



The Good News

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What does it mean to be holy?

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“Holiness” in the religious community at-large is defined by a number of different criteria. For most, “holiness” is simply the state of “feeling holy” in whatever standard of faith to which they subscribe. However, in all the hundreds of places that holiness is mentioned, the Bible never suggests or implies that holiness is anything but a set, concrete standard of what God considers to be right. The relationship of righteousness (the requirements of pleasing God), holiness (the character with which God is pleased), and godliness (the earnest desire to please God), must all be understood by those who seek to know what it means to truly be holy. Consider the following four answers to the question “What does it mean to be holy?”

It means fulfilling a command – In **I Pet. 1:13-16** we are told: “*be holy as He is holy*”. It does not become any clearer than understanding that this is what God wants in the character of those who would seek to please Him. In **I Thess. 4:7** we read that the Christian is “called” to holiness through righteousness. The only means to be holy is to seek the standard by which God judges holy and unholy. While many in the world insist on believing that God does not hold anyone accountable to law, the Bible very expressly teaches that we will be judged by the “*perfect law of liberty*” (see **Jas. 2:12**).

It means a commitment must be made – In **Rom. 6:16-22**, Paul leaves no wiggle room in determining the object of our service on this earth. Either we serve sin and receive the wages of sin (death), or we serve righteousness and receive the free gift of God to those who seek to be holy (salvation). There is no middle ground, gray area, or straddling of fences. We either serve one or the other. It is in this text Paul makes it clear that what we manifest (our fruit) comes straight from the character that is

within. This is what leads us to salvation. However, the commitment must be made to serve either sin or righteousness.

It means my behavior must change – Holiness is not defined as a feeling or an intention. I can intend to do what God wants me to do my entire life and feel justified because of my good intentions, but this will in no way bring me any closer to truly being holy. If I am to truly seek to please God, I must develop a character that is trained in the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. Once trained, I must exhibit this character in my life by behaving in such a way that God will be pleased. In **Eph. 4:17-24** Paul makes the point that we are to put off the old man and the conduct that characterizes the sinful flesh and embrace the new man which was created according to God’s character and likeness.

It means I must make God and His Word holy in my mind – In **I Pet. 3:15** we are encouraged to “*sanctify the Lord Jesus*” in our hearts and to be ready to give a defense of the hope that is in us. Sanctify means to “set apart” and is synonymous with “make holy”. In other words, we are to make Jesus, and God, holy in our own minds and hearts along with the Word He has given us. In doing this we can enable ourselves to fulfill the command, make the commitment, and change our behavior to truly be holy.