

HOLINESS

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(Dictionary of Christian Spirituality. Glen Scorgie, General Editor. Zondervan. 2011)

Holiness describes the complete otherness of God's nature which elicits both fear and attraction from humans in their aspiration to and appropriation of that divine characteristic. Many other themes of Scripture represent an action of God toward people. While the atonement refers to God's work of satisfying the cost of human sin, mercy represents God's patience with offense, and justice engages God in dealing with disparity, holiness is innate to the nature of God. Deep consciousness of this ineffable divinity at once motivates and fulfills the human longing for wholeness in our spiritual yearning. In all of God's dealings with creation – human and otherwise – holiness becomes evident as a result of divine presence.

Two basic emphases accompany discussions: the condition of being holy (holiness) and the process of becoming holy (sanctification). Whether stated or implicit, holiness drives any pursuit of spirituality in remediating the deficiency that is evident in humanity because of estrangement from God. Holiness is often narrowly represented as purity. Although pure motive and pure living are significant parts of a proper understanding of holiness, they are not a complete description.

Proximity - God's presence is evident in each case where holiness is described. God's nature never fails to affect that which is in proximity. In this way God's holiness sustains all that is created. Willful sin caused estrangement with the resulting absence of holiness. By a decision of the will, humans may also experience proximity to God through Jesus with the resulting transformation into being holy as God is holy.

Relational - The pursuit of holiness is not behavioral or propositional only. Some have attempted to codify holiness in rules or doctrines. This effort is inconsistent with the relational nature that proceeds from the character of God in love. Further, the transcendence and mystery of God's nature leaves the constraint of doctrines wanting. While holiness results in behavior that is different from a life that is not reconciled to God, behaviors are not the object of pursuit but the evidence.

Transformation - God is wholly other. The deep longing of every person to be holy is met with fear in the presence of such otherness. The effect of God's presence is to transform people, places, or objects in becoming other than their natural state or condition. God makes all things that are in relationship with him to be other as well. They are transformed and thus become separate or sanctified in the likeness of God and for God's purposes.

Engagement - Though by nature holiness is separate or other, it also is engaged with what is not holy. Motivated by love, God's nature compels engagement in redemptive efforts. Anything in proximity to God that is transformed to reflect his nature and purposes will also be engaged in God's restorative priority.

Integration - God's nature appropriated by the Holy Spirit to the life of a willing person transforms it wholly – not merely the spiritual dimension, or the social, but also the psychological, physical, and intellectual dimensions. Not absolute perfection, but a purposeful perfecting of God's original image in a person. It is God who makes one holy by influencing the life of a person expressing faith in Christ to be made whole again in healing the sickness that disintegrated or marred the image once imprinted upon humanity.

Allowing God to be near by surrendering selfish independence results in:

Our nature being transformed to become holy as God is holy;

Our priorities being reordered to become God's priorities.

Personal nature flows into social responsibility that reflects both the nature of Christ and the salvific priority of God in the world. Conversely, social relationships form the personal nature of an individual thereby framing the assertion by John Wesley that there is no personal holiness without social holiness

The archetype of this restored condition is the person of Jesus Christ. Hence the essence of holiness is Christ-likeness and the pursuit of holiness is reflecting Christ.

Further Reading: M. Lodahl & T. Oord, *Relational Holiness*, (2005); K. Mannoia & D. Thorsen, *The Holiness Manifesto*, (2008).

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