

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

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Scripture: Heb. 12:14

"Without Holiness, No One Will See God"

A INCREDIBLE TRUTH

Please turn with me to **Hebrews 12:14**. Here we find one of the most important verses in all of Scripture: ***"pursue peace with all men and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."*** The old KJV says it this way: ***"Without holiness no one will see the Lord."***

The Word of God is very straight forward and clear. We will not see the Lord without holiness. That's why we are told the following in **1 Peter 3:14-16**: ***"As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*** The Apostle Peter simply was reiterating what God has always expected. We are to be holy. Peter was quoting from **Leviticus** where God declares the same thing three times: **Lev. 11:44** - ***"For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy."*** (cf. **19:2; 20:7**.) In **Eph. 1:3-4**, the Apostle Paul writes that God ***"chose us to be blameless and holy."*** In fact, throughout the New Testament, the apostles call believers, "saints," which literally means "holy ones."

Over and over again in the Scriptures God is identified as a Holy God. In **Isaiah 6**, the prophet sees angels declaring to one another ***"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts."*** In **Revelation 4:8**; the four living creatures who are before the throne of God continue to say, ***"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and is and who is to come."*** In fact, God's holiness is mentioned more times in the Bible than His love.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HOLY?

So what does it mean that God is a holy God. To be holy means to be set apart. God is set apart from all creation by virtue of Who He is. As the Creator of all things, He is distinct from His Creation. He transcends time and space for He made it. He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. And as such, we can never be like God.

Holiness not only refers to God's eternal and unchanging attributes, it also refers to His perfection. In other words, God's character is totally good, righteous, and pure. There is no evil or sin in His nature.

Such holiness is why we are called to fear and revere the Lord. He is a just God who judges His people and the world with equity and will not let the guilty go unpunished.

Now when He made the earth and all that is in it, He declared in Genesis, ***"that it was good."*** And at the end of creation on the sixth day, He declared that what He had made

"was very good." God divided the light from the darkness. He put all things in their place. Everything was created according to its kind. There was order and there was holiness.

And out of this order and holiness comes the reality that there are certain boundaries, certain laws that He establishes for the good of His Creation. In fact, holiness is about living in the context of those boundaries. And all things are good when used in their God-given boundaries. But because God has given us free will, we can choose to ignore those boundaries.

Recall that God told Adam and Eve that they could enjoy all that He had made except that they were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate of that tree, if they choose to live independent of God, in that day they would die. And we all know what happened. Adam and Eve ate and that which was good became perverted and cursed, and death entered into the created order. God brought order out of the chaos and then man brought chaos out of the order. The pollution of sin spread throughout the whole earth. And so after death and destruction, there came more death and destruction and on and on it goes.

UNHOLINESS IS EVIL

Some ask, "Well then, if God is a good God, why does He allow evil?" He allows evil because of His mercy. He could obliterate evil but He gives us the freedom to choose to follow His will or our own. Moreover, true love is love that is freely given. We could not love unless we had the freedom not to love. So a good way to look at evil is to view it the same way that science views darkness and coldness. How does science define darkness? It is simply the absence of light. You can't turn on the darkness. If there is light, there can be no darkness. The same thing can be said of coldness. In science, coldness is the absence of heat. Likewise, evil is the absence of God. When God is no longer at the center of one's life or decisions, evil will result.

Now when Adam and Eve rebelled they were no longer holy. They were under the pronouncement of judgment. Someone had to be held accountable. Someone had to pay. And not only did God have to remain faithful to His Word, the creation had to be cleansed and restored. How would this be done?

God gives the woman a promise - the first prophecy of the Bible - in **Genesis 3:15** - ***the seed of the woman*** - would crush the head of Satan. In other words, a descendant of Eve would be the means of rescuing and restoring the human race. We now know this seed to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Only God can make us holy and He did so through Jesus Christ. We now have the grounds to be holy. We now can be justified through the what Christ has done for us.

Now before Christ came, God gave the Law to His people to not only reaffirm the boundaries but to show that no one can live up to the Law. We need a deliverer. We need someone to enable us to fulfill the Law of God and thereby be holy. But what happened? Rather than looking at the Law as the way to show them their need for God, they turned it

into a means to gain approval before God. In other words, they believed that one could be made holy by following the law. They fell into the trap of self-righteousness rather being freed to be truly righteous.

JESUS IS OUR HOLINESS

Jesus came to set us free from the guilt and bondage of sin so that we could be a holy people before God. In His Incarnation He showed us what true holiness looks like. Jesus kept every boundary, He kept every law, He submitted to the Holy Spirit in His flesh. He came to fulfill the requirements of the law so that His righteousness would become our righteousness. So holiness is not simply about following the law of God, it is not a state of being, it comes from being in right relationship with Christ. It is simply surrendering to the Lord and agreeing with His way and His will. So the more I am walking with Christ, the more I am growing in His holiness.

In the Old Testament there was a distinction made between the clean and the unclean, the holy and the profane. In fact, anything clean would be made unclean if it touched anything unclean. But something happens when Christ comes. Anything He touches, it is made clean. Recall in **Luke 8**, the account of the hemorrhaging woman - she was considered an outcast, she was cut off and unclean because of her blood disorder. But when she touches Jesus, she is healed and made clean. You see when we are touched by Christ, our whole situation changes. Our lives are spiritually transformed. Do you remember the movie, *"The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe?"* When Aslan returns to Narnia, he finds the land in the grips of winter and the spell of the White Witch. But as He roams through the dead frozen tundra of Narnia whatever he touches, life breaks forth. The ice and snow melt and spring returns. That is what Christ does to us spiritually. He brings new life to all He touches. He transforms our dead hearts and makes them alive.

HOW TO GROW IN HOLINESS

So if Christ is the One Who makes us Holy, how do we grow in His holiness? By walking with Him, by being filled with the Holy Spirit and by obeying God's will and word. In other words, our holiness flows from the holiness of Jesus Christ, Himself, and His relationship with us.

God's Word gives us the specifics of what this entails. Note the following passages from Holy Scripture:

1 Peter 2:11: *"I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."* The way we conduct ourselves should be totally different than the way of the world.

1 Cor. 6:18-20: *"Flee (sexual) immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price:*

therefore glorify God in your body. Sexual temptation is the only one temptation that we are told literally to flee. It is the one area that many can not simply stand against. Recall what Joseph did when Potiphar's wife continued to make advances towards him. He ran!

2 Cor. 7:1: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

What is the best way to cleanse ourselves? Not simply by abstaining but by presenting ourselves before the Lord every day. We need to surrender our wills to His will.

Read Rom. 6:15-23: Here, St. Paul tells us ***"to present ourselves as slaves to righteousness, which results in our sanctification."*** While we were once obedient slaves to sin, now we are called to be slaves of righteousness. Notice how many times the verb "present" is used.

Galatians 5:16: ***"Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh."*** If I am to be a slave to righteousness and not to sin it will mean being filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. I am filled with the Holy Spirit, when I confess my sin, spend time in the Word and in prayer and when I step out in faith and do those things that are pleasing to God. Then true holiness will be evident in my life.

The truth is we will not be completely made holy until we meet Christ face to face. But until that time we are to make it our aim to please and serve God and as we do we will experience His holiness and be like him. That my friends is the key to being a Holy People of God. For without holiness, no one will see the Lord. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!