

## MARCH 12-24: HOLY PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION BY DR. GREG ROBERTSON

Having been reared in the Church of God (Anderson), holiness was a concept affirmed with regularity. I was taught that holiness was primarily about separation: separation from the world, separation from sin and sinful activities, etc. However, several years ago I found myself thinking about holiness in light of Jesus's cross and resurrection. Scripture presents Jesus's death, resurrection and ascension as central and essential to whom Jesus is and what he does as the Son of God. Yet, that means that the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are central and essential to who God is, since Jesus is the trustworthy revelation of God.

Scripture leads us to confess that God is holy, so how is the complex of the cross expressive, or better yet, demonstrative of God's holiness? This led me to another question: how is God different from us; what sets God apart as holy? What if the cross of Jesus constitutes the concretion of God's holiness in space and time? We often perceive of God's holiness and difference from God's creatures in metaphysical terms (God is all powerful or omnipotent, all-knowing or omniscient), so God is not limited in any manner like we who live in space and time. However, when we begin with the cross as the location from which to perceive God's holiness, we come away with a very different picture of God. God's holiness is not an abstract divine quality but is instead the enacted love of God for a rebellious and marred creation. God's holiness did not drive Jesus away from sinners, but into their very midst, as these were whom he sought to redeem and heal.

This has implications for us as we seek to understand what the biblical mandate to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). In what way may we seek to engage this new being that strives and desires to live a holy life? I believe it comes about because God releases us from our bondage to self. As John Webster observes, "'Holiness' and 'freedom' are correlative terms: my sanctification is my emancipation."<sup>2</sup> For what are we freed? We are freed to seek to understand what it means to live in love for our neighbor as an expression of our love for God. That is the possibility now made possible through the indwelling and the empowering in us by the self-same Spirit that pervaded the life and ministry of Jesus. It is in this way that we anticipate the Spirit's conforming us as those for whom Jesus sanctified himself (John 17:15-19): "...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20b-21)

### CONTRIBUTORS FOR THIS THEME

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<sup>2</sup>John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 92.