

Be Ye Holy for I am Holy

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer
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Now, the Apostle here exhorts us. I like, exhort, better than command, though it is a command. He here exhorts us to holiness of life, and he bases his exhortation upon two great facts. One is the character of God, and the other, the command of God. He says simply that God's children ought to be holy because He is holy. That's the character of God. Then he says God's children ought to be holy because he commanded them to receive this in the Spirit, which you could not now understand or receive, things being what they are.

Now, that's a paraphrase of what our Lord said, certainly, but it's a fair statement of the meaning of His words. And now Peter comes along in obedience to and in line with these teachings of our Savior, and among other things, he commands us to be holy. And because this is an apostolic injunction, we who claim to be apostolic Christians dare not ignore it.

And when I use the word, dare not, here, I do not mean that I forbid it. How could I forbid you to do anything? I do not mean the Church forbids it. How could this Church forbid anybody to do anything and make it stick? I only mean that morally we do not dare ignore this commandment, be ye holy.

We have to deal with it some way or other. We dare not ignore it. Ignoring it is the way that it is dealt with by most Christians. We read it and then ignore it. But we dare not, and we dare not accept it as optional. It is not that we go to the Bible and say, now I am going to look this over, and if I like it, I'll buy it, in the language of the day. But if I don't, there's no harm done. This is not something optional which I may do or not do at my own choice.

This is an apostolic injunction to commandment, to holiness of life, and I dare not overlook it. Then it is not something which I can judge the wisdom of, or the appropriateness of, and then weigh it in my own balances and decide just how far it applies to me. It doesn't have to apply to me. I can walk out on it. God has given us all and each one the right to make our own choices. So we don't have to bow our neck to this yoke, and we don't have to apply it to ourselves. If we don't like it, we can turn our backs on it.

Once Jesus said to his disciples, except ye eat my body, my flesh, and drink my blood, there is no life in you. And they looked at each other and walked away from him. And He said, will you also go away? And Peter gave the answer that I must give this morning. Peter said, Lord, if we wanted to go away, where would we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Those were wise words indeed by the man of God.

So, I say that we do not need to listen to the apostolic injunction. We do not have to obey it. There's only one place where the Bible is, but there are a million places where it isn't. And you can always find a place where it isn't. There's only one kingdom of God, but

there are lots of other places. And if we don't like it, it's always possible for us to reject it.

But I say, Lord, how could we reject it? Where else would we go? If we refuse these words, where will we turn? If we turn away from Thy authoritative word, to whose authority can we turn? Eisenhower's? The Pope's? To where shall we turn? What great man, and I do not speak slightingly of these great men, but any great man in whatever field, could we turn to him? Who is he? He's a man with his breath in his nostrils. Would it be to some great school of learning? Could we go to the university down here on the midway and say, I'm looking for a professor to show me the way, to help me? He couldn't help you; he must be himself, helped.

So, I say, therefore, we dare not ignore this. And I have explained what I mean by dare not. We dare not accept it as optional, and we dare not judge of the wisdom of it and make our choice as to whether it's worthy of our obedience. To do so is to jeopardize our souls and to earn for ourselves severest judgment to come.

Now, I want to point out to you that the doctrine of holiness has been wounded in the house of its friends. Whenever Satan has reason to fear a truth very greatly, he counterfeits it. And wherever he can, puts it into such a bad light that the very persons who are most eager to obey it are frightened away from it.

I think it would not be hard to make a case for that statement and to prove it if I wanted to do it and show how he was afraid of the virgin birth, so he has done everything possible to reduce Jesus Christ into one more, being one more man. He was afraid of the bodily resurrection, so he has done everything he can do to take the weight and pressure off of the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. He will allow Jesus to rise from the dead in spirit, but he's afraid when we say he rose from the dead in person and in body.

He's afraid of the second coming of Christ, so he has done everything he can do to becloud the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, and so with every doctrine. The ones he fears the most are the ones he parodies, and pawns his parody off as the real thing, and frightens away the serious-minded saints.

Now in evangelical circles, the doctrine of holiness has been identified with a specific school of theology. Having their own terminology, and their own system of metaphysics, and their own phrases, they've copyrighted the term holiness and claimed it exclusively. And it has been thus betrayed by its friends. Because I hesitate to say that some who call themselves by the name of holiness have allowed the doctrine to harden into a theory which has become a hindrance to repentance. And they invoke this doctrine to cover up frivolity and covetousness.

I have had occasion to mingle somewhat with those who have taken out the copyright on the word holiness. And while I have found some good people among them, I have found just as many good people among the fundamentalists, and the Calvinists, and those who don't believe what they believe quite. So that they are what they are, obviously, in spite of their copyright doctrine, not because of it.

While there are few that are, I believe, worthy, I have found a great deal of frivolity carried on in the name of the deeper life, and a great deal of worldliness that has been sanctified, accepted, taken in, and given a place in the sanctuary. And the results, of course, have been that honest, serious persons have shied away from the whole thing.

Someone told me of hearing a man stand in a pulpit the other, some while back, and said, I was sanctified 15 years ago, and I want to tell you, my friends, that I have never sinned since. Now maybe he hasn't, but if he hasn't, he'd be the last one to know it. If he was a holy man, instead of a holiness man, he'd never have made a crack like that. Maybe he never sinned since. That could be possible, I suppose, theoretically. But he would not find it out. Other people might be saying it, but he would never have said it. He would rather have knelt and said, thou art in heaven, and I am on earth. Oh, God forgive my confusion of faith. He'd never have said, I haven't sinned in 15 years.

So that some serious-minded people have been driven away from the whole idea of holiness by those who have claimed it, and then have lived frivolous, worldly, and conceited lives. But we dare not be frightened away by this. We are under the holy authority of the apostolic seed.

We have been told by a holy man of God, and we have been ordered by God himself to be holy. And therefore, regardless of how badly wounded the doctrine of holiness has been, we must not let it die, and we must not assume that we have no moral obligation to this truth. The doctrine is highly important to God.

It must be highly important to God, because I have personally counted in an exhaustive concordance and have found that the word holiness occurs 650 times in the Bible, or the word holy, holiness. Then I have not counted in my, the King James, the other word sanctify and sanctified, which is the same word, exactly, only in our English different, so that the count would no doubt jump up nearer to a 1,000 than 650 times.

Now, this word holy is used to describe the character of angels, and of heaven itself, and even of God. It is written that the angels are holy, and those angels who look over the battlements to gaze down upon the scenes of men, mankind, are called the watchers and holy ones. And it's written that the angels are holy, and then heaven itself is said to be a holy place, and that no unclean thing can enter in. And God is described in the term by the adjective holy, Holy Ghost, and Holy Lord, and Lord God Almighty, Holy Lord God Almighty.

Those words are used of God throughout the Bible, showing that the highest adjective that can be ascribed to God, the highest attribute that can be ascribed to God is that of holiness, and that in a relative sense, the angels and heaven itself partake of the holiness of God. And then again, its absence is given as a reason for not seeing God. I know the grotesque interpretations that have been given to the text, without holiness no man shall see the Lord, but because some people, in order to support their patented theory, have misused the text, that is no reason for my throwing the text out.

Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; that does mean something, and what it means ought to disturb us until we have discovered what it means. And then having discovered what it means, we have met its conditions.

Briefly, I want to tell you the meaning of the word. In the Bible it means moral wholeness, actually means, kind. Holy, means kind, merciful, godly, pure, blameless. It means kind. It means merciful. It means godly. It means pure. And it means morally blameless. But in all this, it's never to be thought of in the negative--never. It's always to be thought of in a positive, white intensity of degree. For it is written that God is holy. It means that God is kind, merciful, pure, blameless, in a white, holy intensity of degree.

And when used of men, it means the same, certainly not the same degree as God, not absolute holiness, but it means an intensity of a degree of holiness that is not negative, but positive, and it means that it can be tested and can be trusted. A holy man can be trusted, and a holy man can be tested. Some people's piety will not stand up under tests. Some of us are afraid.

Once when God was taking Israel through a certain section, he went ahead of them and warned them. He said, now don't take them this way because there's a fight on over there, and they're so green that they'll run away if they see the fight. The Lord steered them around a battle, lest they all get excited and flee in disorder into the wilderness. He knew their weakness and steered them around it.

So, there are those of us who are holy, but we're afraid of the tests that will prove whether we're holy or not, and we can't trust ourselves. But a holy man can be trusted, and a holy man can be tested. And wherever there is a breakdown of holiness, there is a proof that there was never any real degree of holiness there in the first place.

Now, not only this moral wholeness, there is one great religious thinker who's just gone, a German, a Lutheran man, who's dealing with the question of holy, and the idea of the holy has greatly intrigued me, and I believe also instructed my heart.

And this man says that the word holy, as originally used in Hebrew, did not have, first of all, the moral connotation. That is, when it says that God was holy, it did not mean, first of all, that God was pure. That was taken for granted. It did mean that later. It did come to mean that, as I've explained. But that he says the root, original meaning of the word holy was something other than, something that lay beyond, something strange and mysterious and so different from, and awe-inspiring. And that is in the Word too. You'll find it there. So that when we talk about the holiness of God, we talk about something heavenly and awful and mysterious and fear inspiring.

Now, this is supreme when it comes to God, but it is also marked in men of God, deepened as men become more like God. This sense of the other world, this mysterious something that rests on men, that is a holiness.

Now, if they should have that and not be morally right, then I would say it was a counterfeit of the devil. But when they are morally right and are walking in all the holy ways of God, and then in addition to their good, righteous living, they also have this mysterious quality that they had come down from another world and carried upon them the fragrance of a kingdom that is supreme above the kingdoms of this world, then I'm ready to accept that as being of God. Moses had it when he came down from the

mount, you'll remember. He had been with God forty days and forty nights there in the wilderness.

And as the colored preacher said in that sing-song oratory that they love, he said, Moses went to nobody knows where Moses had gone. And Moses was away forty days and forty nights, and nobody knew where Moses was. And Moses came back and then everybody knew where Moses had been.

Now, that's what I mean. He would have been on the mountain, and nobody knew where he was. But when he came back, everybody knew where he had been. He came down with this heat lightning playing over his countenance, this strange something that you couldn't pin down or identify, but it was there.

Now, that mysterious quality there has all but forsaken the earth in our day. The philosopher I refer to that theologian had to invent a term for it, he called it the numinous. And that word numinous has now gotten into all the books. But he invented it to mean that overplus of something that is more than righteous, but is righteous in a fearful, awe-inspiring, wondrous, heavenly sense, and glowing with a mysterious fire.

Now, I say this latter quality has all but forsaken the earth. God has been reduced to our own terms. And we are now told to gossip the gospel and sell Jesus to the people. And it's been reduced, I say, to a place where men may be righteous. I don't say that they're not, but I say that we miss and lack that quality, that overtone of something.

Now, this mysterious fire was in the bush, you'll remember. Fire doesn't frighten people. A small fire doesn't frighten people. It's only when it gets out of control and your loved ones or other humans are there that it becomes a portentous and fearful thing. No one's afraid of fire.

And yet here was a man who knelt beside a bush where a small fire burned and hid his face, for he was afraid. And there was that quality that was mysterious. And later in the mountain yonder, I repeat, when, with the voice of the trumpet, Moses shook until he said, I am fearfully afraid and quake.

And then that Shekinah that was over Israel, of all the figures in the Bible—and this is more than a figure, it's a symbol—of all the symbols in the Bible, I know no other that is so satisfying, so deeply satisfying as the symbol of the Shekinah. I use it often and often refer to it in my preaching and praying because it to me sums up wonderfully this holiness of God present.

There was that cloud hanging over by day, plainly visible, that mysterious cloud not made of water vapor, not a shadow cast somewhere, but a mysterious cloud. And at night, as the light of the day faded away, that cloud began to turn incandescent. And when the darkness had settled, it shone brightly like one vast light hanging over Israel.

So, every tent in that diamond-shaped tent city was lighted fully by the strange Shekinah that hung over. Nobody had built that fire, nobody put any fuel to that fire, nobody stoked that fire, nobody controlled that fire. It was God bringing himself within the confines of the human eye and shining down.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have lived then, to take your little baby by the hand when he was big enough to toddle, and say, I want to show you something wonderful, I want to show you something, look, look at that, and have the little lisping fellow say, what is it, mama? And you say, that's God, that's God.

Moses, our leader, saw that fire in the bush. Later Moses, our leader, saw that fire in the mountain. And now since we've left Egypt, that fire has hovered over us now all these years, maybe ten, maybe twenty, maybe thirty years, that fire is there.

But how do you know there's a God, mama? There's the fire. There's that mysterious over-plus from another world that has no connotation of morality, particularly, that's all taken for granted. It has only a connotation of the reverent and solemn and awe-inspiring and terribly different and wonderful and glorious.

And that was there, and then it was in the temple when they had built the temple, when Moses had built the tabernacle and when the temple was built, and then when the fire came down at Pentecost, it was that same fire again, and it sat upon each of them, and it rested down upon them with an invisible visibility, a visibility that was yet not exactly visible and certainly would never have photographed if they'd have had cameras, but it was there. It was a sense of being in or surrounded by this numinous, this holy element. And so strong was it that in Jerusalem the Christians went on Solomon's porch, and the people stood off from them as wolves, they say, stand off from a bright campfire, and looked on and it said they durst not join themselves to them.

Why? Had there been any prohibition? Was any man standing there with a sword saying, don't come near? No, they were praying people, humble, harmless, undefiled, clean, and completely harmless as far as the crowd was concerned, but the crowd couldn't come. They didn't rush in and trample the place down. They stood away from Solomon's porch because there was a holy quality there, they couldn't come up to.

And when Paul was explaining the mysterious fullness of the Holy Ghost in the book of Corinthians, he said, some of you, when you meet together and you obey God and God speaks, there is such a sense of God's presence there that the unbelievers fall on their faces and go out and report that God is with you indeed.

Now, that emanates from God, as all holiness emanates from God. My dear people, if we are what we ought to be, if we may see to it that our conversation, the whole sum of our lives, beginning with the inner life, becomes becoming more and more God-like and Christ-like, less and less like the things of this world, more and more like the things of the world above, I believe there will be upon us something of that.

I have met a few that have had this on them, and I don't hesitate at all to say to you that it has meant more to me than all the teaching I've ever had, all the Bible teachers that I ever have thought, and I thank God for every one of them. I stand indebted deeply to every Bible teacher down the years. But they did little but instruct my head, but the brethren who had this strange thing on them instructed my heart.

Some weeks ago, there appeared an article called "The War of the Ages" in the "Alliance Weekly." It was sent to me by the widow of my friend Emil Sywulka of East Africa. I knew Emil Sywulka when I was a young fellow. I have mentioned it before, certainly in my preaching I have not overlooked it. But I knew him, a long, lean, rather homely, serious-faced man who smiled infrequently, but when he did it was like the coming out of the sun after a storm. He had this in marked degree. He had it so completely that he was the dean of his field.

Over in Keswick I talked to three missionaries. Day after day I talked to them, as we ate and as we walked together and as we had our services together. These missionaries knew this man, and they told me of this serious-minded, long, lean fellow with the unpronounceable name, who walked with God so perfectly that there was something on him. They said there was something different, Mr. Tozer, and now say what you will, this man had something different. Personality? Absolutely none. He was without it.

But now in his seventies, on an old motorcycle, he's chugging over the rough way, and suddenly the motorcycle goes out of control and Emil falls beside the way, and they picked him up. He died shortly after of a heart attack. It wasn't an accident, but he died in the harness, died with his face toward the light. He took with him that old, tired body, I suppose, and they laid that away in Africa, and his spirit went to God.

But he left behind him a sense of the numinous, a sense of this mysterious, awe-inspiring presence that comes down on some people and means more than all the glib tongues in the world. I've gotten so I'm afraid of a glib tongue.

I'm afraid of the man that can always flip his Bible and answer your question. He knows too much. I'm afraid of the man who has thought it all out and has a dozen epigrams that he can quote; that he's thought up over the years and settled everything spiritual. Brethren, I'm afraid of him.

There is a silence sometimes that's more eloquent than all human speech. Sometimes there is a confusion of face and a bowing of the head that says more divine truth than the most eloquent preacher can say. And so, he says, Be holy, as and for I am holy.

First bring your life morally into line that God may make you holy, and then bring your spiritual life into line that God may settle upon you with the Holy Ghost, that there may be upon you that quality of the wonderful and the mysterious and the divine. You don't cultivate it, and you don't even know it, but it's there. And it's this that the Church of our day lacks.

Oh, that we might seek to cultivate the knowledge of God, that we might seek to become more God-like, and then without cultivation and without seeking, there would come upon us this that gives our witness meaning, this sweet, radiant fragrance.

Haven't you noticed that in some churches it's felt very strongly? But you say you don't go by your feelings, do you, Mr. Tozer? Sure. Quote me on that if it's worth it. Feeling is an organ of knowledge, and I don't hesitate to say so. Feeling is an organ of knowledge.

Define love for me. You can't define love. You can describe it, but you can't define it. And a person or a group of people or a race that had never heard of the word love and didn't know what it was, all of the dictionaries in the world couldn't teach them what love is. But just let some old freckled-faced boy with big ears somewhere and his hair a bit awry, let the feeling of it come to his heart, and he knows more than all the dictionaries can tell you. Love can only be understood by feeling it.

And so, it is with the warmth of the sun. Tell a man who had no feeling it's a warm day, he wouldn't know what you meant. But take a man who is normal out into the warm sun, and he'll soon know it's warm. You can know more about the sun by feeling than you can by description.

And so, there are qualities in God that can never be explained to the intellect but can be known by the heart. So, I do not hesitate to say that I do believe in feeling. I believe in what the old writers called religious affections. And we have so little of it because we've not laid the groundwork for it. The groundwork of repentance, and obedience, and separation, and holy living.

And if we lay the groundwork, thus you will find there will come to us this sense of the otherworldly, this presence of God that will be wonderfully, wonderfully real. So that when sometimes as a religious prayer cliché, we pray the little expression, O God, draw feelingly near, we're not too far off.

Some would wave us off on that and say you're off the track. I'm not sure. O God, come feelingly near. He came feelingly near to Moses at the bush. He came feelingly near to Moses on the mount. He came feelingly near to the church at Pentecost. And He came feelingly near to that Corinthian church when the unbelievers went away awestruck to say God's in the middle of them. God is with them. Oh, how we need this in our day.

Let's pray. O Son of God, Most Holy, that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. O Holy Thing, born, crucified, risen, enthroned, we beseech Thee that Thou would rebuke all the unholiness in us that would grieve Thy Spirit from us.

Rebuke, we beseech thee, all of the flesh and of the mind that is even negative, and that thus hinders the operation of the Spirit. Oh, we beseech Thee, let the Shekinah be seen today. Let it hover over each habitation, showing that the Lord is nigh.

We beseech thee, may we go away from this place, serious, if need be; perturbed, bothered, until we have done something with this injunction, and have sought to be holy as Thou art holy, and have tried by surrender and faith to purify our hearts unto obedience. Grant, we beseech Thee, to answer all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.