

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



April 24, 2016

Reflecting God's Holiness

In a world darkened by sin, little beacons of light show humanity a better way to live. It starts with people who commit their lives to reflecting the holiness of their Creator.

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2; see also 11:44-45; 20:7).

“. . . as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 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. 1:14-16).

The holiness of God is a recurring theme in the book of Leviticus. The sacrifices, the special functions and garments of the priests, the strict moral code, the ritual purity laws — all of these were designed to impress upon the people that the God of the Hebrews was not like the gods of the pagans. He was different, and had to be treated with a measure of respect befitting His character.

It was not enough that the people merely acknowledge God's holiness; His holiness had to be reflected in their personal lives. Again and again, His instructions were predicated upon the fact that “I am the Lord” (thirteen times in chapter 19 alone). The overarching

message of Leviticus can be summarized in the frequent reminder, “you shall be holy, for I am holy.” A holy God must be worshiped by a holy people.

God set the bar high for the Israelites, but He had to. They had been slaves in a foreign nation filled with false gods, and were on their way to a land inhabited by idolaters with even lower standards. The influence of these pagan neighbors was strong, enticing God's people away from Him. But God's desire was to mold them into a nation that stood apart from the degradation of the surrounding culture. Through them, the nations could see what the true God—and service to that God—looked like. Even when Israel failed to live up to that standard, it was always there, calling them to a nobler life that reflected the Creator's purpose.

The epistle of First Peter applies that same principle to Christians. The ceremonial purity requirements and penal codes of the old law are stripped away, of course, but the idea of reflecting God's holiness in the midst of an alien environment still stands out.

Starting from the same Levitical foundation—“Be holy, for I am holy”—Peter argues for a lifestyle of moral excellence: corralling our animal passions (1:14; 2:1; 3:9-11; 4:2-3), serving others from a spirit of love and goodwill (1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8-10), and remaining patient in the face of hardship (1:6-9; 2:19-21; 3:14-15; 4:19). What God desires today is what He has always desired: a people whose attitudes and behaviors mirror, as much as humanly possible, His own character. Only this time, it's not limited to one ethnic group. His call for a holy life is extended to all humanity.

Imitating the holiness of God is quite a stretch. No one (except Jesus) has ever done it perfectly, nor ever will. But that does not excuse indifference. Success is measured, not by how close we come to achieving it, but by how hard we try.

This world is an ugly mess, and it won't improve on its own. God is looking for those few people who see in Him a more noble alternative, and use their lives to reflect His holiness. They are the ones who truly make a difference.

— David King