

God's Call to Holy Living

by John Arthur Brubaker

Those who have been given a new life in Christ are expected to exhibit godlike attitudes and behaviors that reflect God's nature and bring glory to God's name. The God who has saved us has also called us to holy living (2 Timothy 1:9). We are to be holy just as God himself is holy (1 Peter 1:15).

Holiness as Christlikeness

Holy living is essentially Christlikeness. It is a life patterned after the kind of life Jesus taught and modeled. It is a life based on kingdom-of-God values. It is demonstrated in a loving, trusting relationship with God that is expressed in obedience to God's rule and an unreserved commitment to God's will. It is reflected in a set of values that are radically different from those of this world.

Scriptures abound that call us to renounce an unholy lifestyle. We are admonished: "put to death...whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Colossians 3:5); "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God" (Romans 6:18); "be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15); "to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its sinful desires...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). Additionally we are urged to seek after holiness (Hebrews 12:14); and to live a life worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1).

The holy life to which we have been called is characterized by a strong aversion to sin in any of its forms, and an equally strong desire to portray the joy, peace and basic goodness

that are outcomes of the Spirit's presence in the life of a yielded believer (Galatians 5:22). The holy life is a life committed to truth and truthfulness; to righteousness and a high moral standard. God's holiness shines through our lives when we purpose to love as God loves, without reservation, and offer forgiveness and grace to those who may have wronged us. God's holiness is on display in us when we seek justice for the oppressed and show compassion for those who are suffering.

God's Provision

God's grace provides for more than forgiveness of sin. It also promises a dynamic change of heart and a new life in Christ. The holy living to which God calls us becomes a reality for the believer through the transformational power of the Holy Spirit. To begin, as new believers we receive the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the process become new beings, babes in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Further, in our Christian walk we are strengthened with power through the Spirit in our inner being (Ephesians 3:16). The Holy Spirit within us gives us freedom from sin's control and fortitude to resist temptation.

Here is another way to look at it. Holiness of heart and life is a provision of God's grace. Those who respond in faith to Jesus Christ are made holy or righteous by his atoning death. This positional holiness, rightly understood, leads the believer into a life of holiness or holy living. The provision of Christ's death on the cross includes both pardon and power – pardon for sins committed; and power to

overcome the debilitating effects of sin's deadly grip on our lives.

This holiness of heart and life becomes a reality as a child of God surrenders the egotistical self, which is naturally bent toward evil, to the authority of God; submits the self will to the holy will of God; and receives the cleansing, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in a deeper, fuller, more meaningful way.

A lifestyle of holiness is sustained by a ready assent to God's will and way; by the consistent practice of essential spiritual disciplines; and by an open responsiveness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In the fullness of the Spirit a believer committed to a holy life will realize a liberating release from sin's control. Yet a relapse into sinful behavior remains a possibility, and too often a reality. Thus confession of sin which opens the way to God's forgiveness and restoration is an integral component of a holy life (1 John 1:9).

Good News

The call to holy living is, in truth, God's invitation to a life of wholeness. Beyond the forgiveness for sins which frees us from guilt and condemnation, there is the prospect of deliverance which frees us from the stranglehold of addictive behavior and brings healing to the deep, inner wounds of an abusive past. It also offers strength to withstand the lure of our secular culture. Many defeated and discouraged believers, like the Apostle Paul, have longed for a release from ingrained habits and destructive behaviors; behaviors which constantly thwart their aspirations to live a fulfilling and effective Christian life. The answer lies in the deliverance available through Jesus Christ and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit at work in the one committed to holy living.

The invitation to holy living is most certainly good news. It is an essential element of the gospel message to those struggling with their sinfulness and to a world system that has lost its way morally and ethically. Unfortunately the church, too often, seems to have muted this aspect of the Gospel or has presented it in ways that have made it either threatening or unappealing. The result in our day is an anemic Christianity in which many of those who profess a faith in Christ give scant evidence of a transformed life. When the values and lifestyles of those who claim to be born again Christians are barely distinguishable from those of their unbelieving neighbors, something is seriously wrong. This casual attitude toward the call to holy living undermines the spiritual vitality of the church and seriously compromises its witness.

God's call to holy living is clear and compelling. It is a provision of the cross and possible in the power of the Spirit. It is a way of life that is freeing, fruitful and fulfilling. It is a convincing witness to a skeptical world. May we then as God's holy people embrace the call to a holy life.