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How would you describe yourself? Take a few moments. Write down five words that would best describe you. What would they be? “Outgoing?” “Harsh?” “Compassionate?” “Kind?” “Witty?” “Faithful?” “Critical?” What words would others use to describe you? Would the word *holy* be among them?

Most of us never think of calling ourselves holy. Only saints and preachers are holy (even that is debatable), not ordinary people like you and me. For many, *holy* means stern people wearing dark colors and high black stockings, walking with rigid strides. People who would use the word *holy* to describe themselves live hard lives with hidden troubles, carrying black Bibles around (or little red books) to remind them of what they shouldn't be doing. They live in the land of No—saying NO to everything that has color, joy, spontaneity, humor, variety, creativity.

Scripture gives a mixed picture. On the one hand, people are called holy (saints), and on the other hand,

WHAT? ME HOLY?

the same people are commanded to stop living sinful lives. How can that be? How can you be holy if there is sin in your life?

Most troubling is the assertion that “without holiness, none will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14, NIV). Then there's God's call for us to be holy: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, NIV). According to the context (1 Peter 1:13-21), *holy* includes at least five realities: (1) *holy* defines a way of both being and behaving; (2) *holy* is a way of being and behaving that is defined by the character of God [who God is and what God does]; (3) *holy* is a way of being and behaving that all Christians are expected to manifest; (4) *holy* is a way of being and behaving that is markedly different from that of the unbelieving world around; and (5) *holy* is a way of being and behavior that is rooted in and flows out of God's redeeming grace and forgiveness manifested in Christ's shed blood.

The most interesting thing about these words in 1 Peter is how the

exhortation to be holy is a person-to-person call. God *makes* it personal: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (NASB). It is not, “Be holy because I said to be holy.” Rather, it is “Be holy because I am holy, and if you love Me, you will want to be like Me.” “This is a person-to-person call placed by the Lord God to each one of us. The Lord is calling you to be holy. He beckons you to come out from all conduct that is inappropriate and be separated to Him, to depart from everything that isn't like Him and devote yourself fully to Him.”¹ The conduct of believers is determined by the person of God and the nature of God. A holy God requires holiness in His followers.

God is by nature holy (Rev. 4:8; Isa. 6:3). He *alone* is holy (Rev. 15:4). It has to do with who He is—His character and being. To be a child of God, it is necessary to bear a family resemblance.

Being holy or behaving holy is a matter of love. Peter asserts how being or behaving holy cannot be separated either from God's mercy and forgiveness or from the spilled blood of Christ. “Love is the well from which practical holiness springs: love for God, then love for men. This love is the humble response to God's great love for us. If we truly love Him, attaining to His likeness will be our heart's desire. And like Him we will be, if we are holy.”²

As Ellen White writes: “Holiness is . . . an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.”³ Who would ever imagine that holiness is resting in God's love?

There is more: “No man receives holiness as a birthright, or as a gift from any other human being. Holiness is the gift of God through Christ. Those who receive the Saviour become sons of God. They are His spiritual children, born again, renewed in righteousness and true holiness. Their minds are changed. With clearer vision they behold eternal realities. They are adopted into God's family, and they become conformed to His likeness, changed by His Spirit from glory to glory. From cherishing supreme love for self, they come to cherish supreme love for God and for Christ. . . . Accepting Christ as a personal Saviour, and following His example of self-denial—this is the secret of holiness.”⁴

Only God is holy. Yet He graciously extends His holiness to us through His Son Jesus Christ. The secret of holiness is accepting Christ as our personal Savior. It means receiving God's character as a gift implanted within. It is a gift that will

forever change who we are, how we think, what we value, and what we do and say (Col. 1:21, 22; Gal. 6:14). We rest in His love. Our humble response to His love is to be like Him in the world.

The reality is that those who comprehend the holiness of God are immediately filled with dread and horror over personal sin (Isa. 6:3-6). It is a fact that “the most holy person is most in touch with his own depravity, and consequently, with the great mercy and kindness of God.”⁵ “The more closely they contemplate the life and character of Jesus, the more deeply will they feel their own sinfulness, and the less will they be disposed to claim holiness of heart or to boast of their sanctification.”⁶ “Only God is holy. Man has not holiness apart from what belongs to God, extended to him in Christ.”⁷ Holiness begins with

a sense of who God is and an appreciation of His grace. Appreciating salvation is where holiness begins. Starting anywhere else leads to legalism or fanaticism, hypocrisy or discouragement.

God would have us hear His person-to-person call to be like Him in the world. And He would remind us of His gracious provision through Christ: “be holy, for I am holy, and if you love Me, you will want to be like Me.”

REFERENCES

¹ Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart: Discovering Personal Victory Through Holiness* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), p. 25.

² Clyde Cranford, *Because We Love Him: Embracing a Life of Holiness* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, 2002), p. 32.

³ *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51.

⁴ *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 120.

⁵ Cranford, op cit., p. 27.

⁶ *The Sanctified Life*, p. 79.

⁷ Cranford, op cit., p. 33.

