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Devotional "Holiness A"

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HOLINESS "L"

Devotional

April, 1997

I've never been particularly comfortable with the word holiness. Some discomfort originated in childhood, when holiness referred to a church at the edge of town; practices took place there which were alien to this Baptist preacher's kid and to most of those I knew. Some discomfort originated nearer adulthood than childhood. Evergreen's churches represented varieties of the same basic groups rather than a broad range of beliefs. The 1960 Presidential election put Catholicism on everyone's horizon and "Holiness" became linked with another religious oddity as a title for the Pope.

Bizarre or autocratic religious practices bore little relation to either the God I knew or our relationship. Oh sure, I knew that God was holy, an important and special concept. But when I read Moses' song (Exodus 15:11) and heard him ask rhetorically "Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"...well, I just sort of skipped over that uncomfortable word. When the Psalmist averred that "Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, forevermore" (Psalms 92:5), I wasn't sure what to think.

I'm still uncomfortable with the word, though my comfort level now has less to do with old than with new thought patterns. Peter and Paul (1 Peter 1:13-16 and Hebrews 12:9-10) saw God the Father disciplining us as children so that we might be as holy as He. Paul prays that Christ may cause the Thessalonians "to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men...so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness

before our God and Father..." (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)
As a parent I can understand that.

We are to be holy, to partake of His holiness, to be separate and special, set apart for a purpose and faithful to that purpose. We are to be like the burning bush, where God instructed Moses to remove his sandals. Yet we blithely speak of "going into God's presence" in worship services or in prayer as if it were nothing more than walking through the front doors of Wal-Mart. We refer to everything as God's creation and to God as omnipresent—with us all the time. Do we really have a sense of God's holiness, of the sacredness of life and all that He gives us in trust?

I find myself uncomfortable with "holiness" now because I know that to be like Christ is to be holy, yet I find myself ignoring the quality of absolute holiness. Moses, with whom God spoke face to face as with a friend, asked to see God's glory—the manifestation of His holiness. God responded "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live," before offering to shield Moses in the cleft of the rock, covering him with His hand "while My glory is passing by." "Then," God offers, "I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:11-23)

My current discomfort with "holiness" lies in the realization that Jesus tells us to count the cost rather than to put our hands to the plow and then turn back (Luke 9:62). He also warns James, John and their mother "You do not know what you are asking for" before saying that they will pay the price anyway (Matthew 20:20-23). I know my "signing on" as a Christian means signing on to join in God's holiness; I don't know if I really understand what that implies, and

fear that in my finite conception I make nothing holy as I seek to invest everything with holiness.

Ray Granade