows that Holiness is not recognized when seen. It is misunderstood.

The Bible declares, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” — 2 Timothy 3:12-13 (NIV).



Persecution varies from generation to generation – taking the form at times of death on a cross or at other times a subtle scoff or raised eyebrow or a jeering attitude. But you will notice, however, that the persons who persecute others never give the Holiness of their victims as a reason for the persecution.

Early Christians were called atheists. Others who are persecuted are called fanatics, obstinate, disloyal, impostors, or heretics. Many times those who persecute others profess to be true believers with a zeal for God and Holiness. So Holiness is misunderstood as false religion.

Holiness is also misunderstood by giving it a false standard. This false standard is that a holy person cannot make a mistake in judgement, or knowledge, or comprehension. In other words, Holiness is understood as infallibility – never making a mistake.

And further, this false standard is raised even higher, if possible, by saying that if one mistake is made, then a holy person is discredited and proven never to have been holy at all.

With that false standard of Holiness – no mistakes ever – then who can doubt that Holiness is declared to be impossible. No one could possibly attain it. The perfections of God

are presented as our standard, and then we are told that we cannot attain it.



Allow me an imperfect illustration. I consider myself to be a safe and courteous driver – a good driver – in spite of what some members of the congregation would say. Allow me to make the claim that I am a good driver.

I was sitting at a stoplight in front of our residence. I was the first in my lane. I had some things on my mind that I was pondering as I sat there. Cars coming from the opposite direction were making left turns in front of me.

Suddenly in the midst of my thoughts I perceived that my light had turned green, so I accelerated and moved forward through the intersection.

Horns began to sound. I quickly glanced upward and saw that the light I thought had changed, had not!

Now the cause of the error in all of that was my incorrect perception ... not my intent, not my attitude toward others, not any self-centeredness. Okay, I told you it was an imperfect illustration. But do you get what I am trying to say?



Holiness is not perfection in all things. Holiness is a life lived before God and toward others. Holiness is the outward expression of your intimate, personal, and loving relationship with God.

Holiness comes from God within our relationship with God. Our Holiness is not dependent on our attainment or our effort. Holiness comes from God.

God is a Being of infinite power. He is dependent upon none. All power is derived from Him.

God is also a Being of infinite Holiness. This includes all moral perfections.

“Who ... is like you, Lord? Who is like you—majestic in Holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” — Exodus 15:11 (NIV).

“There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides [Him]; there is no Rock like our God.” — 1 Samuel 2:2 (NIV).

“The Lord is righteous in all His ways and faithful in all He does.” — Psalm 145:17 (NIV)

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” — Isaiah 6:3 (NIV)

This is the God we worship.

Holiness in us is derived. It is not original, nor inborn. It is the image of God's Holiness. It resembles His Holiness, though it falls infinitely short of it.



A glass of water taken from the ocean possesses the same chemical properties as the ocean, though it has not the beauty, or grandeur, or power of the ocean.

Your Holiness is the same as the Holiness of God. It is God's Holiness in you. It is the same perfection in love; the same hatred of sin; the same sincerity, truth, justice, goodness, and fullness.

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being

corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and Holiness.” — Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV).



“What then,” asks John Wesley, “is Holiness?... It first, through the energy of God, worketh love to God and all mankind; and by this love, every holy and heavenly temper—in particular lowliness, meekness, gentleness, temperance, and long-suffering. It is ... keeping the commandments of God; particularly this: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.’ In a word, Holiness is having the mind that was in Christ, and walking as Christ walked.”

Self-control or self-discipline is not Holiness. True Holiness does not stress doing holy things; but calls us to being holy first.

John Wesley is an example of one who tried to do holy things without first being holy. Wesley went to Georgia to preach Christ to the Indians in that colony. He did so in order save himself ... as he wrote. He left the colony of Georgia a failure. It was only when he had the inward change in his relationship with God that he sparked a revival in England and beyond.



Martin Luther started his religious life as a monk and priest. He out-did his brother monks in his efforts. Why did he work so hard at doing good and being holy? He wanted to deserve his salvation. It was only when he discovered that

his salvation and Holiness was a work of God, not of himself, that his efforts sparked a reform that swept through Germany and Europe.



Jesus teaches us that a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit. A person who is not in a personal, intimate, and loving relationship with God cannot bring forth a holy life.

John Wesley used the term “almost Christian” to describe a person who looked holy to the world, but was not.

I cannot build a Christian character with myself as the foundation. I look successful, but it is a splendid failure. The glittering structure will not stand the first flash of the fires of eternity.



The nature of Holiness – of holy living – is the nature of God. Holiness comes from God. It is a life lived before God and toward others. Holiness must come into the believer’s heart by God’s love and power.

Take the first step and continue. Draw near to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Grow each moment in your loving relationship with God and you will live a holy life.