

## CHAPTER 12

# GOD IS HOLY

Columnist Ray Cohn writes in the *New York Times*, “I don’t want to know what the law is, I want to know who the judge is.”<sup>1</sup> How important is a judge? All over the world, we hear of court cases that are mock trials. Defendants are paraded as guilty after being forced to sign confessions—many times to crimes they did not commit. The judges in these cases are part of a system that results in injustice for the people. On the other hand, if the judge is honest and fair, he will fulfill his role so that justice is served and complaints are addressed.

Since God is the most powerful judge in the universe, we must know what He is like to understand His role as judge. What kind of court does He hold? What kind of laws does He uphold? Is His justice fair and impartial?

Today most people ignore God’s role as judge of mankind. They go on with their sin as if no one will ever call them to account. Yet in both the Old and New Testaments, God’s justice is repeatedly presented. Look at a few of the times God acted as judge:

- He sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden because of their sin.
- He destroyed the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- He sent plagues on Egypt for the Pharaoh’s mistreatment of God’s people.
- He struck down Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit.
- He inflicted King Herod with deadly worms after he accepted worship as a god.
- He sent disease into the Corinthian church for not honoring the Lord’s Supper.

As we study God’s role as the Perfect Judge, we will tackle some of the difficult areas

and see the purity of God's moral attributes of integrity. We will learn about His holiness, righteousness, and faithfulness, and how they affect our lives. And of course, we will also discover the truth about God's justice, the basic characteristic for a good judge. Once we see how God's attributes of integrity work together, we can have confidence that every action He takes as judge is perfect. As we grow in our intimacy with God, we will also learn how we can be free of the fear of His judgment against sin. Allow me to begin by showing you the awesome magnificence of God's holiness.

### **THE POWER OF FIRE**

They were called the Great Fires of 1988. That year, wildfires swept through 1.4 million acres of Yellowstone National Park. The park was like a huge lumberyard filled with millions of wooden poles stuck at intervals far enough apart to allow good air circulation but close enough for each old lodgepole pine to torch its neighbor. Pine needles and dead twigs littered the ground, providing tinder-dry fodder for the unquenchable appetite of the fires.

On September 6, spot fires were seen around Old Faithful Inn. Built in 1904, it is the world's largest log structure. It sits near Old Faithful Geyser surrounded by the majestic old forests of Yellowstone. Twenty-five miles north, a fire storm raged across 50 acres of forest. Winds as powerful as a tornado whipped the flames through the forest with the sound of a freight train, reducing trees to piles of white ashes and small charred spears on the blackened earth.

On September 7, wind gusts in the wildfire area enabled the fires to spread even faster. By afternoon, a large wall of intensifying black and brown smoke hovered close to the Inn, but firefighters felt confident that they could contain any outbreaks. Suddenly, fingers of fires around the Inn curled together to make a powerful fist that pounded the area. Then 50-mile-an-hour, fire-generated winds thundered in, sounding like the continuous roar of a jet taking off. Spot fires jumped up in numerous places close to the vulnerable buildings. A wall of flame higher than the tops of the trees advanced with incredible speed.

Firefighters worked furiously, soaking the Inn with water to protect it from the flames. Then as quickly as the fire had come, it turned to the northeast. The danger was

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past. Twenty-four buildings had burned, but Old Faithful Inn had been saved.

Months later, the forest grew with new vigor. The heat from the fires split open the hulls of the pine cones, releasing their seeds and yielding a forest of little saplings sprouting everywhere. The dead underbrush had been burned away. New spears of

grass turned the hillsides to spring green, and a bumper crop of wildflowers carpeted the meadows.

### **THE POWER OF GOD'S HOLINESS**

Anyone who has been near a fire of that magnitude understands its tremendous power. When it roars through an area, everything is changed. Ancient trees turn into cinders. Buildings are reduced to ashes. Nothing can withstand its fury. In their wake, wildfires also bring new growth and regeneration.

In the Bible, God's holiness is sometimes pictured as a fire. A. W. Tozer writes:

Only fire can give even a remote conception of it. In fire He appeared at the burning bush; in the pillar of fire He dwelt through all the long wilderness journey. The fire that glowed between the wings of the cherubim in the holy place was called the Shekinah, the Presence, through the years of Israel's glory, and when the Old had given place to the New, He came at Pentecost as a fiery flame and rested

<sup>3</sup>  
upon each disciple.

What does a fire do? It destroys the dead, purifies, transforms the landscape. It is powerful, beautiful, and awesome. No one can stand up to the heat and fury of a firestorm. Nothing can bring regeneration like a forest fire.

God's holiness has even greater power. Moses, who saw God's holiness in the burning bush, asked, "Who else among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is glorious

<sup>4</sup>  
in holiness like you—so awesome in splendor, performing such wonders?"

Of all God's attributes, nothing compares to the splendor and beauty of His holiness. It is chief among His attributes. That means His character is perfect in every way. He is totally pure. His moral excellence is the absolute standard of integrity and ethical purity for all within His universe. God's supreme holiness infinitely sets Him apart from His creation. Everything God does bears the imprint of His holiness. His holiness never diminishes.

### **OUR GOD IS EXALTED IN HOLY MAJESTY**

Unfortunately, to a large degree, God's holiness has been ignored by modern Christianity because we are filled with the dead brush of sin and pride. Our unwillingness to acknowledge a holy God reflects our failure to recognize who God really is. The Hebrew root word for "to be holy" means to cut or to separate. The Old Testament reveals that God is above and separate from all that He created. He is

exalted above everything in holy majesty.

We may also define *holy* as completely set apart from sin. It is a term describing conduct or behavior usually implying sacredness, being consecrated to God, or being

<sup>5</sup>  
worthy of God. Holiness reflects a flawless, unblemished purity. God does not just match a standard of purity—He is the standard.

I feel totally inadequate to describe this attribute of God. How can I, or any sinful human being, find the right words to explain how pure and high God is in His holiness? How can I describe something that is so far removed from my experience and nature?

When I think of God’s holiness, I am convicted by the sinful nature of my own being. We are all like a man wearing a beautiful white suit who was invited to go down into the depths of a coal mine. In the darkness of the mine, he was not aware that his suit was becoming soiled. But when he resurfaced into the dazzling light of the noonday sun, he was fully aware that his suit had become sooty and dirty. The light of God’s holiness reveals the darkness of our sin.

Isaiah was a prominent citizen of Judah during the eighth century B.C., a prophet who followed God’s commands and served his Lord. Today, we would consider him one of the “spiritual elite,” a man of integrity and honor. At one point, Isaiah had a vision of heaven and the holiness of the Creator:

I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Hovering around Him were mighty seraphim, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with the remaining two they flew. In a great chorus they sang, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty! The whole earth is filled with His glory!” The glorious singing shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire sanctuary was filled

<sup>6</sup>  
with smoke.

Prior to his vision, Isaiah was focused on the sins of others, calling them to repentance. Now that he found himself in the very presence of our holy God, he became dramatically aware of his own sin and unrighteousness. Terrified, he exclaimed, “My destruction is sealed, for I am a sinful man and a member of a sinful race. Yet I have

<sup>7</sup>  
seen the King, the LORD Almighty!”

When the angels surround the glorious throne of God, they sing, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty.” Stephen Charnock comments, “Do you hear, in any angelical

song, any other perfection of the Divine Nature thrice repeated? Where do we read of them crying out, ‘eternal, eternal, eternal’ or ‘faithful, faithful, faithful’ Lord God of hosts?”<sup>8</sup>

This repetition, “holy, holy, holy,” tells us that God’s holiness is the supreme attribute of His being, the foundation of His eternal existence. His sovereignty and His role as judge are rooted in and flow out of His holiness. In fact, theologians speak of God’s holiness as His “central and supreme perfection.”<sup>9</sup>

### **GOD’S HOLINESS REQUIRES SEPARATION**

Permit me to take you back to the Old Testament times when the Israelites worshipped God in a tabernacle they carried through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. The tabernacle pictured God’s holiness and His separation from sinful mankind.

The tabernacle had three sections: the large area of service, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. Each area was hidden from the other two by curtains.

Any priest who entered God’s tabernacle first had to sacrifice an animal on the Brazen Altar to atone for sin. These burnt sacrifices were offered twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Next was the Laver in which the priest washed his hands and feet before he appeared before the Lord—once again a symbol of our need for cleansing from sin. Then he was ready to enter the Holy Place.

Inside the Holy Place were three articles: the Table of Shewbread, the Candlestick, and the Altar of Incense. The Table of Shewbread held the special Bread of the Presence; the Candlestick continually burned pure oil; and the Altar of Incense held fragrant incense which was offered every morning.

But the Holy of Holies was the place where God’s presence resided. It was hidden from view by a curtain so heavy that it took four men to move it. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter this place—and only once a year. If anyone else tried, God would strike him dead. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, the dwelling place of God Himself, where once a year the High Priest offered sacrifices for his own sins and the sins of the people.

Why was the place of God’s presence in the tabernacle hidden from view? Because God is so holy that no one can look upon His glory and live. No one can approach our holy God without a covering of blood to atone for the forgiveness of his sin.

Why was a lamb offered as a sacrifice for sin? It was a picture of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and His sacrifice on the cross to provide a covering against the wrath of God on unconfessed sin. The only thing that can satisfy the judgment of sin demanded by God's holiness is the shedding of pure, innocent blood. Only Jesus' blood met this high standard.

### **GOD'S WRATH IS PART OF HIS HOLINESS**

God is the absolutely pure and righteous being who abhors evil. He cannot tolerate any unrighteousness. Habakkuk 1:13 tells us, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; You cannot tolerate wrong" (NIV). God cannot secretly inspire any evil in us, for in His very nature He cannot accept any evil in any form.

God's holiness demands consequences for sin. We have broken His standard of holiness, and His holiness demands that He judge sin, not ignore or excuse it.

Throughout the Bible, God's wrath is pictured as a destroying fire. Think back to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities were filled with sin; the only righteous person was Lot. God allowed Lot and his family to flee from Sodom before He brought judgment. What was that punishment? The Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur upon those cities. All who lived there perished. Yet God's wrath is not uncontrolled anger, like we may sometimes think. Instead, it is a planned and just act that has its roots in God's holiness.

In the secular world, many people believe that actions do not have consequences. If you want to have extramarital "safe" sex, just use a condom. If you commit a crime, hire a good lawyer who can get you off on a technicality. Stealing items from your employer is okay because everyone else is doing it. The lack of teaching on morality in our public schools and in society in general has lowered the bar of standards for holy and righteous living.

This is how we sometimes approach God too. "Our sins are not so wrong," we say. "What others do is much worse." The person who believes this has not confronted the holiness of God. One small sin, one white lie, one hurtful word is enough to separate us from God's holiness.

### **GOD'S HOLINESS IS DEMONSTRATED IN HIS LAWGIVING**

In recent years, numerous laws passed by state and federal legislatures have been struck down by the Supreme Court. In some cases, the judges ruled that a law could not be fairly applied. Other laws the Supreme Court decided had a fatal flaw that would

prevent justice from being evenly distributed.

As the supreme, absolutely holy lawgiver, God has never announced a law that was not perfect in all respects. He has no need of a Supreme Court to determine whether His laws are fair or can be evenly applied. All His laws are an expression of the purity of

<sup>10</sup>  
His holiness.

Jude’s epistle provides numerous examples of people who rejected God’s laws—and suffered the judgment of a holy God. Jude mentions “godless men, who change the

grace of our God into a license for immorality.”<sup>11</sup> They thought they could get away with their sin. Not so, Jude writes, for we are dealing with a holy God who, after delivering

the people of Israel out of Egypt, “later destroyed those who did not believe.”<sup>12</sup> Even the angels who rebelled against God “He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting

chains for judgment on the great Day.”<sup>13</sup>

Over and over again, we set up our own standards of what ought to please God: “I deal fairly with people.” “I do not abuse my wife or my children.” “I give to the needs of others in the homeless ministry I support.” “I’m a good neighbor.”

We slight the holiness of God when we think we can manage on our own. We fool

ourselves when we assume that keeping the Golden Rule<sup>14</sup> will cover our sins. How ridiculous our standards are when compared to His standards of righteousness. When Joshua gave his farewell address to the people of Israel after they had settled into the Promised Land, he knew that the people still worshipped foreign gods. He told them, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy and jealous God. He will not

forgive your rebellion and sins.”<sup>15</sup>

None of our manmade standards of behavior meet the requirements of a holy God. God’s holiness mandates that we keep all His laws perfectly at all times. The only way we can come into His presence is by having our sins covered by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Only through Christ’s payment can our holy Judge extend His mercy to us.

### **RESPONDING TO GOD’S HOLINESS**

If we could just grasp even a part of the magnificent holiness of God and the miracle

of His mercy to His sinful creatures, then our homes, offices, schools, and in fact, the whole earth would shake with people falling prostrate on the ground in worship and adoration of Him. Such a view would precipitate a healthy fear of God, which is a

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necessary starting point.

True knowledge of God's holiness always elicits a worshipful response from us. Moses fell to his face before the burning bush. Isaiah said, "Woe is me!" We cannot stand in the presence of God without acknowledging His holiness and seeing our own sin. Author Beth Moore writes in *A Woman's Heart: God's Dwelling Place*:

The light of God's glory shines two ways: it sheds light on the knowledge of God so we can see Him more clearly, but it also sheds light on us so that we can see our own sin more clearly. Remember, the closer you approach the light, the brighter it shines on you. This is the marvelous two-edged sword of intimacy. We see Him more clearly and we see ourselves more clearly. It is the perfect safeguard against pride. You can mark His word on this: true intimacy breeds true

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humility!

When we concentrate on God's holiness—His moral perfections and absolute purity—the only appropriate response is humble adoration. Adoration is the basis for all worship.

Whenever I meditate on the holiness of God, I am impressed with how worthy He is of our worship. I think of the verse, "Worship the LORD in the splendor of His

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holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth." I want to become absorbed with His holiness, rather than with His might, His wisdom, or His other magnificent attributes.

As we meditate on God's supreme holiness, we cannot help but be overcome with a sense of awe. Music can help us express our awe for our Lord. Many of the old Christian hymns capture the spirit of worship. I encourage you to select one of them, such as *Holy, Holy, Holy*, and begin to worship God in song and praises right now.

After Isaiah humbled himself before the Lord during his vision, one of the seraphim flew over to the altar in the temple and picked up a burning coal with a pair of tongs. Isaiah says, "He touched my lips with it and said, 'See, this coal has touched

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your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.'" Worship God also for the Lamb of God who bridged the separation between God and the repentant sinner. *The Old Rugged Cross* is a hymn which tells that story in song. Read through

the words of this classic hymn; then exalt God's holy name as one of His children who has caught a glimpse of His holiness and His merciful salvation.

# LIFE APPLICATION

**EXALT YOUR GOD**—Exodus 15:11 records that, after Moses and the Israelites safely crossed through the Red Sea, they sang a song of praise to the Lord.

“Who else among the gods is like you, O LORD?  
Who is glorious in holiness like You—  
So awesome in splendor,  
Performing such wonders?”

Make a list of the wonders our holy God has displayed in your life this past year. Be specific. Now, thank God for them and praise Him by singing the beautiful hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!  
Holy, holy, holy! Tho’ the darkness hide Thee,  
Tho’ the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;  
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,  
Perfect in pow’r, in love, and purity.

**REFLECT HIS IMAGE**—We are called to be holy, which means “set apart,” “dedicated to the Lord.” First Peter 1:16 says, “God Himself has said, ‘You must be holy because I am holy.’” Are there areas of your life you are ashamed of, aspects of your character or lifestyle that are not pure? Submit them to the Lord and ask for His cleansing and forgiveness.

**SHARE HIS MAJESTY**—Moral integrity is not very common today. Does a friend or family member need to hear that there is someone who acts with complete integrity and can always be trusted? Share the truth of God’s holiness with them today.

## CHAPTER 13

# GOD GIVES US THE POWER TO BECOME HOLY

Have you ever known anyone who was extremely talented but morally flawed? It does not take long to realize that great ability without the moral guidance of good character can cause immense tragedy and grief. An individual's character, rather than his abilities, determines the lasting value of his accomplishments.

For example, the president of a famous university was discovered using his computer to transfer pornographic material to minors. The head of a prestigious charitable organization was convicted of embezzling from the charity. Several top political leaders have been accused of committing adultery with interns and staff. Obviously, not all people in these professions are guilty of such crimes, but these problems are so rampant that although we are a nation of achievements, we are morally bankrupt.

Christians also struggle with moral purity. Some time ago a man who held an influential position in a Christian ministry confided in me that he had never surrendered his life to Christ, although for years he pretended that he had done so. He said and did all the right things so that his friends and all who met him would think he was a committed follower of Christ. But he admitted to deliberately saying "no" to the

Holy Spirit's leading and choosing to live a lie.

I was shocked that anyone who was exposed to the inspired Word of God, Christian fellowship, and ministry would dare to deliberately disobey God. But as we talked, I learned that he was simply afraid to live a holy life. The thought of complete surrender to the Lord was unappealing to him, and as a result, he had run from God for many years.

### **HOLY LIVING, THE SECRET TO LIFE**

Like this man, a false view of holiness causes many Christians to stop short of complete surrender to God. They have a distorted view of holiness because they define it from a secular viewpoint. They imagine a holy person as some kind of religious fanatic, a “kook,” or an isolated monk devoted to prayer and fasting. Others think that holiness has only to do with the way a person dresses or socializes. These misinformed believers decide they do not want to give up their lifestyle, pleasures, and pride and allow God to renew their minds. They do not let Him mold them into people with tastes and desires that bring true happiness and joy in fellowship with Him.

Tragically, some believers continue to wrestle with their childhood experiences with strict, legalistic parents or churches. I have heard some confess, “I tried to live up to the high expectations of my parents or pastor, but I have failed many times. I just can't live the Christian life!” They conclude that the Christian life is difficult to live. I agree—and go one step further: It is impossible to live a holy life on your own. Even with determination and our best efforts, we will always fail. We can never become holy in our own strength and abilities.

But the story does not end with our feeble efforts. Paul proclaims:

There is no condemnation [guilt] for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent His own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow

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our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

This is the secret: We can live a holy life if we yield to the Holy Spirit who came to glorify Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only person to ever live a holy life, and now He

resides within every believer through His Holy Spirit. His presence and power give us the strength to live a holy life moment by moment.

Holy, righteous living is the secret to a life of joy, power, victory, and fruitfulness. When we are holy, we are set apart and separated from sin for God's special use. God gives us the power to experience a whole new life based on His holiness and purity. But we must obey His direction and laws. In this chapter, we will learn about several ways God wants us to respond to His holiness.

### **Because God is holy, we must give Him reverential respect.**

In 1996, I was privileged to receive the prestigious international Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. As part of the honor, Vonette and I went to Buckingham Palace to meet with Prince Philip and Sir John Templeton. Because we were meeting royalty, we were very conscious of our appearance and our behavior.

Do we have less concern when we come before our Sovereign God, the ruler of the universe? He deserves much more reverence and respect than any human being who ever lived! He is not the "man upstairs." He is the great, holy, righteous, all-powerful, loving, creator God.

Many Scripture passages tell us to fear God. King David writes, "Serve the LORD with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling."<sup>2</sup> Solomon explains, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in understanding."<sup>3</sup> Fearing God does not mean to be afraid of God, but rather to express reverential awe and deep respect before Him.

Vonette and I get on our knees every morning to praise and worship God out of reverential awe for Him. I encourage you to examine how you come before God, how you honor His name before others, and how you respect His Word. In your daily quiet time with Him, give Him the honor He deserves. Spend more time worshipping Him than asking for your own needs.

### **Because our holy God abhors sin and evil, we must turn away from every evil.**

God created the universe to function according to His standard of holiness. God's holiness is so complete that He cannot look on even one sin. Not one.

Picture God's holiness in this way. Envision a beautiful bride on her wedding day, dressed in white and looking radiant. The white dress symbolizes purity. It does not have a spot or wrinkle anywhere. If one ink spot stained the dress, people would focus

on the ugliness of the stain rather than the loveliness of the dress. That is a picture of God's purity. God, who has never sinned in any way, is so pure and holy that He "cannot

tolerate the slightest sin."<sup>4</sup> His heaven is pure and holy, absolutely free of all sin and evil.

No matter how religious, self-disciplined, or good we may try to be, we cannot expect God to allow us into His heaven when we have sin-stains in our lives. If God allowed one sin to mar His pure dwelling place, it would cease to be a holy city. Since God cannot even look on sin, our sinful, human situation is hopeless.

This is where a miraculous paradox comes in. Jesus Christ came to take away the sins of the world. He became sin for us. The perfect, holy Son of God took on the stain of our sin. He endured and satisfied the judgment of a pure God for our misdeeds—not just one or two sins, but every sin you and I have ever committed or will commit in our lifetimes!

Remember how the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle illustrated God's holiness and His separation from humans? The heavy curtain separated sinful people from God's presence. The sacrifices of lambs and goats symbolized a holy God who would take upon Himself the sins of the world. This ultimate sacrifice also included death—Christ's death on the cross.

The physical agony of the cross was nothing compared to the spiritual agony of God becoming sin for us! All the sins and evil ever committed, or that ever will be committed, were laid on Jesus Christ just before He died. Although Jesus abhorred sin and evil, He willingly took on the sins of all people. The Book of Hebrews explains this so much better than I ever could:

What God wants is for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time...For by that one offering He perfected forever all those whom He is making holy...Now when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices. And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means

<sup>5</sup>  
of His death for us.

That is why during Christ's crucifixion God miraculously tore in two the heavy curtain that kept men and women from the Holy of Holies. Christ had paid the ultimate price. Those who accept God's forgiveness become spotless and pure so they now have access to God. In fact, all believers become God's holy temple as the Holy Spirit comes to live within them at the moment of their spiritual birth.

As His temples—His Most Holy Place—our lives are no longer temples of evil, immorality, stealing, or lying. Because God lives within us, we should abhor evil the way He does. When we understand how holy God is and what His Son endured to make us the temple of the living God, our motivation should be to live pure and sin-free lives.

Of course, living a pure life is possible only through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. We are given power over sin and temptation as we are indwelt, filled, and anointed by Him.

According to God’s Word, we do not have to sin. But if we do sin, there is Someone to plead for us before the Father. This is explained in 1 John 2:1,2: “My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely. He is the sacrifice for our sins. He takes away not only our sins but the sins of all the world.”

Becoming holy is more than obedience; it is a liberating, cleansing freedom from all unwholesomeness. Sin in our lives creates a barrier to fellowship with God. It blocks the communication lines between us and God so He does not hear our

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prayers. Restored fellowship with God comes by confessing our sin and turning from it. As the holiness of God is absorbed into every fiber of our being, we become even more sensitive to sin and learn to abhor it all the more as we walk in an intimate, joyful relationship with Him.

### **Because God’s holiness dispels darkness, we must walk in His light.**

In the early ’60s, I went to Rangoon, Burma, to speak to a gathering of students. When I arrived, I was told that a group of radical Communist students planned to kill me by stoning me at the meeting.

When I began my speech, there was so much heckling that I could not be heard. Since I knew that God inhabits the praises of His people, I asked the few Christians in the audience to join me in singing the praise chorus, *Hallelujah*. Satan cannot stand it when believers praise God. As we praised God, the hecklers leaped from their chairs and ran out of the meeting. We continued with the meeting and several students received Christ.

Sin and evil always seek refuge in darkness. But God’s holy radiance exposes and destroys the darkness of sin and evil. Paul writes, “God lives in light so brilliant that

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no human can approach Him.” The more we meditate on the holiness of God, the

more we become aware of our sinfulness. In comparison to His purity, everything else appears dull and dirty.

First John 1 says that “God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all... If we are living in the light of God’s presence, ... then we have fellowship with each other,

and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from every sin.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won’t be stumbling through the darkness,

because you will have the light that leads to life.”<sup>9</sup> As we follow Jesus, His light illumines our way and unbelievers see the holiness of God through our attitudes and actions.

**Because our God is holy, we must serve Him with life-changing devotion.**

Scripture gives us God’s directive: “Now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God—who chose you to be His children—is holy.”<sup>10</sup>

Christians have been set apart by God for this divine purpose. If you want to see the holiness of God, examine the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. He is the visible expression of God’s holiness. God wants us to place our lives under His lordship and conform to the moral character of His Son and reflect the beauty of His holiness and character.

Out of respect for God, I want to be holy as He is holy and never disappoint Him in any way. I would rather die than bring dishonor to His holy name. I have often prayed that if there is any possibility that I might be unfaithful to my beloved wife or in any other way bring dishonor to our Lord, that He would take my life before it happened.

George Muller, well-known for his great faith and ministry to orphans, was asked the secret of his fruitful service for the Lord. He said, “There was a day when I died... utterly died.” As he spoke, he bent lower and lower until he almost touched the floor. “I died to George Muller—his opinions, his preferences, tastes, and will—died to the world, its approval or censure—died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends—and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.”

Everyone I know who has been greatly used by God for the cause of Christ has gone through an experience of “dying to self” as described in Galatians 2:20. It is not until we know the reality of “death to self” that we can live for Christ and God can truly use and bless us. My Galatians 2:20 experience happened in the spring of 1951 when Vonette and I signed a contract to become slaves of Christ. I daily reaffirm this

contract.

Holy living involves a daily decision to surrender to the lordship of Christ. It involves yielding our will to God and adopting His perspective for life. <sup>11</sup> God wants our minds and hearts to be filled with His holy qualities. As our lives are transformed, we will project the light of His holiness into the darkness of our evil world. Real life—abundant life—begins with dying to self.

**Because God expects holiness from His people, we must turn away from any idols in our lives.**

God is very possessive of our affections. He warned the Israelites, “Do not worship any other gods besides Me. Do not make idols of any kind . . . You must never worship or bow down to them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not share

<sup>12</sup> your affection with any other god!” He alone has the right to occupy the throne of our heart. He is to be exalted to the highest place in our lives. Everything else must be of lower importance.

Yet we are all guilty at one time or another of idolatry. The false gods and idols of our society may not be as obvious as those of ancient Israel or other cultures, but their presence is just as real. They clamor for our attention. They bargain for our allegiance. Here are some of the most common:

- The god of affluence. Many are convinced that wealth is the key to happiness. They place their trust in bank accounts and hoarded assets. The spirit of greed has gradually transformed their values so that money is now their master.
- The god of pleasure. Multitudes are convinced that fun is the chief goal in life. Couch potatoes vegetate in front of the TV screen. Sports fanatics cannot watch enough games. Some seek entertainment, thrills, and adventure in hopes of conquering boredom in their futile search for happiness.
- The god of achievement. The ambitious sacrifice themselves to this god. Pride is their relentless taskmaster. For these workaholics, accomplishments are the building blocks of self-esteem. No challenge is too great in their quest for significance.
- The god of infatuation. Some people idolize a celebrity, a hero, a friend, or even a relative. Their entire world revolves around that individual. The spirit of obsession amplifies healthy feelings of love and admiration into unholy worship.

- The god of self-worship. Many are convinced by the spirit of vanity that appearance is everything. Their life is preoccupied with beauty, fashion, and body-building.
- The god of sensuality. The spirit of lust has ensnared many with immorality. For them God's gift of sex has been distorted into perversion and tragically often ends in addiction, abortion, disease, and death.

Substitute gods usurp the worship and devotion that rightfully belong to our holy God. In reality, these idols can never fill the God-shaped vacuum within the heart of man. God's Word calls us to a higher focus: "You must be holy because I am holy." 13

As believers who belong to the universal Church, we are the bride of Christ. God promises that the Church will one day shine faultless before Him. At the end of this age, Christ will present us to God clothed in Christ's purity and holiness. 14

I can hardly wait for that day. That will be the moment when all of us, the Church of Christ universal with millions upon millions of believers, will give glory to God as the spotless bride of Christ. It will be one of the most moving moments in all eternity. We can prepare ourselves for that momentous occasion today by living our lives in the light of God's holiness and purity by faith through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

# LIFE APPLICATION

**WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART**—Commit the following statement and verses to memory. Then as you encounter situations during this week where you need to be reminded of God’s purity, claim these promises by faith.

- Because God is holy, I will devote myself to Him in worship and service.
- 1 Peter 1:16—“[God] Himself has said, ‘You must be holy because I am holy.’”
- Psalm 96:9—“Worship the LORD in the splendor of His holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth.”

**COUNT ON GOD**—Our holy God is perfect. Give your imperfections and limitations to Him. Trust Him to bring good out of your current circumstances and bring glory to His holy name.

**OBEY GOD**—God’s very nature is holy, and His holiness abhors sin and evil. In order to have a healthy relationship with your loving Father, you must not have sin in your life. Search your heart for any hidden sin and confess it to your holy God. Commit yourself to turn away from temptation that you struggle with today.