

# **It Is Because the Lord Loves You, October 17, 2004**

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**Selections from Deuteronomy 7-9**

**(1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Luke 1:46-55)**

**Intro:**

Holiness: What does the word conjure up for you? Do you picture a Bible-banger, someone who assaults people, like the Market Square preachers who thunder denunciations at us as we walk by, telling us that we're on our way to hell? Or do you picture the girl who would never join you for dinner or a movie, but seemed only to live her life between Bible studies, church and prayer meetings? Or is it the person who doesn't drink, dance, smoke or play cards? Is it, in other words, the very opposite of what may seem to you to be a full and enjoyable life? Or perhaps you have a more appealing picture: Someone who always seems to have it together, always happy and fulfilled, never struggling with life as the rest of us so often do? It is attractive, but feels unattainable.

Holiness is at the heart of what it means to a child of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ, a person who has been saved from

bondage to sin and death and brought to new life. It is crucial that we understand what it means so that we can see how attractive and desirable it is, and stop being put off by the misperceptions of holiness that are ascendant, not only in the world, but even in many parts of the church.

In our verses from Deuteronomy, Moses warns God's people against intermarriage with those who do not worship the God of Israel, giving the reason, "For you are a people holy to the Lord" (7:6a). However, that raises a number of questions, not the least of which is, How can any human being be called "holy," when that is the word used to describe the essence of God's being as different from human beings, and from everything else he has made? God alone is holy, perfect in all of his attributes, his holiness expressing itself visibly in his glory, that blazes forth from his presence, causing all who behold him to fall on their faces and cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!"

Yet, we know that this holy God has said repeatedly to his people, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (e.g. Lev 11:44; 20:7,26). And here in our text, the statement is declarative:

"You *are* holy." So, how are we to understand the holiness that is ours as God's people? How do we, who are so very aware of our failures, who feel so keenly the guilt and shame of our sin, how do we understand this as true of us, and understand it in a way that will help us actually *be* holy in thought, word and deed?

We find in our text as good an explanation of the holiness of God's people as may be found anywhere, and I encourage you to focus with me on this, for at least two very important reasons: First, if God considers us holy, then to continue to see ourselves as manifestly unholy is to harbor a false view of ourselves as God's people, in the same way that it is unhealthy for one who is loved to see oneself as unloved. If we would begin to find healing from the disorders that we inherited merely by being human, we need to begin to refashion our view both of the world and of ourselves according to God's Word.

Second, until we see ourselves truly through the eyes of God, it is unlikely that we will see one another truly through the eyes of God. We are to be a holy people, those who

reveal to the world the nature of our holy God. For this we were created. In this we find at last what we have been searching for all our lives. Here is our joy and our peace.

*There are three questions implied and answered in our text that illuminate this matter of holiness.*

## **Body:**

### **1. First, how can the Bible call the likes of us holy?**

*God has chosen us "to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (7:6b).* But what does that mean? What is it to be God's "treasured possession," set apart from all the other people on earth?

Any Israelite hearing these words, should have heard echoes of God's call to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2,3). In case anyone missed the reference, Moses refers in this same passage to God as

keeping the oath that he swore to their fathers, and keeping covenant to a thousand generations (7:8,9).

Holiness, then, first describes our being set apart by God for his purposes, and for his own glory. And our fulfillment of that calling is to be, not merely a blessing for us, but for all the nations on earth. In other words, our holiness involves bringing the goodness, grace and glory of God to the nations of the world. It is never meant to be something that cuts us off from others, or that makes us peculiar in ways that merely offend and confuse. No, we have been set apart for their sake. Our salvation means the salvation of the world.

## **2. But, why did God choose us?**

*It is necessary that we first be clear why God did not choose us: He did not choose us because we were great and mighty in ways that would impress the world (7:7), nor was it because we were righteous in ways that would impress the godly (9:4f).* Paul makes this same point in our New Testament reading: God did not choose you, he says, because you were wise in ways that would impress the gentiles, or spiritually powerful in ways that would impress

Jews. No, he chose things that are weak and foolish to shame the strong and wise, and leave us with no basis for boasting, except in him (1 Cor 1:18f).

It is crucial that we hear these words, for it is precisely here that we struggle with the designation, "holy." We think that it implies a certain superiority of wisdom or spiritual strength that would impress the world and the people of God. This leads either to arrogance, if we think, "So that's why he chose me, because of my wisdom and spiritual gifts!" Or, it leads to spiritual depression, if we think, "I must not really be God's child, if his children are filled with wisdom and spiritual power."

*If it is not because of these things, then why has he chosen us? The answer is simply this: "It is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath he swore to your fathers" (7:8).*

He saves us from both arrogance and depression by telling us that the choice is all of grace. He has chosen to love us and make us his children for the sake of his promise to the fathers and mothers of the faith that through his people, he

would redeem the world from its brokenness and rebellion against him.

In fact, the discipline that some of us here this morning are enduring is a manifestation of his love for us (see 8:5). When we turn from his ways and fail to respond to his love, he mercifully disciplines us for our good, rather than simply letting us go our own way until we are back in Egypt, bound hand and foot by the very master from whom we have been set free.

*Here is the wonder of our holiness: we are holy in relation to him, who has loved us and made us his treasured possession, not because we are righteous or powerful, but simply because he could and he did.*

**3. The final question then is this: How should we respond to such love?**

*That is precisely what the book of Deuteronomy was written to answer: we honor him who loved us and made us his treasured possession by loving him and keeping his commandments (7:9).* This will be health and wholeness for

us, and for those who live and work with us, because – as we have been studying – the law of God is our life, it is a picture of the perfect life of love for which we have always longed. We were made for this. It is our joy!

### **Conclusion:**

At the end of the day, the call of God to his children is never, "Be what you are not!" But rather, it is always, "Be what you are!" We are holy by virtue of his loving choice, so now let us be holy as he is holy. He has forgiven our sin and given us his Holy Spirit to enable us, not only to keep his commandments, but to desire to keep his commandments. When we fail, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous one, who intercedes for us. Every moment offers us a fresh beginning in the life of holiness.

"And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you" (7:12,13).

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