

Be Ye Holy



David Wilkerson April 1, 1982

Three months after Israel left Egypt, they arrived at the base of Mount Sinai and set up camp. Moses climbed that rugged mountain to commune with the Lord. God called to him and said:

"I am going to come to you in the form of a dark cloud so that the people themselves can hear me when I talk to you, and then they will always believe you. Go down and get the people ready for my visit...Sanctify them..."

On the morning of the third day there was an awesome thunder and lightning storm, and a huge cloud came down upon the mountain...All Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because Jehovah descended upon it in the form of fire...The whole mountain shook with a violent earthquake...

As the trumpet blast grew louder and louder, Moses spoke — and God thundered his reply..." (Exodus 19:9–19 L.B.)

What did God thunder to Moses and His chosen people? These words:

"Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests. A holy people..." (Exodus 19:6).

There is an earth-shaking prophecy in Hebrews about to be revealed at this time. God has promised to speak once more — just as He did at Mount Sinai!

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven..." (Hebrews 12:26).

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh...for if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape...if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven..." (Hebrews 12:25).

Once again God is speaking from heaven. The message is the same as it was in Moses' day. Our God is even now thundering this awesome command.

"Be ye holy — even as I am holy!" (I Peter 1:16).
God Demands Perfect Holiness!

We can't escape the language of the Scripture! We dare not back away from God's description of those who are called:

- Holy and without blame
- glorious, without spot or wrinkle
- holy, unblamable, unreprouvable
- righteous, pure, clean
- cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh

The whole world knows from sad experience this command to be holy like God is absolutely impossible! Scripture tells us

"There is none righteous — no not one...there is none that doeth good..." (Romans 3:10–12).

We have all sinned and come up short of God's holiness. All mankind has miserably failed to obey the command to be holy like God. God did not say, "Be holy! He said, "Be holy, even as I am!" As this age becomes more and more corrupt and filthy, the thundering call to holiness will grow louder and louder in the hearts of men.

There are only three ways to respond to God's command to be holy. At this very hour you are in the throes of one of these responses.

I. The First Response Is to Just Give Up and Quit Trying the Impossible.

I've preached in a prison ward in Mexico City to more than 150 rapists and murders. I've ministered to some of the most sinful people on earth, including prostitutes, gangsters, drug pushers, and skid-row alcoholics. One question always comes to mind — "How did he, or she, get like this? How did a once tender child turn out to be so wicked and unholy? How did devil get such a hold on them?"

The same question could be asked about the Jews who heard God speak audibly at Mount Sinai: "How could people ever forget the thunder, the lightening, the trumpet sounds, the supernatural smoke, the violent earthquake — and the cosmic voice of Almighty God? How could they turn out to be such wicked, vile, adulterous, and unholy people?" For six days these people saw God's glory - "And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel..." (Exodus 24:17). Then, forty days later, those very same people — who had fallen prostrate on the ground because of God's holy presence — danced naked around a golden calf — worshiped a dead idol — played, fornicated, caroused — totally corrupted! Just 40 days from heaven to hell!

God was enraged! He commanded Moses — "Get thee down to your people — how quickly they have turned away from me and my command to be a holy people..." (Exodus 32:7, 8).

There was nothing like it in the history of the world. In just 40 days, a holy people — and a holy priesthood — had corrupted themselves. Aaron, the high priest, had been on top of Mount Sinai with Moses. "He, too...saw the God of Israel...walking on a brilliant pavement of sapphire stones..." (Exodus 24:10). How could a man who actually saw the glory of God turn away so quickly, mold a golden calf, build an altar to it, and invite all of Israel to fall down and worship it?

The reason for this sudden rebellion goes back to Mount Sinai — back to that thundering voice — back to God's command — "Be ye holy!"

Behind all rebellion is an anger toward God for making what we believe are impossible demands!

For days the Israelites sat brooding in their tents — full of fear of a holy God who demanded holiness from them. It soon began to dawn on them how impossible it was. I see them going from tent to tent, gathering in small groups and venting their anger: "How can we ever live up to such an impossible demand? How can we be like God? Someone says the unthinkable — "Well, I know what I'm going to do — I refuse to live in fear! I won't serve a God of fear — a God who makes such impossible demands!"

Soon the rebellion spread like wildfire. People began saying, "Why would that God of Moses bring us out into the wilderness, knowing how weak and frail we are, and allow us to be tempted — and on top of it all, demand the impossible from us?"

Even Aaron, the high priest, must have given in to this anger — this feeling of helplessness. He had seen the holiness of God and it seemed so high and unreachable. He came off Mount Sinai to the reality of his own sinfulness! Finally, he too was saying, "What's the use — I'll never make it — I'm too weak and sinful."

The world is mad at God! Angry He brought them into a wilderness of temptation and sin — made them tremble with fear — then demanded they be holy and pure! And, worst of all — to their way of thinking — no one to show them how to be holy and good!

II. Another Response to God's Demand for Holiness Is — Do the Very Best, Humanly Possible, to Obey!

What pain, what suffering, what superhuman effort are endured by zealous people trying to obey God's command to be holy! Paul said of them:

"I give them credit for having a zeal for God, but it is misdirected...Because they are ignorant of God's righteousness, they go about to establish their own righteousness, having not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God..." (Romans 10:2,3).

They hear God thundering His command, Be ye holy!" So they answer, "I'll be holy — if it kills me!" They live under a terrible burden by not knowing the Scriptures! They want to be holy so they try to obey God through sheer willpower.

After all, doesn't the Bible say:

- Shun the very appearance of evil
- Resist the devil and he will flee from you
- Lay aside the sin that easily besets you
- Put off the old man and all its evil desires
- Yield not your body to temptation

It sounds like God put all responsibility on us. So off we go — attempting to be holy!

Some give up smoking, drinking, dancing, card playing — even theater-going. Others try to please God by fasting, praying, and pleading with Him to "take away all my evil desires." One promise after another is made — only to be broken! Sometimes, through superhuman efforts, they can last a week, a month, or longer — and not give into besetting sin. Then just as they think the victory is won, back down they go! Tempted, defeated — and left in despair!

Why? Because unless they submit to the righteousness of Christ by faith, it is all in vain. They have set themselves to an impossible task! All our good works must spring from a pure heart, sanctified by faith in Christ's work on the cross.

God despises every human effort to be holy — when it is done in man's own strength! He despises every book, every sermon, every doctrine that calls men to holiness through man-made rules and traditions. Entire holiness movements have been born through men's desire to do everything humanly possible to please God and be holy. A few have become absolute legalists.

Church history is filled with ridiculous ideas on how to be holy. I have read of monks who slept on bundles of thorns and piles of broken glass. Others bound one foot, hopping around on one foot until they lost the use of the other. Simon Stylites stood for thirty years on top of a column, and when too weak to stay there, he had a post erected and chained himself to it. In the Middle Ages, long processions of flagellants traveled from country to country, moaning, weeping, singing sad songs of repentance, and whipping their bare backs as they marched. Thousands joined these processions in an effort to "whip out the evil."

We're just as guilty. We've simply invented modern ways to create holiness. First, short hair was sinful — then long hair. Makeup and jewelry were thought by some to be worldly. Long sleeves and long dresses for women were considered holy. Cooking on Sunday or riding a bicycle on the Sabbath was sinful. Some thought you had to be poor to be holy. Others thought God expected a total withdrawal from society — and monasteries were begun.

Think of all the books written by "holy" men. Men who have made holiness sound so unreachable — as if it took a lifetime of self-denial — affliction — mourning — long fasts and deep humility! These books sound so saintly — so holy and pure. But many of them are abominable in God's eyes. Because these so-called holy men never did submit to the righteousness of Christ — a gift given through faith alone.

The apostle Paul said:

"I want to be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the Law [or works]...but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith..." (Philippians 3:9).

III. The Only Proper Response to God's Demand for Holiness Is Total Surrender to the Holiness of Christ!

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is revealed...even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no distinction...being made justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3:21–24).

God has revealed to us a sure way to become absolutely holy and perfect in His sight — whereby all His children can live in absolute peace and joy, knowing God looks upon them as holy, pure, and unblamable. And this is all a free gift!

His gift of holiness can never be a reward for anything we have done. It is an unearned, undeserved favor! An outright gift!

"Wasn't Abraham accepted by God for all his good deeds? Didn't he earn his right to heaven by all the good things he did? No! For righteousness is a gift; if a person could earn it by being good, then it wouldn't be free — but it is! It is given to those who do not work for it. For God declares sinners to be holy in his sight if they have faith in Christ to save them from God's wrath..." (Romans 4:1–5 L.B.).

Some argue — "I know that becoming holy is humanly impossible — but with God's help all things are possible." In other words — "I can make it if God will just help me out!" We seem to think we are to do the very best we can — then having done all we can — call on God to give us a little boost!

Wrong! Dead wrong! We cannot be holy — even with God's help — because God will not assist a thief trying to climb in some other way than what He has opened.

This is the dilemma so many Christians are in today. They pray — "Oh, God — don't you see how hard I'm trying? Don't you feel the agony of my heart? Don't you see how hard I'm fighting to stay pure? God — why don't you come with special power to help me in my struggle?"

We think God should be delighted with our tearful efforts. We expect Him to be standing by, applauding our hard work — eager to pick us up when we fall. We assume He is pleased with all the struggling, the fighting against sin, the resisting temptation! But God's Word says, "If a man strive for mastery — yet is he not crowned, except he strives lawfully [according to God's rules]..." (1 Timothy 2:5).

God is not at all interested in Christians doing battle against certain sins. He is not interested in patching up their weak spots. He will have nothing to do with such pick-and-choose struggles. He wants more than that — He wants to put the robe of Christ's righteousness on those who hunger for holiness! He wants to exchange our filthy rags of self-righteousness for a spirit of holiness — alive of holiness — through faith in Christ. He wants to put an end to all our discouraging and useless struggles to be holy!

Submission is the only way into God's holiness — "...submitting to the righteousness of Christ, through faith..."

To submit means "to surrender the power of your will." With God there is no such thing as willpower — all power is His! He will permit no other power than His own! God demands absolute holiness for a reason — He wants us to be humbled by this demand! He watches over our struggles to be holy with patience — waiting for us to fail so miserably that we will run to His throne, fall on our knees and cry out, "It's hopeless! I will never be holy! I am weak — sensuous — sinful — I have no good in me at all!" this is the kind of repentance God is looking for — confessing the weakness of our futile efforts — denying that we have any power at all in ourselves.

Beloved — hear this — you can never be clothed in Christ's holiness until you fall on your face before God's throne — naked, poor, wretched, weak, and totally helpless! You must once and for all admit you have no power in you to resist sin — that you have nothing to offer the Lord but a broken-down, defeated and helpless lump of clay. You must admit you can't be holy — even with help. You must be given holiness — as a gift.

The greatest gift you can give to God is your faith that He will give you His holiness! Isaiah exulted:

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness...So the Lord will cause righteousness to spring forth before all the nations..." (Isaiah 61: 10, 11).

All hell is about to break out on this doomed world of ours. Evil men and seducers will get even bolder and more violent. There will be nudity on prime time TV — cable stations showing X-rated movies. Satan has declared war on the saints! Corruption, adultery, drinking — sexual debauchery such as the world has never before witnessed. All around will be godlessness, fear, hardheartedness — mockery of all that is good and pure and holy!

How shall we stand in such an hour? What is our defense? How do we stay holy in such a wicked age? What human being can resist the flood that is coming? Who can keep himself from being contaminated and spotted by it all? No one! Not by their own strength, that is.

This is why this message of total surrender must grip our souls! Only God has the power to keep us holy — to present us to Himself a holy people without spot or wrinkle!

Believe this — The God who gives us His holiness — has the power to keep us in it! The safest place on earth is at the foot of the Cross — humbled before God's throne. The more wicked the times, the more we need to stay yielded! Stay submitted! Not giving up — but giving in!

You can then know what it really means to walk in the Spirit — so as not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. It means this: living at all times in a constant state of submission and yieldedness to God's power! Living in a state of total surrender — giving up all rights to power and self. Becoming totally dependent on God to perform all things for you, and through you.

Be Ye Holy — Even As I Am Holy — by Faith Alone!

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