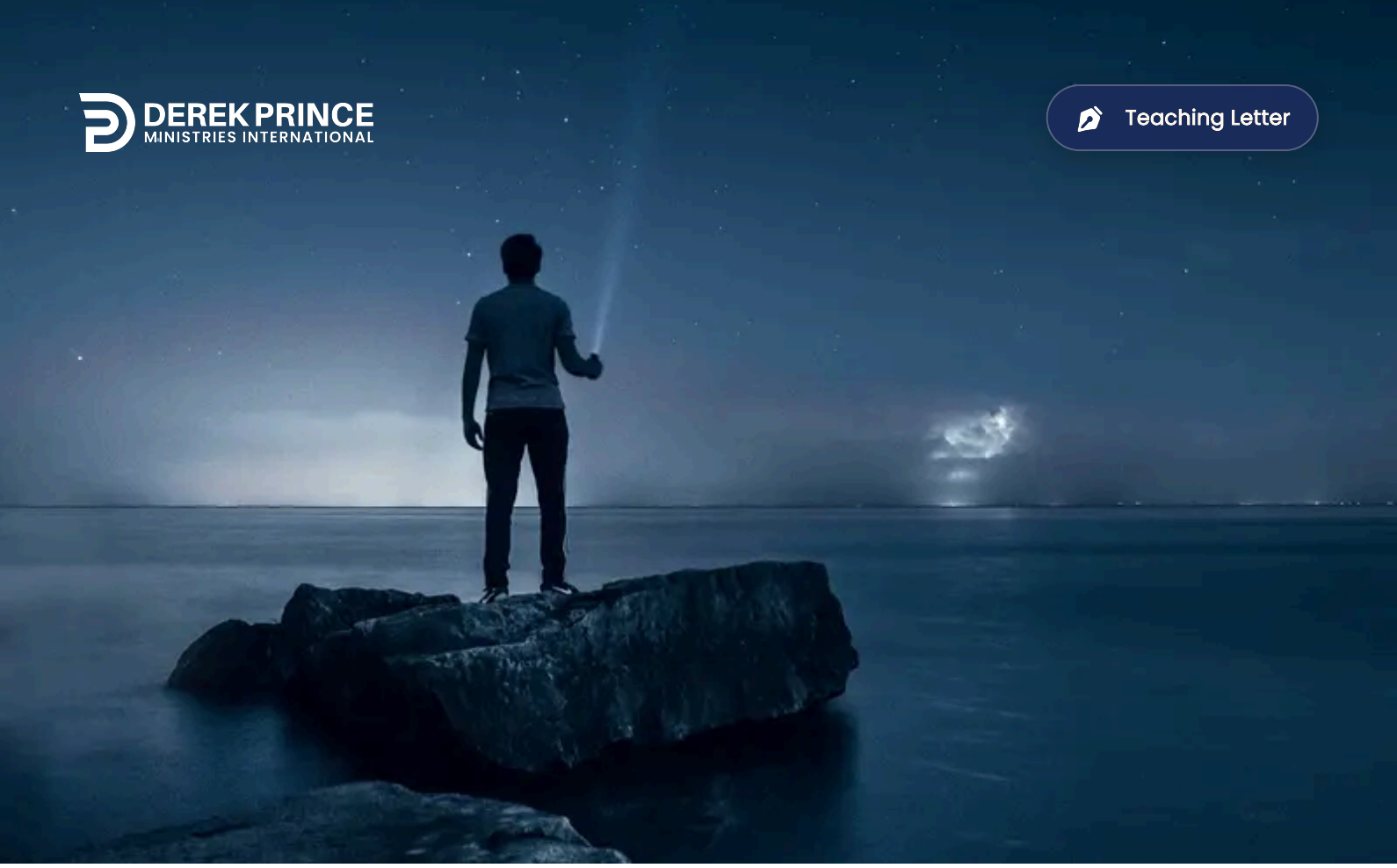


# What Is Holiness?



## Holiness
## By Derek Prince

This excerpt from Derek Prince's inspiring book, Set Apart for God, is the first in a two-part Teaching Letter series. This month, Derek introduces us to the basic concept of holiness—a vital topic for all of us.

Holiness is one of the great and unique themes of the Scriptures. No other book in the world reveals the nature of holiness as does the Bible. However, this topic has been neglected among many groups of God's people for some time, so that there has been relatively little teaching on it.

## In Pursuit of Holiness

At one point in my ministry, I was preparing to give a series of messages entitled 'In Pursuit of Holiness,' taken from Hebrews 12:14:

> "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." ((Hebrews 12:14, NIV))

In the process of my preparation, I reflected back over the years. At that time, I had been a preacher for more than fifty years, and I counted over forty-nine different nations in which I had preached to people from all kinds of denominational and ethnic backgrounds—about as wide a variety of people as you could imagine. Sadly, I could not recall ever having been among a group of people who appeared to be pursuing true holiness. Maybe my memory was at fault. Or maybe I misjudged the people. But I could not recall ever having been in a congregation or other group of people of whom I could say with certainty that they were seeking holiness.

## Holiness Has Disappeared from Our Christian Vocabulary

My impression is that about the time of World War I, certain subjects just dropped out of the thinking of Western Christians and were never really regained. One of those subjects was holiness. In fact, the word holiness seemed to disappear from the Christian vocabulary (along with certain other words, such as sacrifice and self-denial). The result of such neglect is always disastrous to God's people because, as we will see, holiness is the essence of what God is and what we are to be.

> "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written,

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> ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15–16)

There are, of course, some groups within the total body of Christ that have denominational titles linked with the word holiness. Yet, I have observed that, in many cases, the presentation of holiness by such groups has been essentially a list of rules that have to be observed, and, often, there is very little scriptural basis offered for these rules.

God is holy, but not because He has a set of rules that He follows. Following a set of rules will not make you holy, either—even if they are good rules. You may decide to follow them. But, again, that is not what makes you holy. My personal conclusion is that holiness has almost nothing whatsoever to do with observing rules and regulations. It has to do with partaking of the divine nature through Christ by entering into a relationship with the God who loves us, discovering what He has called us to do, and fulfilling that call upon our lives. I trust that this truth will become clear to you as you read Set Apart for God: The Beautiful Secret of Holiness.

## What Is Holiness?

To begin to answer the essential question of “What is holiness?” let me first tell you what it is not. Understanding what holiness is not is a very important step in coming to know what it is, because many Christians have the same incorrect idea about holiness that I mentioned in the introduction to this book—basically, that holiness is a set of rules about where you may go, what you may eat, and how you may dress.

Traditionally, at least in Great Britain and America, this has been many people’s picture of holiness. Yet the apostle Paul was emphatic about the fact that subjecting yourself to regulations has nothing to do with holiness. In Colossians 2, he wrote:

> “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” (verses 20-23)

What Paul stated in the above Scripture is profoundly true. The more you focus on what you must not do, the more power those activities have over you. They “are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” You say to yourself, “I must not lose my temper, I must not lose my temper, I must not lose my temper.” What is the next thing you do? You lose your temper. Why? Because you are focusing on the wrong thing.

Frankly, exhibiting a belief that holiness means rules and regulations turns other people off. “If that’s holiness,” they say, “I don’t want to have anything to do with it.”

Let me prove to you that a list of “don’ts” is not the holiness the Bible describes. Let’s look first at Hebrews 12:10, which speaks about the discipline of God the Father as He deals with His children:

> “For they [our human fathers] indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He [God] for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.”

It is clear that rules are not the definition of biblical or divine holiness. Again, God is holy, but not because of a set of rules He establishes to check His own conduct. The discipline spoken of in the above verse has to do with partaking of God’s nature through a relationship with Him.

## Holiness Is the Unparalleled Aspect of God’s Nature

Through the ages, preachers and theologians have offered many interpretations and definitions of holiness. Let me start right off with my simple definition: Holiness is the unique aspect of God’s nature that is without parallel anywhere else in the universe.

In the Bible, we find many different aspects of the nature of God. We are told that God is wise. He is knowing. He is just. He is powerful. He is loving. Clearly, we see these attributes of God’s nature: wisdom, knowledge, justice, power, and love. In the world around us, we can see examples that portray these characteristics in some way. We see people whom we esteem to be wise. We see people who obviously have a high degree of knowledge. We see aspects of justice. We recognize the concept of power. And, in some measure, we are all familiar with love.

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The same is not true, however, when it comes to holiness. There is nothing on the human plane, outside of God and the people of God, that has any claim to the title “holy.” The holiness of God is unique.

Therefore, in order to understand holiness, you have to know God. A person who does not know God has no concept whatsoever of holiness. This is one good way to distinguish between people who know God and people who do not know Him. You cannot distinguish them by their denominational titles. You cannot always distinguish them by the kind of language they use, because some people are professional religionists who use all the “correct” religious phrases. But when you find someone who has a conception of holiness, you find someone who has met God—because without God, there is no holiness.

## Holiness Is the Essence of God

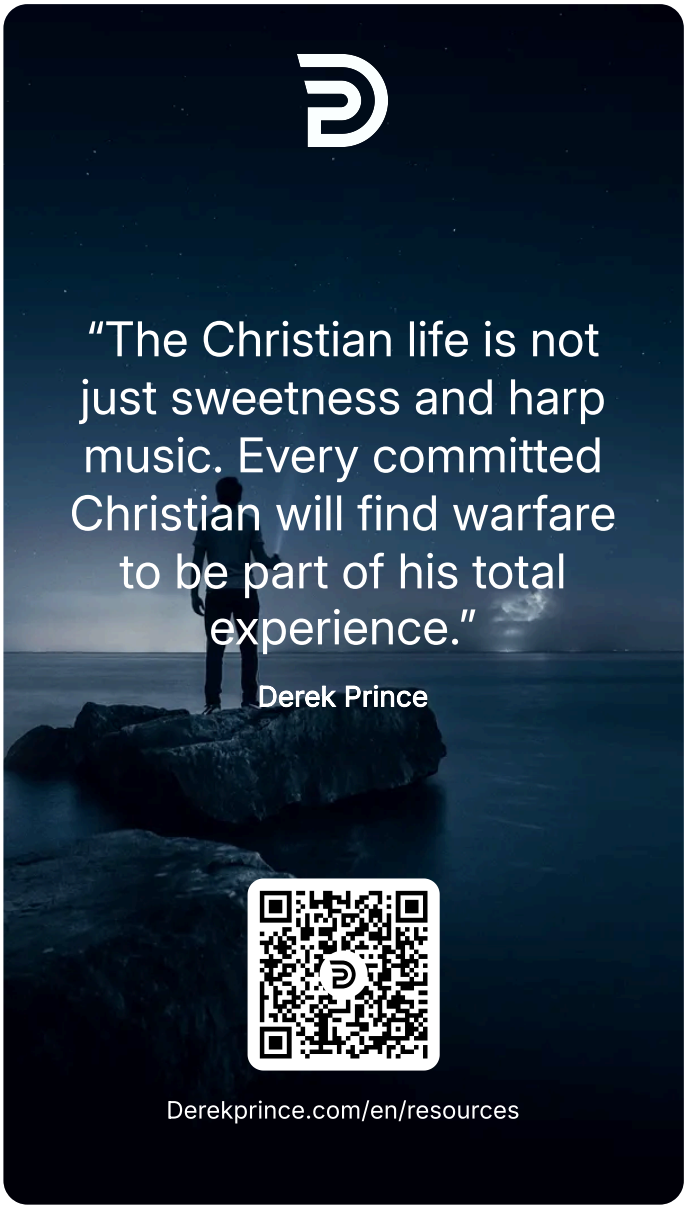
Let me suggest for your consideration that holiness is the essence of what God is, and what only God is. There is no one else who is holy but God.

> “For You alone are holy” (Revelation 15:4)

No one and nothing else is holy. In addition, everything about God is holy. So, again, in order to have any kind of understanding of holiness, we have to have an understanding of God: who He is and what He is like.

Do you want to know more about the Lord and His holiness? If so, let’s close this letter with that very request as we pray together.

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