

Righteousness And Holiness

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God's Righteousness and Holiness

Holiness is Different than Righteousness

Some distinctions between righteousness and holiness are basic. For instance, while righteousness is imputed to believers, holiness is demanded from believers. In fact, holiness is the only perfection of God that is required of believers as compared to God's holiness. Both testaments declare "Be holy because I am holy." Peter is quoting the Old Testament when he makes his statement (1 Peter 1:15, 16 from Leviticus 11:44), but the meaning is clear. We are required to be holy because God is holy. This is never said precisely the same way of righteousness.

Holiness is Applied Variously at Different Times

How can a person be holy? The answer to this lies in the meaning of the word. In Leviticus 11:44 the requirement for holiness is at the end of a passage dealing with correct eating habits, particularly with reference to insects and unclean animals. In the OT a person is holy by following God's program. While there may be nothing unrighteous about eating certain foods, when God requires such a restriction because of a particular program, the person who keeps the requirement is considered holy (though not necessarily inherently righteous, although righteous in obedience). Peter's argument is that Christians should live according to the change in program they have experienced. No longer, says he, are believers to live as previously (1 Peter 1:14), that is, the old program of law, but now are to conduct their lives according to the new program of grace. Furthermore, since God is holy, Christians are to be holy. This activity of holiness is based on a perfection of God. Obviously holiness is not limited to right actions, but to the entire way a person lives. Holiness is broader than righteousness, because it includes not only right living, but also a separated life style, including how believers show forth their live style to others.

Holiness Distinguishes Believers through Separation

What then is this perfection? The idea of holiness comes from the concept of separation. *God is separated from anything unlike Himself.* He is distinct and His programs are different than anything that we as human beings can devise. In the Old Testament this distinctness was applied by keeping His people Israel separate from the Gentiles. The reason they were not to eat with Gentiles, nor to eat the things gentiles ate, was so that they would not socialize with and ultimately mingle with the nations. God was keeping His messianic nation "holy," that is, distinct from the non-messianic nations.

Today Christians are to be holy in a different way than Israelites were under the old program. By accurately applying God's grace program to their lives, they show themselves to be living a distinctive life, a god-like life, distinct from the natural life that abounds around them. Believers are not to live as though they had no ability to live correctly, because they have entered a program of grace by which they may receive the power to live a distinct life. It is true that this life involves righteous living. But the thing that makes it holy is its distinctness from the way unbelievers live, not simply its righteous character. While unbelievers can live a *somewhat* righteous life, they can never live such a life according to the grace program of God, but only through self-effort, which produces self-righteousness.

Holiness is Limited to Believers

Although they are not righteous by imputation (justification), unbelievers can and do act righteously in specific and defined ways. Righteousness is simply the characteristic of acting in a right manner. But unbelievers *cannot* be holy, because even their righteous behavior is not because they are in obedience to God's program. When an unbeliever does a good work, though it may be exactly the same good work a

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believer does, it is impossible for that unbeliever to be considered holy. Such works are always with a motivation that is not based on Scripture or on God's character of holiness. Rather, such people act righteously for motives that do not honor God, but themselves.

A Christian can be holy, but a self-righteous Christian, though he might act righteously, cannot be holy any more than the unbeliever can, because he is not being righteous using the God-defined grace method. Being righteous in one's acts *is not* the issue. Being righteous in one's acts according to God's program *is* the issue, and when God's program is followed by the believer when he acts righteously, he is holy.

Ultimate Righteousness is not Attainable by Mankind

When the Bible says God is holy, it means that He is distinct from anything unlike Himself; but when it says He is righteous it means that He never commits errors or mistakes. This righteousness goes well beyond the fact that He does not sin. He always does everything right. When Jesus Christ was a man on the earth He was righteous not simply because He did not sin, but also because He made no errors in either moral or non-moral areas (which must have been a vexation to those around Him who made errors constantly.) When the Lord Jesus performed any act, He did it perfectly right, the first time and every time thereafter. He did not go through the long, laborious activity of learning to do right. He was righteous in His divine character from the beginning, and every act that He performed not only as a grown man, but as a child growing up, was consistent with this divine attribute. He was, and is, perfectly righteous in all His ways.

Christ, in His humanity as well as His deity, was perfectly holy. As the human Messiah of Israel, He followed God's pre-grace program perfectly, and with the correct attitudes and motivations. Having been born "under the law" the Lord kept the entire law it was intended to be kept, including all the requirements for holy living. It was in this sense that He fulfilled program of the law. In this sense, He, the Messiah, the perfect human being, was perfectly holy as well as being perfectly righteous.

Such a state of perfect righteous cannot be attained by man through actions, but must be imputed to unrighteous man by declaration

Justification and Sanctification

Justification by God (Positional)

Justification by God is by faith. It consists of God's declaring the individual unrighteous person to be righteous in His sight. That is, when a person believes the object of faith that God requires, God declares that person to be righteous. This is not to say that God makes the man righteous in man's sight or experience. Believers are still in a state of unrighteousness, and continue to be limited in their ability to act righteously.

Nevertheless, God views them righteous from His perspective, that is, a believer is declared righteous by God in Christ.

Romans 3:24-26 ...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 4:3-5 For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him

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who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...

Romans 4:19-25 And not being weak in his faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was empowered in his faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. ²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴ but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our trespasses, and was raised because of our justification.

Justification by Man (Functional)

One must not confuse functional righteousness with positional righteousness. The word “justification” is used of both, and both are “by faith,” but the contexts must be distinguished. In one, justification is limited to position because it is imputed to the believer, but in the other justification is associated with works, the practical outworking of the Christian life. Note the following passages where justification does not refer to God declaring man to be righteous (positional), but man is viewed righteous in his activity (functional).

Romans 2:13 (under the law) ...for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified...

Galatians 3:11 (under grace) But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for the just shall live by faith.

Galatians 5:4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

James 2:21-25 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?

Positional Sanctification

Positional sanctification takes place when God separates someone to Himself. One of the main methods of indicating positional sanctification in the Bible is by use of the word “saint.” In the Hebrew Bible the word “holy” occurs hundreds of times, sometimes referring to people when in the plural. Note the following representative uses:

Deuteronomy 33:3 And he said: Yahweh came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand *Came* a fiery law for them.

Job 5:1 Call out now; Is there anyone who will answer you? And to which of the holy ones (saints) will you turn?

Psalms 34:9 Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! *There is* no want to those who fear Him.

As in Job 5:1, each of these examples from the Hebrew Bible could have been translated “holy ones.” The word which is translated “saints” is from a Hebrew root (*qodesh*) that refers to being separated to God. They are viewed as separated out, even though they were not necessarily universally holy in their daily practice.

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In the New Testament, the word “saint” or “saints” occurs over 60 times. It is a noun use of the adjective “holy,” which comes from the same root as the word “sanctification,” again referring to separation.

Romans 8:27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

Romans 16:2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Ephesians 2:19 So then, you are no longer foreigners and non-citizens, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the family of God...

Hebrews 6:10 For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

As in the Hebrew Bible, the Greek New Testament uses the word “saints” indiscriminately of all believers. It is not a claim to holy living, but to a position that these believers hold in the mind of God.

The verb “sanctified” is also used of positional sanctification. This sanctification took place at the point of faith, and is a distinct feature of how God views believers, even those who are not always living as they should.

1 Corinthians 1:2 ...to the assembly of God which is in Corinth, *the* ones sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, together with all who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And some of you were these. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified by the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Functional Sanctification (holiness)

Functional sanctification takes place as an individual lives a life that is separated to God’s way of doing things. It is sometimes called “progressive sanctification.”

Romans 6:19 I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves *of* righteousness for holiness.

Some translations substitute “sanctification” for “holiness.” In either case, the point of the statement is that the believer is to present his members (viewed as the functions of the physical body) as separated unto the Lord.

Romans 6:22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, eternal life.

Again, the word translated “holiness” could be translated “sanctification.” The ultimate “fruit” (result) of having been set free from sin and having become slaves of God is sanctification (holiness). Note the change of program from being a slave of sin to having been set free from sin.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷ For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

Here sanctification is directly related to the righteousness of God’s program, versus the immorality of the program of the Gentiles. God has called the believer to be separated from the life of uncleanness.