

## HOLINESS

For *Christians* the meaning of ‘holiness’ is determined by the *Christian* God. This is the Lord whose story, told in *Holy* Scripture, is summed up in His Name, ‘the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’. This God of grace liberated His people Israel from slavery and freely bound Himself to them by covenant in order that through them He might liberate and *sanctify* all humankind and all creation. Yet He was the *Holy* One, ‘separate’ from sin and sinners, and so had elected Israel to be a *holy* community, reflecting His *holiness*. He therefore spelled out for them in Torah the obligations of His covenant, instructing them how they must live, and appointed priests to offer sacrifices of atonement for them. Because of their perpetual sin and idolatry and social injustice, corporate and personal, they were eventually exiled from the land He had given them, but the Lord remained faithful to them in steadfast covenant love, and brought them back. He thus prepared the way to become one of them in Jesus of Nazareth, the *embodiment* of the *new* covenant, through which their inner hearts would be *purified*.

When the Word or Son of God was made flesh, united to all humankind as Jesus, He *sanctified* our human nature in His Incarnation. He continued to *sanctify* human living by His obedience in the power of the *Holy* Spirit. The inner secret of His *holy* life was His loving relationship with His Father in the Spirit. In the Father’s heart then, revealed in Jesus, we see that the eternal *holiness* of God is not just to be seen negatively as ‘separation’, but positively as *love*. ‘God is love’, a Tri-personal *koinonia* of interpersonal perfect love. *Holiness is pure and perfect love*. The self-sacrificing, *holy* life of Jesus led all the Way to the cross, where the old dying adamic humanity, having been *sanctified* in His self-less and sinless life, was finally crucified, thus triumphing over the powers of evil. In His resurrection by the power of the *Holy* Spirit, He was vindicated by the Father, and He *perfected* in His own resurrection body the prototype of the new humanity, resplendent and glorious in *holiness*. Having ascended, He poured out at Pentecost upon the community of His followers that same Spirit by whose power He Himself had first walked by faith along the Way of *holiness*, the Way of the cross, so making it possible for us to follow Him.

Our *sanctification* as members of Christ takes place within the community of the new ‘Israel’, which is the Church, His Body. Although still in a fallen world and in fallen ‘flesh’, and *not yet* in the resurrection body, by the Spirit we are *already* united to Christ in such a way as to share in his loving relationship with the Father. We are adopted into the loving *koinonia* which *is* the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christians then are those who are ‘born again’ into the family of God, a new birth celebrated in the sacrament of baptism. They share in His vindication: they are justified through faith. They are given to share in His *perfected*, *holy* humanity within the *koinonia* of the Church, celebrated and enacted in the sacrament of *Holy Communion*. For only within His *Holy* Church can *perfect love* be nurtured and flow outward to the world in mission and service. The initial *sanctification* of believers in regeneration produces an immediate effect on their thinking and willing and behaviour, so that they no longer deliberately disobey Him in outward act. By the poured-out Spirit, they have increasing victory in their thought-life over the remaining habitual pull to self-centred living and so,

through testing, they develop in *holy* character. They engage in mission, *embodying* the message of the love of Christ.

As they grow in maturity and self-understanding and *holy* character, and as they are nurtured within the fellowship of the Church, the community of *perfect love*, so they come to the point where they trust God to fill their hearts with His Spirit of love. From then on, as long as they continue to walk in the light, they are no longer divided in heart between love of God and love of the world and self, but serve him single-mindedly as the 'pure in heart' with 'perfect' (that is, whole-hearted) love. But although *already* they no longer have the '*mind-set* of the flesh', they are *not yet* in the resurrection body of the age to come, but in the cracked 'clay jars' of the mortal body. They still live as fallen creatures sharing in the natural, mortal, fallen flesh of a fallen world. Correspondingly, they still face temptation, they are still very conscious of how far they fall short, and they still must seek daily forgiveness for their failures and failings. But they look for the Day of His coming when in the power of the Spirit, Christ will offer up the Kingdom to the Father and God will be all in all. They look expectantly for the resurrection of the body, when they will be like Him. They await the final *perfecting* of the *holiness* of the people of God as all creation is redeemed and *sanctified*. Then indeed, in the new creation, the community of Christ will reflect fully the *holiness* of God, namely, the perfect interpersonal love of the *holy* community of the Triune Lord.

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