

Holiness in Postmodernity: Extracts

Holiness and the Five Calls of God

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Is the holiness message still relevant in a so-called postmodern age? Or in a *post*-postmodern age? I believe it is. Paradoxically however, the relevance of the holiness message for today becomes clearest when we first go back and look anew at what the Bible says about the holiness message, examining it in light of the questions and challenges of today.

The church has always been the most prophetic when it has rediscovered the relevance of the “eternal gospel” (Rev. 14:6) for a new age.¹ My thesis here is that the biblical message of holiness is pointedly and powerfully relevant to the world in which we live. But to understand God’s call to and provision for holiness, we must see it within the context of the *whole* call of God. What does it really mean, biblically, to speak of the whole gospel for the whole world? Too often we pull apart things that should be held together. The need for biblical comprehensiveness is especially important when it comes to the subject of holiness. Holiness *should* mean wholeness, the integrity of heart and life. Therefore we should pay close attention to the full scope of God’s call upon our lives, upon the church. This we will attempt to do. We want to see, for instance, how the call to salvation, the call to ministry, and the call to holiness all fit together as one story, making one picture.

I am structuring my presentation therefore around what I am calling *the five calls of God*. We will examine what the Bible says about God’s intent for humanity and for his creation. We are called to holiness. But that call is part of a larger intention of God to bring salvation in its fullness. We need to understand the *call to holiness*, and the *grace of holiness*, in the context of the full biblical witness of God’s intention for people, cultures, and in fact the whole creation.

We will examine these five calls of God more or less in the order in which they appear in the Bible—that is, in a history-of-redemption sequence. There is a story here. We can trace it through Scripture, and even up to today and into the future, postmodern or not. God is up to something, and he graciously calls us to be part of this great work. We are a called people. The final goal is “a new heaven and a new earth,” the kingdoms of this world becoming “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah” (Rev. 11:15). Then “every knee [shall] bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue . . . confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11).

If we are to play the role God intends in this great drama, we must be a holy people. In fact, God calls and invites us to share his nature and his holiness, for his own good pleasure and purposes.

What then are these five calls of God? And what do they have to do with holiness?

The five calls of God are the compound call of the Spirit. *By the Spirit of the living God*, Jesus-people today can:

—be filled with all the fullness of God in Christ, living holy, devout, pure, healing lives, being Jesus’ counterculture and contrast society in witness to the world.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Citations marked “ESV” are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Good News Publishers, 2001).

- exercise a beautiful and effective array of ministries and callings, according to the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit.
- be God’s kingdom people in the world, living in full allegiance to Jesus and his reign—Spirit-endowed coworkers for the kingdom of God.
- live as a faithful covenant people, building accountable community, growing up into Jesus Christ, embodying the spirit of God’s law in holy love.
- care for the garden, this good earth, God’s gift in trust to us, working in faith, hope, and confidence for the healing of all creation, being the leading edge among the nations for the care and feeding and eventual reconciliation of all things—things visible and invisible; things in heaven and on earth.²

This is what holiness—life in the Spirit in response to the fivefold call of God—means in a postmodern world and within earth’s diverse cultures. We must be a holy people. For God says, it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech. 4:6) that he fulfills his designs.

In faithful response to the fivefold call of God we learn more fully what the words mean: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

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² E.g., Eph. 1:10, 22; 3:9; Col. 1:16-20; Heb. 1:2-3.