

Becoming Holy Hebrews 4

Hebrews 4 Introduction

- What is *holiness* anyway?
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- From dictionary.com:
 1. the quality or state of being holy; sanctity.
 2. a title of the pope

- How about *sanctity*?
 1. “holiness...”

- As for the pope’s title, it is equally a title used by the Dalai Lama
- And he get a lot better press than the pope these days.

- The Dalai Lama:
- What makes him *holy*?
- Is it the robe? The smile? The shaved head?
- But that equally describes Uncle Fester!

Holiness (From Easton’s Bible Dictionary):

- in the highest sense belongs to God (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 15:4), and to Christians as consecrated to God’s service, and in so far as they are conformed in all things to the will of God (Rom. 6:19, 22; Eph. 1:4; Titus 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:15).
- Personal holiness is a work of gradual development. It is carried on under many hindrances, hence the frequent admonitions to watchfulness, prayer, and perseverance (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:23, 24).

Hebrews 4 Outline

- I. Be diligent to enter God’s rest. **4:1-11**
- II. Let God’s word expose your heart. **4:12-13**
- III. Come boldly to the throne of grace. **4:14-16**

Be diligent to enter God's rest. 4:1-11

- Start in **3:16** to pick up the flow of the rabbi's argument.
- The generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt received a promise that God would settle them in the land of Canaan.
- They refused to believe the promise and so refused to enter the land when they finally came to it.
- That generation died in the wilderness.

4:1 We, in our generation, have also received a promise from God.

- He has promised to give us **rest** if we are willing to lay down any sense of our own merit in His sight.
- He wants us to give up our self-righteousness to receive Christ's righteousness as a free gift.
- To the extent that we continue to rely on ourselves, we lose out on the offer of **rest**.

4:2 This verse is awkward to translate. The ESV may do the best job.

– *Hebrews 4:2 (ESV)*

For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

- We have God's message and so must act on it.
- The unbelieving Israelites rebelled against God and Moses, refused to act, and rejected God's promise of a land of their own.
- We must respond differently.
- We must by faith receive what God offers us for the promise of His **rest** to take effect.

The rabbi now connects what He is saying to the Jewish Scriptures or our Old Testament.

4:3 See **Psalm 95:11**

4:4 See **Genesis 2:2**

4:5 See **Psalm 95:11** (again)

4:7 See **Psalm 95:7-8**

4:9 The word for "**rest**" here is unique and means a special "**Sabbath rest.**"

- The generation that came out of Egypt under Moses rebelled in the wilderness.
- The next generation entered the land under the leadership of Joshua.
- Even this rest, however, was only partial and temporary.
- The final form of God's rest only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
- It is a Sabbath-rest offered to those who believe.

4:11 Be **diligent** to enter that rest.

- To be diligent means to do your best, to put forth earnest effort, to be eager and alert.
- How odd! Why should we "be diligent" to enter God's rest?
- Is this a contradiction? Isn't rest the opposite of diligence?
- Is the rabbi wavering between "faith" and "works" forms of righteousness?
- Be diligent to enter God's rest. **4:1-11**

- From the rabbi's perspective, there is no serious contradiction at all.
- He is simply a great student of human nature.
- We naturally want to feel worthy of God's blessings and favor – it is our default setting.
- **Diligence** is required to abandon this natural inclination toward personal merit and receive the righteousness of Christ.
- **Becoming Holy**
- Giving up our right to feel worthy before God in the strength of our own merit, and thereby entering into His rest, is an essential first step in truly and finally **Becoming Holy**.

Let God's word expose your heart. 4:12-13

- Once we've accepted the premise that we dare not stand before God trusting in our own merit to save us, we are ready for the **Word of God** to do its penetrating work.
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- The **Word of God** is a term used generally in the Bible for all that God has said.
- Its ultimate expression is the incarnate **Word of God**, Jesus Christ.
- The original readers would have taken this to mean the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) plus the teaching they received about Jesus.
- An equivalent reference for us would be the written **Word**, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.
- The living, active nature of it may be experienced whenever that **Word** is read, studied, taught or its truth is preached – especially when met by faith in the hearer. (Remember the Israelites!)
- John Wesley pointed out that **God's Word** works on the “inmost recesses of the mind,” but specifically when working on the conscience it “gives the fullest conviction.”
- In this area of conscience, **God's Word** has a way of revealing what we may desire to keep hidden from everyone – including ourselves.
- **God's Word** knows us better than we do.
- Though we may choose to suppress it, our conscience is a powerful force within us.
- Edgar Allan Poe illustrated this extremely well in his 1843 short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

***The Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe (1843):**

- The narrator of the story one night murders the old man he lives with, dismembers the body and hides it under the floorboards of the old man's room – being very careful not to leave evidence, not even one drop of blood.
- The police arrive, having been called by a neighbor who heard the old man shriek.

- The narrator brings them in, claiming the shriek was his own – caused by a bad dream.
- The old man, he said, was off in the country.
- He brings them right into the old man’s room, even setting up chairs so they can talk.
- He places his own chair on the floor directly over the man’s dismembered body.
- The police suspect nothing. All is truly in order. They chitchat together for a time about completely inconsequential things.
- But the narrator/murderer is all the while being driven mad by his conscience.
- He hears a steady beating, perhaps his own heart, but thinks it is the heart of the old man.
- The beating gets louder and louder, but the police can’t seem to hear it and just keep chatting away.
- Finally, convinced the police actually know the whole truth, but are simply pretending not to hear the beating heart, the narrator confesses to everything:

It grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they *knew!*—they were making a *mockery* of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But any thing was better than this agony! Any thing was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!— hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!*— “Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!”

- Conscience is powerful.
- We may think of conscience as our God-given capacity to determine right from wrong.
- It needs to be developed just like other natural skills or abilities that we have, whether physical, mental, etc.
- Through instruction and practice we can grow our abilities in these areas – and conscience is much the same.
- That instruction comes through **God’s Word**.
- Constant exposure to **God’s word** will reveal the true nature of our heart to us.
- It’s not always pretty, but by subjecting ourselves to the surgical incisions of God’s holy **Word**, we allow the “Sword of the Spirit” as it’s called, to deal with us now.
- The alternative is when it’s too late – like choosing between surgery now or an autopsy.
- **Becoming Holy**
- Allowing the **Word of God** to infiltrate our hearts and reveal its contents – the outright sin, the mixed motives, the hidden agendas – is an essential next step in truly and finally **Becoming Holy**.

Come boldly to the throne of grace. 4:14-16

- These verses may be the key to this entire rabbinical sermon to the Hebrews.
- The concepts mentioned here will be broken down and discussed all the way through Chapter 10.

4:14 In ancient Judaism, the high priest was the only one who had access to the “Holy of Holies” in the temple, symbolizing immediate access to God.

- Jesus, the Son of God, has taken our cause directly to heaven, into the very presence of God the Father.

4:15 By sharing our humanity, Jesus also shared in our temptation.

- Though Jesus was God, and God cannot be tempted, He endured temptation as a man.
- Look at His struggle with the devil in the wilderness, look at His time in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Jesus relied on the Scriptures and a prayerful relationship with His Father, not on any supernatural power inherent to His deity.

- We might also think that Jesus’ temptations were unlike our own due to His time or circumstances.
- He was never tempted by Road Rage, tax evasion or internet pornography.
- This is where we have to accept that the basic issues involved in temptation are common to both men and women in every time and place.

***1 Corinthians 10:13(NKJV)** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

4:16 So here is the rabbi’s conclusion:

- Jesus in His humanity experienced and resisted actual temptation in all of its essential forms.
- Jesus as our truly human High Priest presented Himself as an offering for our sins.
- Jesus has gone into heaven before us.
- Therefore, we should follow, confidently coming before the Father in prayer to receive mercy and grace to help in our every time of need.

Becoming Holy

- Realizing that God wants nothing more than to help us, and coming boldly, confidently, before the throne of grace to receive that help – is an essential closing step in truly and finally

Becoming Holy.

Hebrews 4 Conclusions

- The steps involved in **becoming holy** that we have looked at here are by no means steps that we take once and for all.
- Taking them repeatedly, even daily, is a sort of prerequisite to real spiritual growth.
- Remember our earlier description:
- “Personal holiness is a work of gradual development. It is carried on under many hindrances, hence the frequent admonitions to watchfulness, prayer, and perseverance (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:23, 24).”
- Each day, we must be diligent to:
 - Rest in Jesus
 - Let God’s word examine and reveal our heart
 - And come before the throne of grace to receive God’s mercy, grace and help.
- By doing so, the process of **becoming holy** will be clearly visible.
- Others will see it – and we will also begin to see **holiness** growing in ourselves.

Words from an old hymn:

- *My Savior, Thou hast offered rest:
Oh, give it then to me;
The rest of ceasing from myself,
To find my all in Thee.*
- *This cruel self, oh, how it strives
And works within my breast,
To come between Thee and my soul,
And keep me back from rest.*
- *How many subtle forms it takes
Of seeming verity,
As if it were not safe to rest
And venture all on Thee.*
- *O Lord, I seek a holy rest,
A victory over sin;
I seek that Thou alone shouldst reign
O'er all without, within.*