



Holiness - A Gift of Grace

With Bishop Ronald K. Powell

HEBREWS 10:9-10

Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” . . . And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

“The great mistake made by most of the Lord’s people is in hoping to discover in themselves that which is to be found in Christ alone.”

These words of Arthur W. Pink focus on a key issue in living by grace. Most of us have the tendency that Arthur Pink identified: to seek within ourselves what is to be found in Christ alone.

To live by grace is to live solely by the merit of Jesus Christ. To live by grace is to base my entire relationship with God, including my acceptance and standing with Him, on my union with Christ.

It is to recognize that in myself I bring nothing of worth to my relationship with God, because even my righteous acts are like filthy rags in His sight (Isaiah 64:6).

Even my best works are stained with mixed motives and imperfect performance.

I never truly love God with all my heart, and I never truly love my neighbor with the degree or consistency with which I love myself.

Zechariah 3:1-5 1Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. 2The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" 3Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. 4The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you." 5Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So, they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

Yet God requires perfection.

Jesus said, **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"** (Matthew 5:48).

When we take Jesus' words seriously, we are forced to say with the psalmist, **"Your commandment is exceedingly broad"** (Psalm 119:96, NASB).

What is the answer to our dilemma?

All Christians recognize that we are justified—that is, declared righteous—**solely on the basis of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by God through faith** (see Romans 3:21-25).

Romans 3:21-25 King James Version

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

Forbearance of God means patient self-control; restraint and tolerance.

"forbearance from taking action"

But few of us fully recognize that we are also sanctified through faith in Christ. Sanctification, or holiness (the two words are virtually interchangeable), is essentially conformity to the moral character of God.

We normally think of sanctification as progressive, as an inner change of our character whereby we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ.

That is certainly a major part of sanctification, but that is not all of it.

Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more.

The first is the result of the work of Christ for us; the second is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

The first is perfect and complete and is ours the moment we trust Christ; the second is progressive and incomplete as long as we are in this life.

The objective holiness we have in Christ and the subjective holiness produced by the Holy Spirit are both gifts of God's grace and are both appropriated by faith.

However, the perfect holiness we have in Christ is the answer to our dilemma of how we can appear daily before a perfectly holy God, when even our best deeds are stained and polluted.

Our lack of understanding of the distinction between the holiness we do have in Christ and the holiness we want to find in ourselves caused Mr. Pink to say that

we mistakenly hope to find in ourselves something that can be found in Christ alone.

CHRIST OUR HOLINESS

1 Corinthians 1:30

The apostle Paul wrote, “It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption”.

In other words, it is God Himself who chose us to be in Christ.

But the truth I want to call attention to in the passage is that **Christ Jesus has become our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.**

That Christ is our righteousness is an accepted and well-understood truth and the basis for our justification.

But Christ is also our holiness.

This fact is not as well understood.

All Christians look to Christ alone for their justification, but not nearly as many also look to Him for their perfect holiness before God.

The blessed truth, though, is that all believers are sanctified in Christ, even as we are justified in Christ.

In ourselves, apart from Christ, we are both guilty and filthy.

We are guilty of breaking God’s law, and we are filthy in God’s sight because of the vile, polluting effect of sin.

We need both forgiveness from our guilt and cleansing from our filth.

Through justification we are forgiven and are declared righteous in the courtroom of God’s justice.

Through the perfect holiness we have in Christ, our moral filth is removed, and we become fit to enter into the very presence of an infinitely holy God and enjoy fellowship with Him.

1 Corinthians 1:30 help us see this objective aspect of sanctification—the holiness we have in Christ alone.

Hebrews 10:10-14 King James Version

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;

13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.

Note that we have been made holy.

This speaks of a completed work. The emphasis here is on the holiness we have in Christ through His once-for-all sacrifice.

Verse 14, on the other hand, says, “**By one sacrifice he [Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**”

This verse mentions being made holy—the work of the Holy Spirit in progressive sanctification.

But this verse also refers to our completed, objective sanctification in Christ when it speaks of those, He has made perfect forever.

So, in one aspect of sanctification you are already holy because Christ’s holiness is imputed to you. You have been made perfect forever.

In another aspect, you are being made holy day by day through the work of the Holy Spirit imparting Christ’s life to you.

Holiness should be an objective for your daily life.

But to live by grace, you must never, never look to the work of the Holy Spirit in you as the basis for your relationship with God.

You must always look outside of yourself to Christ. You will never be holy enough through your own efforts to come before God. You are holy only through Christ.

Two parallel passages in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians should encourage all of us:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. [EPHESIANS 1:4](#)

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

[COLOSSIANS 1:22](#)

The common teaching in both verses is that we are holy and blameless in God's sight.

[Let's Pray](#)