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1961 General Conference Sermon

HOLINESS-GOD'S IMMUTABLE STANDARD

"Far I am the Lard your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. Far I am the Lard that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11: 4445).

An analysis of this dynamic topic grips you at once with the immensity of its potency.

These words are interlocked with a fraternal kinship. Their meaning and character are of such kindred quality that they hang together like links of an unbroken chain; yet, at the same time, each word is of such independent essence that it stands apart in its individual moral strength. Take any phrase out of its contemporary relationship, and you have a self-sustaining truth.

These ageless principles belong not only to time, but they literally emanate the elements of eternity.

The enormity of the text plus its extensive involvement necessitates a definition of each word.

STANDARD: An established measure of quality by which the accuracy of others may be determined; an accepted model for comparison; a basis for measurement; a high, recognized order of excellence.

IMMUTABLE: Not subject to change. It carries synonyms as: indestructible, imperishable, incorruptible, constant, immovable, deathless, unchanging.

God: To attempt to define God is but to underscore the futility of such a task. The only authority on this is the Bible itself.

From this source, we know that God is a spirit, He is infinite and eternal. He is unchangeable in His being, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Upholder of all things both visible and invisible.

We know that He is eternal and possesses such natural attributes as Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence; and such moral attributes as holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, mercy and love.

Beyond this, we can only stand with Moses in Horeb and inquire: "Who are you, God?" The answer comes back, "I am that I am."

This answer serves only to magnify the mystery and defy definition of His infinite being.

There is no scarcity of definitions of Holiness. Holiness is a state or quality of being free from sin. It is moral and spiritual purity. It is being set apart from a common to a sacred use. There is no word apart from God Himself that is so completely expressive, and so absolutely independent of all other words.

Most words need qualifying phrases or modifying adjectives to strengthen their meaning and color their image. But holiness needs no adjective, no props, no modifying phrases.

Holiness is the heart of God placed into the heart of man. Holiness describes BEING. It has to do with character. Holiness is God's answer to sin's curse; holiness is rectitude of character.

We are dealing with the standard of holiness. The standard of holiness is intrinsic in the character of God. Holiness is not an idea, formulated in experience by which we measure God. It is an ideal in human experience derived from the revelation which God has made of Himself to humanity.

Every true ideal of holiness attained in life is derived from divine revelation. Thus, God remains now and forevermore the ultimate standard of holiness.

This statement is not calculated to elevate the ideal to such dizzy heights that it is unattainable by mortal man, for hath God not said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." "Holiness in man, therefore, is approximation to the character of God" (Morgan).

The holiness of God is the standard of holiness for man. Holiness in man is right relationship to God making him a partaker of the very character of God.

Holiness is required of man, is attainable by man, is imputed to man, is enjoyed by man, is God in man. It is a personal experience of man resulting from fellowship with God.

To inquire of its origin is to roll back the accumulated ages and stand with God in the quietness of pre-creation's dawn.

Holiness was intrinsic in the being of God long before time was "formed in the womb of the forgotten past." In the opening sentence of revealed truth, we read: "In the beginning God". We may just as truly say: "In the beginning Holiness."

Standing at the door of all things that have beginnings, we have a holy God, acting in the person of a Holy Spirit, bent on a holy mission,

inspired by a holy desire and expressing this desire in the ultimate act of creation.

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," He said, ". . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him."

This basic image is moral and spiritual, and on this premise, we build our theological concept that man was created holy and capable of fellowship with God on terms of mutual holiness.

We are His offspring, bearing His image and likeness, and only in the amplification of this characteristic are we fulfilling our destined function.

It is true that sin invaded the sacred precincts of paradise, ending the age of innocence, marring the image of Adam, breaking his fellowship with God, and cursing his posterity forever.

But that tragic turn of events did not take God by surprise. It did not force Him into an emergency measure to salvage the remains of sin's merciless ravages. Before sin came, the scheme of redemption was culminated in the mind of Deity. Christ was as a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

To say that Christ came into the world only to save men from hell is to reduce the provisions of Calvary to the elementary level and offend the wisdom of God, limit the power of God, and discredit the resourcefulness of God.

The major motive that brought Christ into the world was to make men holy. This done, all other benefits flow like a thousand tributaries into the great river of holiness which runs at flood-stage from Genesis to Revelation, and flows on out into infinity.

God's standard of holiness as it relates to man is a positive provision, a present possibility, a divine directive, and a dynamic decree.

Holiness is the language of God, the language of the Bible. It is spoken by angels and understood by all of the Redeemed. Through it, the Holy Spirit translates the mysteries of the mind of God into the concepts of the common man.

Trace a river to its source, and you can determine the character of the stream and the kinds of fishes that live in its waters. Trace holiness to its source and you are convinced of its character. Holiness leads back to God, flows out from God; it is God's criterion for all men of all time. It maintains its immutability in a world of constant change. Its purity shines undimmed in a universe of vile corruption. Its quality remains untarnished in a land that is sogged with sordid sins.

To validate these claims, I invite you to walk with me through the gilded halls of Holy Writ, down the Highway of Holiness that runs from the divine source through every book, chapter, verse and line until the gates of the Holy City swing ajar.

Bishop Foster states that "Holiness breathes in the prophecy, thunders in the law, murmurs in the narrative, whispers in the promises, supplicates in the prayers, sparkles in the poetry, resounds in the songs, speaks in the types, glows in the imagery, voices in the language, and burns in the spirit of the whole scheme, from alpha to omega, from its beginning to its end."

Holiness - holiness needed; holiness required; holiness offered; holiness attainable. Holiness a present duty; a present privilege; a present enjoyment. These summarize the progress and completeness of its wondrous theme.

It is the truth glowing all over, webbing all through revelation; the glorious truth which sparkles and whispers, and sings and shouts in all its history, and biography, and poetry, and prophecy,

and precept, and promise, and prayer - the great central truth of the system.

The wonder is that all men do not see it and that any should rise up to question a truth so conspicuous, so glorious, so full of comfort.

The Bible says of God that He is the "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1: 17).

After those long years of moral decay when the old economy was turning to dust, tottering and stumbling in the fading light of its last days; as the creaking hinges of the years of its usefulness were slowly closing the door on a long and turbulent past, God spoke. Out of the darkness of the times, in the last book of the Old Testament, God spoke bringing the freshness of a new beginning and lit up the long night like the breaking of a new dawn: "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3: 6).

After 500 years of darkness, John the Baptist picks up the refrain, as if only a moment had passed. There is no change in God, no alteration of His standard of Holiness. In the New Testament, the candles of revelation become floodlights brighter than the noonday sun. It simply "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Listen to that fiery-souled holiness preacher, John, the forerunner of Christ. The Baptist claim him as the founder of their church, but he preached Holiness. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn

up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3: 11, 12).

Here is the standard of holiness at the door of the New Testament: the purging of the chaff from the wheat, not the separation of the tares from the wheat, but the chaff.

He is seen here cleansing the church of her impurities and raising a standard of purity in character and conduct for the Christian age.

Jesus Christ is identified with God in every act of creation and quality of being.

The Apostle Paul employs the identicallinguistic patterns used by the God of the Old Testament. In Hebrews 13: 8, he writes: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

In Genesis, Enoch walks with God. In Exodus, Moses stands on Holy Ground with the blazing bush aglow. In the book of Law, God's standard of holiness is inscribed on tablets of stone. This Magna Charta of moral statutes sets forth the demands of God and the rights of man for all time to come. No man or generation can escape this universal decree.

From Sinai to Calvary, there is no reprieve from that immortal decalogue. Every relationship between God and man is measured and judged in the light of this unbending standard.

Though those glittering shafts of justice beamed their holiness from Sinai's thundering summit, its high and holy ideals did not discourage those sainted sons of the twilight. Like invincible warriors, they rose from their sinful habitat to heights of holiness that still shine today like bright beacons in a dark night.

Logic grants that God would not create a desire in the human heart for spiritual perfection unless He was able to satisfy that desire. The nightingale

of Jewish hymnology sings in clarion tones of clean hands and a pure heart. Of the standard requirements for a citizen of Zion, he writes: "He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Psalm 15: 2).

Isaiah, that prince of prophets, makes liberal use of the term *holiness*. He opens his great classic with the glory of God filling the Temple and to the tune of seraph song, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."

He cries for mercy and in a flash of glory, a coal of fire touches his lips and an exclamation roars above the song of angels: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged."

Rising to unequalled heights of prophetic beauty and grandeur, he takes us into the far off tomorrows: "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

"No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35: 8, 9, 10).

I never before realized the high premium that God placed on holiness until I started preparing this message. We have a holy Bible, written by holy men, dictated by the Holy Ghost, full of holy things.

In it we have such terms as: a holy Sabbath, holy ground, a holy nation, holy things, holy gifts, a holy crown, holy ointment, a holy sanctuary, a holy house, a holy tithe, holy water, holy instruments,

holy law, holy vessels, holy works, a holy child, a holy commandment, holy fruits, holy sacrifice, a holy calling, holy Scriptures, holy manna, a holy priesthood, holy conversation, a holy altar.

*"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!
"Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the
glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be!"*

-John B. Dykes

Holiness has been a despised grace, hated by Satan, and scorned by his crowd. We have even thought of the word, "holiness" as a handicap to the progress of our church.

Churches have removed it from their official title in an effort to lift the stigma of this unacceptable term. To remove the word "holiness" from the title of a church will not prevent men from living holy, nor will blazing it in neon lights across the sky guarantee that men will live holy lives.

But if no man from Adam to the Rapture ever attains that holy estate, it will forever remain that holiness is God's immutable standard for all men and only on these lofty terms can we do business with Him.

No people who have ever lived were more optimistic and hopeful than these prophets of the twilight in the day of Israel's faded glory. Among

the waste, ravages, and ruin of a fallen and decayed kingdom, men like Zechariah, both a priest and a prophet, looked beyond the stench and carnage of a nation morally bankrupt and saw a day when Holiness would be the order of the day, the theme of the nation's anthem, the trade mark of the manufacturers, the hallmark of distinction, the language of the streets, the glory of the universe.

"In that day," he said. What day? When? Where? I will not take time to speculate, but let me paraphrase one of the literary classics out of the past, "Come along my friend and go with me . . . the best is yet to be."

In that day, that glorious day, that future day, every common bush will be afire and every word a song of praise.

Hear Zechariah in his words of flawless beauty: "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 14: 20-21).

The New Testament opens in the same holy vein that characterized the Old. . . yet amplified a, thousand-fold. The angel of the Lord is talking: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1: 35).

To Joseph he said, "She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

This is more than just to say that Christ came into the world to forgive sinners of their

transgressions. In this declaration God is settling the sin question in its totality.

Here the curse is lifted. This is God's reply to sin's ultimatum. This is Heaven's best for hell's worst. This is God's guarantee of the abolition of the universal blight of sin and the assurance that instead of pollution there will be purity; instead of iniquity, there will be righteousness; instead of sin, there will be holiness.

In the Gospels, this is verified by Zacharias' prophecy of Christ: "That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteous before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1: 74-75).

The ultimate word of Jesus Christ on the question of God's standard for man is found in that matchless manifesto: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5: 48).

No man can honestly read the New Testament without being convinced that God's provision, God's will, God's call, God's plan, God's standard for His people is HOLINESS.

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Hebrews 13: 12). "And for their sakes I "sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17: 19).

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10: 10). "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4: 3).

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness"? (1 Thessalonians 4: 7).

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12: 1-2).

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5: 23).

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12: 14). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

*"Called unto Holiness," Church of our God,
Purchase of Jesus, redeemed by His blood;*

Called from the world and its idols to flee,

Called from the bondage of sin to be free.

*"Holiness unto the Lord" is our watch-word and song,
"Holiness unto the Lord" as we're marching
along.*

Sing it, shout it, loud and long.

"Holiness unto the Lord" now and forever!

-Mrs. C. H. Morris

Thus, we close our case for Holiness. We stand for an instant with John on barren Patmos and gaze in rapture upon the marvelous transactions that usher in the Kingdom age.

The door of heaven swings ajar, and rolling out from the throne of God are the thundering

billows of the raptured saints singing as no mortals ever sung. This scene is too great to describe. Let the Bible speak:

"They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is and is to come" (Revelation 4: 8).

All of us grow weary of the toils of the road, and sometimes despair of the triumph of holiness. But let's take one last glance at the Bride, the Lamb's wife. Said John: "He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Revelation 21: 10).

That is the final home of the Holiness people. Are you on your way to that city? Nothing less than holiness of life and character will grant you citizenship in that holy place.

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" (Revelation 20: 6).

Let us now hear the final word of the Bible that closes the chapter of time's short day: "He that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me" (Revelation 22: 11-12).

*Church of God, beloved and chosen
Church of Christ for whom He died,
Claim thy gifts and praise the Giver,
"Ye are washed and sanctified."*

*Sanctified by God the Father,
And by Jesus Christ His son,
And by God the Holy Spirit,
Holy, Holy, Three in One.*

*He will sanctify thee wholly;
Body, spirit, soul shall be
Blameless till thy Saviour's coming
In His glorious majesty!*

*He hath perfected for ever
Those whom He hath sanctified;
Spotless, glorious, and holy,
Is the Church, His chosen Bride.*

-Author Unknown