

AFI PAPER 2011-BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

AUGUST 22-27, 2011

HOLINESS

By Dele Olowu, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Europe Mainland

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And when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said to him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. Genesis 17: 1-2 (New King James version used throughout)

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy. 1 Pet. 1.15.

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Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, therefore, God thy God had anointed thee with oil of gladness above thy fellows. Heb. 1.9.

I do not know why the organisers of this year's AFI Consultation and pastoral conference assigned me the topic, Holiness. I presume it is because they know that holiness is an important element of our mission and ministry and perhaps also they know that my General Overseer (who is unavoidably absent) likes to speak on such a subject.

The more I thought about the subject the more I discovered that this is actually the key issue in Christianity today. There are diverse interpretations of holiness. On the one hand, there are those who argue that the God we serve is a God of love and we should have outlived by now ancient notions of prudishness and righteousness, and especially concepts such as hell...and its fire, because there is no way a loving God can throw His beloved children into a burning eternal fire. There are also other segments of the global church that subscribe to the notion of eternal security whereby once a person is saved, he or she is saved for past, present and all future sins. At the other extreme, there are others who hold that the world is so sinful that the best thing is to live outside of main stream society, secluded from its sins and maladies. There have been different versions of these diverse groups throughout the history of the church to date.

As I further studied the subject in the Bible, I was baffled by the fact that holiness is one issue that is core to the survival and global prosperity of the church. Holiness is also God's guarantee that the gates of hell would not be able to overcome His church, no matter what the leaders of hell seek to achieve. This was the essence of God's covenant with Abram, to wit, that he would be exceedingly fruitful, his children who would be many (Ismael already born in Gen. 16 not regarded as one of these) would possess the gates of their enemies. All he needed to do was to walk before God and be *perfect*. This brings us to the need to revisit what holiness is.

WHAT IS HOLINESS?

Conventionally, we think of holiness as *obedience to God's word*. In both Old and New Testaments, God constantly reminds His people that they **MUST OBEY HIM**. Obedience is God's way of knowing that we truly believe Him as our loving Father, who has best interest at heart. In both the Old and New Testaments there is a great stress on obedience as the key to pleasing God with specific benefits for diligent obedience. (Deut. 28, Jn 13,17).

Holiness is also interpreted to mean *integrity*—that we live up to our word. It also implies that we ensure that there is no difference between our words and lifestyle, between what we promised and what we actually do...or between our private and public lives. The

absence of integrity has brought indignity to God and it is the reason why the Lord condemned and cursed the Pharisees who were the leaders of religion in his day. It is also the reason He instructed His disciples to make our lights shine before the world so they can glorify our Father in Heaven (Mt.5.16). For many people outside the church, as the word reminds us, we are their bibles. *We are truly the epistle that is written in hearts and read of all men (2 Cor.3.2)*. They would not read the Word but they pay close attention to how we live—whether we live by hatred and warfare when we preach love as the essence of our Lord’s gospel (see James 1.23-25).

The problem with these meanings of holiness is that they contain important but partial elements of what holiness is. *God says the reason we must be holy is that He is holy*. Clearly, God cannot be disobedient to Himself. His word is also yea and amen, settled in heaven Ps. 119.89. . The bible also has references to a range of creatures and things that are holy—e.g. animals, houses, pots used in the temple worship. Tithes are holy according to Lev. 27.30.

In actual fact, ‘holiness’ is rooted in the Jewish word *qodes*, or what belongs to the sphere of sacred as distinct from common or profane. Holiness is thus ‘sacredness’, separation or dedication to uncommon, sacred function. The opposite of holiness is not necessarily sinfulness but ‘commonness’ as Watchman Nee points out in the chapter on the sanctification of those who exercise delegated spiritual authority in the classic, *Spiritual Authority* (1972, pp.179-185). God calls His people to live a different kind of uncommon, supernatural life: life that is above nature and uncommon existence. A life of perfection in devotion to God or complete consecration. It is also the sense in which things and animals can be abominable (unholy) or clean (holy).

This is the essence of God’s covenant with Abraham—to live a life of perfection-devoted and consecrated to God. Even the word ‘consecrate’ in the English language is rooted in this understanding. Hence, in Leviticus 20 the Lord spells out for Israel what holiness is and concluded—*And ye shall be holy unto me, for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine.* (v.26). From this view then, as the Lord tells us what He told Jeremiah, He had set us apart from the time we were in our mother’s wombs. (Jer. 1.4-5). We are set apart for His eternal purposes. In other words, God has a plan or destiny for our lives. *Holiness is the key to the actualization of destiny or purpose*. Lack of holiness probably explains the failure of Abrahams’father, Terah to actualize destiny (Gen 11.31-32).Destiny or purpose is clearly an important matter to most people in our universe, one reason why Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life –What on Earth Am I Here for?* (2002) became an instantglobal best-seller.

WHY HOLINESS IS IMPORTANT.

2.1. God’s Nature is Holy and He commands us to be holy. Be ye holy as I am holy. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect are injunctions from both Old and New Testaments (Lev. 20.26; Mt.5.48).

3-2. Holiness opens all of heaven's resources to God's people because it shows we truly love God. God's resources are for His faithful and obedient children. 1 Cor. 2.9-10.

4-3. Pervasive iniquity is the true mark of the last days and the only force to counteract it is the life of Christians which shine out of darkness. Light also always overcomes darkness! Jn. 1.5

5-4. Holiness leads to prosperity as the Lord told Abraham and the Jewish people later. Gen. 17.1-10; Deut. 28. 1-2, 12-13.

6-5. Holiness ensures healing and divine health Ex. 15.26, James 5.16

7-6. Holiness renews our spirit man from glory to glory even as our physical body ages 2 Cor. 4.16

8-7. ***Holiness is essential to eternal life with Christ. More importantly, as I show below it is essential for all leaders –but especially those who lead in God's church, if they are to help their followers to find God in this world and the one to come. Hebrews 12.14.***

WHY HOLINESS IS A CHALLENGE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

If there are so many advantages for living holy, one wonders why every child of God would not like to live holy. The problem is that there are enemies within and outside each of us that define true enjoyment as sin and complicate any resolve we may have to live holy.

This is why the Bible distinguishes between different types of sins for Christians.

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- Besetting sins....these are sins that no matter how hard we try, the flesh has a way of having its way in our lives. Hebrews 12. 1. These are sins that we too have come to accept as a part of our nature and it is one of the issues raging today in the church with some people claiming that homosexuality is their nature and no a sin as is condemned in the bible. But the same argument can be used by kleptomaniacs, tobacco, alcohol and drug abusers etc.
- Weights or Presumptuous sins...These are sins of ignorance, or those that we do not equate to sin even though God does-e.g. Lev. 4: 1-35; Lk.16.19-24. For many people today, social drinking, alcohol, womanizing, pornography, lying etc are no longer in their vocabulary of sins. Hence, they no longer make any effort to leave these sins behind. For many Christians in business, there is today what is regarded as white lies. These are lies that are thought to be socially and business-wise acceptable compared to the other kinds of black lies. However, this

distinction is not in the word of God-Rev.21.8. Even the international community which once tolerated bribery abroad for business purposes has risen against such actions and sanctioned them. Other examples of presumptuous sins are:

- Faithlessness...in God is regarded as a sin. Many people have lost their faith today because they lost faith in God and live without faith. This also is sin. Whatever is not of faith is sin. James 4,17
- Lovelessness—many Christians today spend most of their time gossiping about other Christians, pretend in their presence to be their friends. He that does not love his brother whom he can see but claims to love God is described by the word as a liar- 1Jn 4. 20. These and other examples are what the writer of Hebrews 12.1 refers to as 'weights'.

God's solution to all of the above shortcomings is not hell fire as is commonly taught in some circles but the gift of His Holy Spirit –who is given to us to ensure that we live a consecrated life—Eph.4.30. The more we obey Him and do that which pleases Him the more He possesses us and lives out His life through us which is the essence of our calling as Pastor Enoch Adeboye explains in his classic, *Becoming a Special Carrier of the Holy Spirit*, (2009). The manifestation of the Spirit in our lives enables ordinary Christians to excel in all they do—in life and ministry. Hebrews 1.9. This is what enables a person to do the seemingly impossible, far above one's peers as we see in the lives of several men and women in the Bible...Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Nehemiah, David, Solomon, Daniel, Esther, Paul, Peter, Prisca and Aquila etc and also in several contemporary examples today. **Leadership, Holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit go together.**

We highlight a few Bible examples below.

CASE STUDIES ON HOLINESS AND THE FULFILMENT OF DESTINY FOR LEADERS.

In this section, we do a study of some Bible characters and the role that holiness played in the actualization or non-actualization of destiny. We select these but the lessons apply to all leaders in Bible times and in contemporary times. The selected ones are: Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Daniel and the 3 Hebrew children and Peter, Mary Magdalene, the madman of Gadara.

HOLINESS AND ACTUALIZATION OF DESTINY—STUDY OF BIBLE CHARACTERS/LEADERS

Name	Destiny/Purpose	Success/Failure	Explanation/Lesson
Joseph	To rule in a foreign land and take Israel to Egypt	Successful	Kept the vision of destiny and holiness ensured God's favour in a foreign land, as a

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			slave and prisoner
▲ Moses	Take out Israel from Egypt to promised land	Partial success	Anger by God's meekest man
▲ Joshua	Possess the promised land and allot it to Israelites	Successful	Full of HS and understood the importance of absolute consecration.
▲ Samson	Deliver Israel from the Philistines	Failed	Could not live a life of consecration
▲ David	Conquer Philistines and rule God's people	Successful	Consecrated with grace covering sins. Cultivated HS from childhood
▲ Daniel & 3 Young Hebrew children	Spokesperson for the Almighty on behalf of Israel in captivity	Successful	Excellent spirit led to promotion after overcoming impossible odds and threats.
▲ Peter	Lead the church after Christ, both Jews and Gentiles	Partially successful	God had to raise another (Paul) for the Gentile ministry
▲ Mary Magdalene	Care of Christ during His earthly ministry	Successful	Once delivered from 7 demons lived a consecrated life
▲ Madman of Gadarene	Evangelist to the Gadarene region	Successful	Once delivered from madness spirit, consecrated himself to reaching 10 cities

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These examples represent practically all possible human conditions today. Passion for righteousness and hatred of iniquity lifted these men and women of like passions with us to a new level of uncommon attainments that is being celebrated many years after these people departed. Their experiences also underscore the point that holiness for leaders is ever more essential for the church and especially in these last days for several reasons. First, these leaders are the standard bearers and setters in the church. Second, they are more visible than others compared to the rest of the church—talk of epistles being read. Thirdly, they are the ones most in need of the Holy Spirit and when He leaves them the spiritual life of the whole church may be jeopardized. No wonder the New Testament provides a comprehensive list of attributes for those who would be leaders in the New

Testament church. They constitute a check -list that every apostle, senior leader and pastor should use periodically to undertake personal spiritual check- up. They include the following 20-point check-list. A Bishop must according to Titus 1.5:

- Be Blameless
- Maintain marital fidelity—husband of one wife (life-long association)
- Have faithful children
- Nor riotous
- Not insubordinate/unruly/disorderly
- Not arrogant or self-willed
- Not quick tempered
- Not given to drink (wine or alcohol)
- Not violent or pugnacious
- Not greedy for money
- Hospitable
- Lover of good
- Sober-minded
- Just
- Holy
- Self-controlled
- Faithful to the word
- Able to teach
- Able to exhort
- Convincing

No wonder the Lord sanctified Himself for His disciples and expects us to do the same.

Conclusion and Prayer

We can summarise the main points made in this paper.

First, holiness is consecration to the service of God, or commitment to perfection.

Second, anyone who hungers for holiness attracts an anointing to excel from God. This makes a man or woman to become a blessing to God and to man. It also ensures a glorious legacy for the next generation.

Thirdly, holiness enables one to become a carrier of the Holy Ghost and therefore a partner of the Holy Ghost in shaping one's own life and those of others close towards excellence. It also enables us to keep one's essential spiritual garment cover (2 Cor. 5.3).

These three reasons make holiness a sine qua non for all leaders of God's people, as holiness attracts an anointing for excellence. Witness the manner in which Saul who had become backslidden lost the Holy Spirit and hid in the presence of Goliath. Compare this with young, untested David, brimming with the anointing of the Holy Ghost and the manner in which he took down Israel's terrorist (1 Sam. 16: 13-14; 17: 11, 42-54).

Many people wonder how can one commit to holy life-style.. Possible helps include:

- Love for God's presence...(this was David's secret and is the secret of all those who would live for God, Ex. 24.12-18; Lk 9: 28-32; Acts 6.4)
- Hunger for God's kind of holiness or perfection;
- Hunger for the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit in prayer life-remember Solomon's, Elisha's and the apostles' 10 day prayer before pentecost;
- Praying in the Holy Ghost... This enables one to speak mysteries to the Lord and develop one's own specialised ministry gifts (Jude 20; 1 Cor.14.2);
- Learning to wait on the Lord so He can show us what we do not know but also renew our strength. (Is. 40.31, Jer. 33.3)
- Honesty with ourselves and with God in confessing our sins to Him and asking for His mercy instead of seeking to justify ourselves-Ps 51.11;
- Committing ourselves to a life of unconditional love and generosity towards others and also to love and please the Holy Spirit by whom we have been sealed until the day of redemption.

Hence, holiness or consecration ensures that individuals and the collective in the church can actualize God's purpose for their lives. It is in this sense that the life of several people within and outside the Bible have been truly pitiful. Their destinies were truncated, a great loss to the generations they were called to lead such as Eli or Samson. I am sure you can add several other examples in contemporary times (e.g Mike Tyson, Michael Jackson, Amy Winehouse etc).

Holiness or is consecration and perfection opens the door to empowerment and exaltation to excellence by the power of God's Holy Spirit. It is the price that all those who would lead others must pay to access divine strength that enables us to do exploits in our generation.

If the above be true, is it not then time that each of us sought God for a spirit of holiness and excellence, praying several hours a day as the Lord and His disciples did

with our minds and also in the Holy Spirit, like the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 14.18) if we want to see Him move mightily again in our lives, families, ministries, fellowships, countries and generation? (compare Rev. 1.10 and 4.1—once in the spirit, the Lord always calls us higher).

The writer of Hebrews noted: *You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity (consecrated and made yourself uncommon)*, therefore the Lord your God has anointed you with oil above your fellows. The prayer for more holiness and anointing for excellence is one that all of us must continue to pray throughout all of our lives. We must also help others to commit to a life of consecration and perfection as the Lord is coming not only for a church that is perfect and without a wrinkle, but one that does exploits (impossible things) in His Name (Eph.5.27, Dan 11.32b). Daniel prophesied that those who know their God (His holiness, which is what the angels in heaven sing around Him), would be strong and do exploits. This is the basis for all extraordinary attainments by the church in His Name. This is also the guarantee that none of the wiles of the enemy against the church would prosper or succeed. Let us pray.....

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