

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How Does a Person Become Holy?

I Peter 3:18-22

¹ I believe that one of the main reasons God created us was to enjoy our companionship. In Genesis, chapter 3, ¹ we find God with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Apparently, this event happened routinely because when His human creation failed to show up, He called out to them. It must have been an enjoyable time for all because God missed them. He created them in His "image and likeness", enough like Him, to enjoy their fellowship.

But they had sinned. They had rebelled against His authority, so He had to banish them from His eternal presence. Although God couldn't stand the presence of sin, He loved the sinners desperately. So God devised a plan to get them back!

¹ Genesis 3:8-9 - Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

God wants fellowship with you so much that He would entice you with a covenant. ² A covenant ² is a treaty, an agreement between two parties. It comes from the Hebrew word "to cut". It's an agreement that involves promises made each to the other.

Covenants, historically, were sealed by a pledge. ³ The Book of Ruth ³ describes how pledges were made in Israel during ancient times. An agreement would become binding when one person gave his sandal to another in front of official witnesses. ⁴

When you make a covenant with God you become His holy person. Holy is the concept used to separate the people who choose to return to God's presence from the ones who don't. The holy are God's people separated from the world.

Here is the explanation of holy from the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary: "Biblical use of the term

² בְּרִית.

³ Ruth 4:1-12.

'holy' has to do primarily with God's separating from the world that which He chooses to devote to Himself. As God's redemptive plan unfolded through the Old Testament, the 'holy' became associated with the character of God's separated people conforming to His revealed law. When the time became ripe for the saving work of Jesus Christ, His redeemed people came to be known as saints (literally, 'holy ones')."

What is the process by which a person becomes holy? This passage of scripture tells us how that happens. ⁵ From First Peter, chapter 3, verses 18 through 22 we read, **For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. ⁶**

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

The two parts of the covenant God wants to make with you are His part and your part. ⁷ Let's first look at . . .

I. God's Part of the Covenant

. . . God's part of the covenant. Observe the covenants God made in the Bible. ⁸

There was God's covenant with Noah. ⁴ God promised the multiplication of Noah's family, that all living things could now be used for food and that a flood would never again destroy the earth. ⁹

⁴ Genesis 9:1-17.

Then there was God's covenant with Abraham. This is found in Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1 through 3, **The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** God promised to bless Abraham's descendants and to make them His special people. ¹⁰

God's covenant with Moses is recorded in Exodus, chapter 6, verse 7, **I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.** God would be Israel's God and they would be His people. ¹¹

This leads us to verse 18, **God's covenant with you! For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.** God's part of this covenant was the Lord's death on the cross! ¹²

The Lord's death on the cross only had to happen once to benefit you. This was in contrast to the covenant in the Jewish system, seen in the Day of Atonement, when a sacrifice had to happen every year. ¹³ Romans, chapter 6, verse 10, says, **The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.** ¹⁴ Although sacrifices occurred daily in the old covenant, the Lord's death had to occur only once. ⁵ ¹⁵ Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 28, **Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.** ¹⁶ You were made holy by the offering of the body of Christ once and for all! ⁶ ¹⁷

The Lord's death on the cross was a sacrifice for your sins! ¹⁸ Only the cross could pay that price. ⁷ You can't

⁵ Hebrews 7:27 - Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day . . . He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

⁶ Hebrews 10:10 - And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

⁷ I Corinthians 15:3 - Christ died for our sins.

be good enough to earn God's salvation. ¹⁹ Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sins. ⁸ ²⁰

The Lord's death on the cross was a substitute for you, the righteous for the unrighteous. ⁹ ²¹ In First John, chapter 2, verse 2, we read, He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. "Atoning sacrifice", or expiation, refers to the Mercy Seat, the golden lid on the Ark of the Covenant, where the blood of an animal was substituted for the death of the person who presented it. Remember, death is the wages of sin! ¹⁰ Lord Jesus paid the price for your sins you couldn't pay. He died in your place! ²²

The Lord's death on the cross was to bring you ¹¹ to God. ²³ This word "bring" is a technical term in Classical Greek. An "Introducer" was a person

⁸ Galatians 1:4.

⁹ v18 - For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

¹⁰ Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death.

¹¹ προσάγω.

selected to introduce people to one another. Lord Jesus is your Introducer to the Father! ²⁴

Now, it's time to look at . . .

II. Our Part of the Covenant

. . . our part of the covenant. ²⁵

Noah's part of the covenant was to multiply. Genesis, chapter 9, verse 1, **Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth”**. ²⁶

Abraham's part of the covenant was to remain faithful to God and serve as a channel which God's blessing could flow to the rest of the world. ¹² ²⁷

Moses', and Israel's, part of the covenant, was to obey the Law. Exodus, chapter 24, verse 7, **Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people.**

¹² Genesis 12:3 - I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.” ²⁸

Your part of the covenant is to commit yourself to Jesus as your Lord! ²⁹ Romans, chapter 10, verses 9 and 10, read, That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. “Lord” was the favorite word His disciples used for Him. ³⁰ A Christian is a person who has surrendered to Jesus as Lord! Jesus is to call the shots in your life. ³¹ A Christian is someone who has been redeemed by the cross to fellowship with God; to **walk with God in the cool of the day! ¹³ God relishes your prayer life! ³²**

In the Book of Ruth, the pledge was the transfer of the sandal. Here, is . . .

¹³ Genesis 3:8.

III. The Pledge Sealing the Covenant

. . . the pledge sealing the covenant. ³³

With Noah, the pledge was the rainbow. ¹⁴ ³⁴ With Abraham, the pledge was circumcision. ¹⁵ ³⁵ With Moses, the pledge was the Ark of the Covenant. With Israel it would continue to be circumcision. ³⁶

Verses 21 and 22 deal with the pledges between God and you. Here are the biblical pledges! ³⁷

The Holy Spirit is God's pledge to you. Second Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 21-22, read, **Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.** ³⁸

Let's examine verse 21 now! . . . and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not

¹⁴ Genesis 9:12-18.

¹⁵ Genesis 17:11.

the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. Submission to Christian baptism is your pledge to God. ³⁹

In verse 21, the word "pledge" ¹⁶ means an inquiry or demand. It's another technical term used in business contracts in ancient society. What made the contract binding was the question, "Do you accept the terms of this contract and bind yourself to it?" The answer would be "Yes". This dialogue was called "The Pledge". ⁴⁰

"Good conscience" is the same phrase we find in verse 16 ¹⁷ which implies a good moral conscience. So, Christian baptism is the pledge you make to orient your life to God's life as consistently as you can to have a clear conscience. ⁴¹

¹⁶ ἐπερώτημα.

¹⁷ v16 - But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

"Symbol", ¹⁸ literally "anti-type", is the impression that is made by a seal. Baptism symbolizes the water, the type, which saved Noah during the flood. ⁴²

Then, Acts, chapter 2, verse 38, tie the two pledges together, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ⁴³

So, to summarize, the pledges of God's covenant are as follows. ⁴⁴ The Holy Spirit is God's pledge to you that He will do for you what He promised; He will save you from your sin, give you an abundant life now and take you to heaven when you die. ⁴⁵ Baptism is your pledge to God that you will accept Him as Lord, live His lifestyle and remain faithful to Him. ⁴⁶

God has this deal for you! If you will make your pledge to Him by being baptized, He will make His pledge to you by indwelling you with His Holy Spirit!

¹⁸ ἀντίτυπος.

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