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Holiness: A Call To Be Christ-like

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The ultimate purpose of redemption through Christ Jesus is restoring man to the image of God. This, however, is not the end but the beginning of the new life. God is holy and His holiness distinguishes Him and sets Him apart from all finite reality. God's holiness calls us to be separated from sin and to live a holy life. Once regenerated, the person needs to have a change in his lifestyle, character, and behaviour. The old nature of the converted person must be replaced by the sanctified nature. One, therefore, in order to maintain the image of God in his or her life, must have a renewal in the inner person.

In this paper I will look at the nature and fall of man and see holiness as a restoration to Christ. I also look at holiness not as a difficulty but a real possibility because of Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. Scripture references are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

The superiority of mankind and their origin is derived by a direct act of God initiated in the divine counsel, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over all creation*" (Genesis 1:26).

The first man was created from the dust of the ground and became alive by the breath of God. His soul, therefore, is never independent of the will and Spirit of God (Genesis 6:3, Matthew 10:28). Man can never be understood or known in his nature unless he is understood as a creature of God. Thus man is highly personal in nature. He was created in the image and likeness of God in order to live, God-like, as a free moral being. Man, however, violated his freedom by disobeying the known law of God. This resulted in a broken relationship and a falling away from his original right relation with God

Man was created essentially good; a person made for God. However, due to man's rebellion against God he cannot return to God on his own initiative. God, therefore, initiates the restoration of man to Himself.

Man's sin alienated him from God, but he is a receiver of God's redeeming grace through Christ Jesus. According to Tillich (1951:62), man's relationship with God is broken yet continued. This can be seen as man "existentially" being sinful, a rebel alienated from the life of God, and "essentially" man's relationship with God is unbroken.

Berkouwer (1988:193) remarked that "sin is a very vicious and mortal enemy." The Word of God explains sin as something radical and regards it as alienation from the life of God, lawlessness, and lovelessness. Sin, as a result, leads man to rebellion. Wesley's definition of sin, namely, "a wilful transgression of the known law of God," indicates that man is a lawbreaker. In addition to that man became enslaved to sin, unable to do good things. Augustine underscores this idea of sinfulness by saying, "man as a fallen being is free only to sin." This implies that the sinful man not only needs to be delivered from his sinful acts but also from inbred sin. A person, therefore, needs to be sanctified initially and entirely. The intended purpose of the reconciliation of man to God is both moral and spiritual transformation. We, then, have to experience the second work of grace working in our lives.

Holiness has its foundation in the Bible. This is stressed in both Old and New Testament scripture references. Two of these include Leviticus 11: 44, "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy", and 1 Peter 1:15, 16: "But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy.""

A closer study of Leviticus provides the reader with remarkable insights into the character and will of God particularly in the matter of Holiness. Among the pagan Near Eastern nations, holiness was a state of consecration to the service of a deity and often involved the practice of immoral rites. For the Hebrews to be holy, as God is holy, required a close relationship of obedience and faith. This should be a daily experience with a high moral and spiritual quality characteristic of God's nature as revealed in the law. Christ has the same expectation of us today as we walk with Him in grace. This can only be done by the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

The word holiness contains both the negative sense of separation and the positive sense of consecration. The mark of holiness is the highest expression of the covenant relationship between a holy God and His people. Our relationship with God can and will only be maintained if we

remain holy. No holy living; no fellowship with God!

By divine ordained rituals the priests were consecrated, set apart and made holy so that they might be worthy mediators between God and the people. God's call for holiness, however, is not only for the priest (minister). It includes every believer to present him or herself blameless in worship and conduct before God. This biblical message of holiness is for all humankind. What God asked of the Israelites is also expected of today's Church of Christ. This truth remains relevant throughout time.

Sanctification can simply be defined as the act or process by which finite objects become holy. To sanctify, we might say means "to make holy." In the Old Testament certain rituals were specified by which this would occur. One, then, must qualify the term "Sanctification" within ceremonial holiness. This conveys the quality of "belonging to God." It means that individuals are perfected as holy not merely because they are separated; but they are separated because they are related to God and therefore this makes them to be holy (Weatherford 1971: 11-16).

Sanctification can also be defined as the process by which a person becomes a Christian and remains a Christian. Holiness refers to God-likeness. Sanctification, therefore, describes the process by which one is made to partake of this quality. The work of sanctification includes both the human act of consecration, accompanied with repentance, and the divine act of cleansing. The purification from all defilement and the renewing of the heart through the Spirit of God is the essence of the sanctifying activity of God. From this concept of sanctification, we summarily see sanctification as the total work of God in making a person Christ-like.

Careful thought is given to sanctification as a process. It should not be concluded that everyone would take the same length of time during this process to gain the experience of entire sanctification. What we call Initial Sanctification is the first step to becoming holy. When a person is regenerated into the new life with God his sins (actual) are forgiven right away. Yet he still has the inbred sin. John Wesley stated that sanctification begins "the moment we are justified. The seed of every virtue is then sown in the soul. From that time the believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace. Yet sin remains in him - the seed of all sin till he is sanctified through and through in spirit, soul, and body" (Lo

1994:52). There are people, however, who make a complete consecration at the time of their justification. A balance, therefore, has to be sought between differing viewpoints of the timeframe required for people to experience entire sanctification.

God as the source of holiness wants His people to be holy like Him. Holiness is possible in this world only as we live close to Him. This allows us to think, act, and serve as He would. This life of holiness means to be set apart for God's glory. We are urged to live with His intended purpose. The lifestyle of Christ-likeness or God-likeness permeates all that we do socially, mentally, physically, and spiritually (Romans 12:1, 2). On this basis we are transformed into His likeness. Our lifestyle is a worship of God throughout the day. Holiness embodies our worship of God.

Holy living is possible. Holiness needs to be seen dually as 1) set apart in spirit for the worship of the only true God, and 2) set apart in living our lives in worship of God. The Holy Spirit, the gift and helper that Christ asked the Father to send us, empowers, enables, and cleanses so that we may lead a life that is pleasing to God. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is in itself an instantaneous work, followed by growth.

The problem we have in Africa is misinterpretation of the concept of holiness among our people. This may be caused by the lack of thorough explanations of the terminology used by clergy and educators when conveying the message of holiness. The systematic explanation of holiness is important. Linked with this, however, we need to use biblical terms to simplify and clarify the message of holiness. The diagram (see Appendix) frequently used to communicate this message also needs to be reviewed. This is because it falsely indicates, or gives the impression, that holiness is difficult to attain.

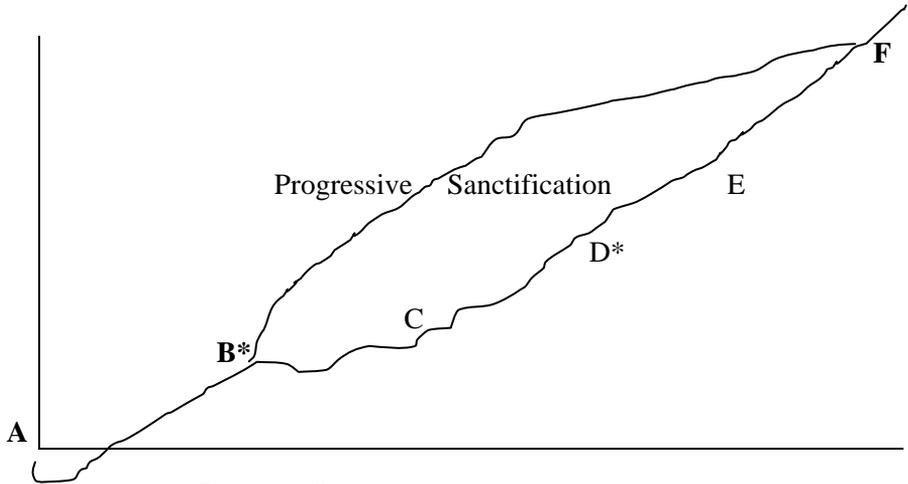
It is important, therefore, that we seriously consider ways to effectively communicate holiness both biblically and contextually in simple terms so that all of us can fully know, understand, and experience the abundant life Christ promised.

In conclusion, the exclusive, intimate, and ultimate relationship that comes with holy living not only links Christians to God; it cuts us from the world. Separation from the world and penetration of the world are the twin around which this relationship swings. Detachment – yet involvement, withdrawal

– yet engagement. This rhythm is expressed in Jesus’ prayer (John 17:17-19). His separating us from the world is not a separation of fear and anxiety but of a blessing and hope.

The message of holiness is unique. It is unique in origin and unique in purpose: unique in origin because truth is linked to God’s Word, unique in purpose because truth is given to produce holiness.

APPENDIX



- A: Preventive Grace
- B: Initial Sanctification (Justification or regeneration)
- C: Carnal / immature Christian
- D: Entire Sanctification
- E: Mature Christian
- F: Glorification
- B-F: Progressive Sanctification**

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