



Unit 6—Holiness: It's Nature

- ... at the core of my identity. I am a child of God and therefore a member of God's family. I am defined by my relationship to God and my relationship to my brothers and sisters in Christ. There is nothing more fundamental to our make-up than belonging to Christ and his people. And part of what it means to be a Christian is to bear our family likeness: we should resemble our heavenly Father.... holiness is our design and destiny ... (40)
- **God is righteous and holy**—when the Bible consistently describes God as 'holy', it is saying that he is 'other' than us; he is distinct and separate.... when we say, —God is holy, we are simply saying, —God is God.... The word 'holiness' also carries the idea of completeness and perfection.... He is totally pure and morally perfect; he enjoys perfect freedom from evil of any kind. Furthermore, God is entirely consistent: he can only act in a manner consistent with his own character. Unlike us, he will never behave 'out of character'. Therefore everything he does is good and pure; his holiness means that it can be no other way. This is what is meant by 'righteous': God always does what is 'right'; he always acts 'rightly'.... God alone is the benchmark for that which is good and right and pure—we can only know what these words mean by reference to God.... it may help us to keep in mind the phrase 'unlike us' when thinking about God. (41-43)
- **God is consuming fire**—in Hebrews 12, the writer compares and contrasts two mountains: Sinai and Zion. Sinai was the mountain on which God gave his Law to Israel. The event was characterized by fire, darkness, gloom and a whirlwind.... in the New Covenant, our focus is not on Sinai with all of its terror and awe-inducing effects. Rather, our mountain is *Zion*: a place of grace and forgiveness. Zion was known as 'God's mountain', the place where he graciously met with his people.... we are exhorted to draw near to a God of grace, and yet that same God is a consuming fire.... Even though the place we meet him is where Jesus died at Calvary, we should take the shoes off our feet for we are on holy ground. For it is there that we see God in all of his terrifying, consuming holiness. It is at the cross that we learn just how incompatible sin is with God's character.... For it is supremely at the cross that we see God acting consistently with his character. On the cross, wrath and mercy meet.... It is at the cross, therefore, that we see the height of God's holiness; we see God in all his 'God-ness'. (44-45)
- **Holiness versus moralism**—any consideration of holiness has to begin at the cross. Without it, any change in our behavior will be mere moralism—seeking to change ourselves by ourselves, to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.... As his character captivates our hearts, change will be the natural overflow. Having said this, we must equally emphasize the fact that this holy God *does* want us to change. He wants us to live different and distinct lives.... the gospel avoids moralism by creating a dynamic of 'not that, but this'... Holiness is not merely the absence of the wrong; it is also the glorious presence of the good.... This, then, is one of the fundamental differences between moralism and holiness. Consider 4:28: 'Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.' **Moralism** says, 'Don't steal, and get a job so you provide for yourself.' Grace-given **holiness** says, 'Don't steal, and get a job so that you can be generous with others when they are in need.' Thus holiness does not intimidate people by its severity, but it compels us because its fruit is so attractive. The fruit of transformed relationships should make others want to find out about the tree from which it comes. That 'tree' of course is Calvary, because holiness is the fruit of the gospel! ... Holiness is not merely a choice we make; it is a destiny we fulfill. What better encouragement could we have?
- **Created in the image of a holy God**—Paul has spoken in Ephesians 2:13–17 of a new humanity. God has created this new humanity with the intention that it will image him in righteousness and truth. Holiness is not *less* than an individual Christian living in a certain way, but it is far more. Holiness is a community project because it is *together* that we image God.... Paul uses the language of 'put off' and 'put on'. Holiness is not only a disposition (what we have been made to be); it is also a decision (what we choose to be).... Our old way of life was characterized by self-indulgence and self-obsession—it was all about satisfying *my* desires.... May the vision of the high and holy one who inhabits eternity fill our minds and hearts, so that our desire for our own glory is blown away by the desire for God's glory.... that we may be intoxicated with the Lord Jesus Christ (47).

Question—How has this unit given you a fresh understanding of God's holiness? How do you struggle between living a holy versus a moral life? How does knowing that you have been created in the image of a holy God make a difference in how you live?

Unit 7—Holiness: Relationships

- It is by faith that we come into relationship with the God who is the creator, sustainer, redeemer, and judge of all things. And it is out of that *relationship*—rather than an abstract concept of *duty*—that we come to obey God. That is, if we know the holy God properly, we will want to please him and be holy like him. It is not that we *have* to imitate God; it is that we *get* to imitate him.... The only fitting response to God's deep and passionate love for us as his children is to imitate him in holiness. Again, contrary to many of our instincts, holiness does not rely on a



code to which we conform, nor on a rulebook with which we comply. Rather, it relies on a person we love, who fills us with awe, and whom we long to resemble. (48)

- John Stott puts it, —Holiness is not a mystical condition experienced in relation to God but in isolation from human beings. You cannot be good in a vacuum, but only in the real world of people.” ... holiness flows out of our identity as members of God’s new humanity — a people —created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. It is this new identity which makes these imperatives possible. In other words, these are not mere rules to obey; they are the distinctive characteristics of those who are *‘hardwired for holiness’*. (49)
- In Ephesians 4:25–5:2, Paul lists six examples of how holiness expresses itself. All of them are relational: (1) Not lies, but truth (cf. Eph. 4:5); (2) Not fury, but righteousness (cf. Eph. 4:26-27); (3) Not theft, but generosity (cf. Eph. 4:28); (4) Not conceit, but concern (cf. Eph. 4:29-30); (5) Not hardheartedness, but forgiveness (cf. Eph. 4:31-32); (6) Not achievement, but imitation (cf. Eph. 5:1-2).

Question—What are the two most challenging expressions of holiness from the above list? Share how your struggle in these two areas reveals your deep sin against God and, as a result, causes you to reflect the world and Satan?

Unit 8—Holiness: Conversations

- It is easy to sin through speech because it takes so little preparation.... It is very difficult, therefore, to produce ‘holy speech’ in a counterfeit way.... It is an excellent example of where holiness must be the fruit of the gospel which is nurtured by our relationship with God. (54).
- **The affections & power in holiness**—Holiness is about the affections; so too is sin. Holiness flows out of love for God; sin flows out of love for self. Holiness arises from loving God with your heart, soul, mind and strength, which inevitably reveals itself in loving your neighbor as yourself. Holiness is about delighting in God and living in a manner that pleases and delights him in return.... As we come to a clear appreciation of God’s grace, in our heads and our hearts, we might pray that he bring our affections around to desiring and delighting in holiness. For if we are ‘hardwired for holiness’, then it should be a joy for us to grow in holiness. In contrast, holiness becomes a struggle for us when we forget Christ — when we forget what he has done for us and the new identity we have in him. True holiness is the first casualty when someone or something other than God steals our affection.
- Community of darkness vs. community of light (Eph. 5:8)—For our corporate holiness is intended to expose the darkness (cf. Eph. 5:13-14), miraculously transforming it into light. In other words, holiness is God’s evangelism strategy: people are converted as Christ, through the holy lives of his people, shines on sinners. We need to dispel the idea of holiness as a fragile, tender thing. The incarnation should teach us that holiness is greater than this: God became man without compromising his holiness in any way.... So holiness is not like a white suit or dress that can easily become stained by any dirt it comes into contact with. Rather, it is a bright light with the capacity to dispel any darkness around it. (55-56)
- **Holy, light-filled speech**—“Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place” (5:4); “it is shameful even to speak of the things that [the dis-community of darkness] do in secret” (5:12).... We might suggest two reasons that Paul is so emphatic and absolutist here: one is a pragmatic deduction, the other a clear principle: (1) Acceptability—through humor can undermine truth and undercut our sin which God finds unacceptable and (2) Judgment—final judgment before a Holy God.

Question—How does your tongue reveal your sinful heart? Have you considered holiness as being associated with the fruit of your affections for God versus your affections for sin? How do you need to grow regarding ‘holy, light-filled speech?’

Unit 9—Holiness: Thankfulness

- the holiness of our life together should demonstrate to the world what it means to be human.... our *corporate* holiness is more glorious than my own personal holiness: God is not just transforming individuals, but has created a new humanity.... as we begin to imitate God’s holiness, we become a message of both judgment and hope (61).
- And it is gratitude which should characterize our speech in the community of light: ‘Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.’ (Ephesians 5:4).... there is a good reason why holiness is typified by thanksgiving: it is the antidote to **idolatry** and to **greed**. (62)
- **Idolatry**—Fundamentally, the misuse of God’s gifts is self-worship. For by detaching the gift from the giver, I come to view it as something there to serve and satisfy *me*. It becomes something I ‘own’, and I can demand of it what I want: I am the god; it is my slave. It owes me whatever I think it owes me. (62)
- **Greed**—Greed is always opposed to thankfulness. For a greedy person is someone who is never satisfied, who always wants more.... But gratitude is a wonderful way to dispel greed, for it shifts the focus away from what I do *not* have, and onto God and what he has already graciously provided for me. (62-63)

Question—How does your grumbling and ingratitude reveal your idolatry and greed?