

Virtue, Vice and the nature of God

Having considered that the purpose of God in salvation and the process of **practical sanctification** is for God to **conform us into His image** by the work of the Holy Spirit, it is important to understand how the image of God and His character is related to how we live our Christian lives in practice, and how that relates to both God's character and ours. In becoming like God, we are taking on His character and "*participating in the divine nature*" and growing evermore in His likeness by the power of the Holy Spirit in us. Let us now consider the important truth that **God is Holy**. That is, He is **set apart** from all other created beings in **moral purity, perfection and self-existence** as the Holy Creator God. The holiness of God is one of God's attributes, and one in fact that characterizes all of God's other attributes. Therefore God's love and mercy are holy, as is His wisdom and justice are holy, that is, they possess a **divine quality** that is **infinite, perfect and complete** in such a way as to be set apart from other kinds of love and mercy, wisdom and justice in the creation. God's majesty and beauty are holy majesty and holy beauty being infinitely and perfectly majestic and beautiful beyond all other things that exist. Moreover, all of God's attributes are **set apart from evil** in every way because of the moral purity of God's holiness. All of God's attributes are completely **pure and untainted** by any kind of impurity of evil. In fact **God's own holiness is the antithesis of evil** and the very standard by which evil is seen and understood. Therefore God hates what is evil and loves what is good, and this is a major theme in the Bible and it is major theme in God's relations with people and His purposes throughout redemptive history. Kevin DeYoung comments... "*There is no question that holiness is one of the central themes in the Bible. The word "holy" occurs more than 600 times in the Bible, more than 700 when you include derivative words like holiness, sanctify and sanctification. You can't make sense of the Bible without understanding that God is holy and that this holy God is intent on making a holy people to live with Him forever in a holy heaven. The whole system of Israel's worship revolves around holiness. That's why you have a holy people (the priests), with holy clothes, in a holy land (Canaan), at a holy place (tabernacle/temple), using holy utensils and holy objects, celebrating holy days, living by a holy law, so that they might be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" Make no mistake about it God is holy and He expects His people to be holy as well. This He accomplishes through the holy work of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit within us!

Now this **holiness of God** has everything to do with our **image bearing** and our **Christian practice** as God seeks to **sanctify us** (make us holy) in our character and in our practice, just like He is and just like He does. Therefore He commands us to be holy, just like Him. He calls us to live a holy life and emulate His holy character. This then becomes a major theme in the New Testament as it was given to us by our Lord Jesus and the Apostles.

Matt 5:48 - 48 "Therefore **you are to be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect. NASB

2 Corinthians 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. NASB

Titus 2:11-14 - 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 **instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly** in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and **purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds**. NASB

1 Peter 1:14-16 - 14 As obedient children, **do not be conformed to the former lusts** which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, **be holy yourselves also in all your behavior**; 16 because it is written, **"You shall be holy, for I am holy."** NASB

Now because God is holy, perfectly pure and undefiled in every part of His character, He expects holiness from us, His holy people who He has set apart to reflect His character and bear His image. Jerry Bridges comments; *“God rightfully demands perfect holiness in all of His moral creatures. It cannot be otherwise. He cannot possibly ignore or approve of any evil committed. He cannot for one minute relax His standard of holiness. Rather He must say as He does say, “So be holy in all you do”...1 Pet 1:15...”*

It is important to remember the **glory of the Gospel** when we start to focus on **God’s expectation of our personal holiness**. We have a **positional righteousness** or **positional sanctification** before God on the basis of Christ’s life and death (discussed in detail below). We cannot forget that **we have been cleansed** once for all by the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross, and His perfect life of righteousness has been imputed to us by faith. We stand in the spotless righteousness of Christ, God’s wrath toward our sin has been appeased (**propitiation**), our guilt has been removed (**expiation**), Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to us by faith (**imputation**), and all of this has brought about **reconciliation** with God. God has now **declared us righteous** in His sight on the basis of Christ’s perfect life and death. This is called **Justification by Faith**. We are now in a state of grace having all our sins forgiven and possessing the hope of eternal life. If you have been born again by the Holy Spirit and believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a result, all of these wonderful blessings from God are surely yours! But now that we have been saved by the grace of God through faith in our Lord Jesus alone, **God expects us to live in holiness** and prove the reality of our faith and love toward Him in obedience to His holy Word! At the same time that our sins are forgiven, God is commanding us to forsake our sins and behave in a holy way.

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But **what does holiness look like in our lives?** In short, it is conformity to God’s holy character and also His practice. We are to be holy in our hearts and that in turn produces holiness in our practice, our daily lives. Therefore **God’s Word is very specific** about what **holiness** actually looks like both in our heart and in our life. The Word is filled with instruction and exhortations toward this end. The New Testament therefore calls us to **“put off”** the evil deeds of the flesh, the old nature of sin which still lives in us, and to **“put on”** Christ, or the new nature which has been re-created in us at regeneration.

Romans 13:12-14 - 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. **Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light**. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 **But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts**. NASB

Colossians 3:8-11 - 8 But now you also, **put them all aside**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, **since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices**, 10 **and have put on the new self** who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him NASB