

The Beauty of Holiness

One of the most insightful modern Christian writers is a man by the name of David Wells. He gave one of the simplest and, I think, best definitions of worldliness. He said, “Worldliness is that system that makes sin seem normal and righteousness seem strange.” Worldliness is a way of thinking, an attitude, a posture communicated through all kinds of things – the media, the fashions, the economy, the educational system. This way of thinking says to the people who grow up in it, what Christians and other religions call 'holiness' is something weird and abnormal. It's some kind of really odd desire to be goody-two-shoes, or extra-good, like the little girls in your Grade Two class who would always sit in the front with fingers on lips to show how good they were. Holiness is even thought of as a kind of arrogance, trying to be morally superior to everyone else, so that you can then judge them and condemn them. The world thinks anyone who wants to be holy must be a bit off-kilter, and probably has some hidden agenda or social dysfunction – abnormal fears, the societal reject who can't fit in, someone who wants attention, a person with deep insecurities, or maybe someone who just wants to do the extreme sports version of religion.

On the other hand, the world thinks sin is normal. Sin is just what people like us do, they want us to believe. Sin is not sin, it's just what the average man does. Everyone tells white lies, despises someone at some point, lusts after other people, covets riches, envies others, is vain and self-seeking, is lazy. This is just who we are, the world says. “And who are you to call what the average man does *sinful*? This is not evil; it's normal. So long as we don't murder or really harm each other, it's just people being people.” So we watch sin on TV and laugh at it. We read about the sinful lives of celebrities and feel that's normal and desirable. Our unbelieving friends and colleagues boast and laugh at their sin, and we laugh with them.

The Bible has exactly the opposite view. According to God's Word, sin is the abnormality. Sin is the odd, unwelcome invader in the world. Sin is the alien infection, the disease, the parasite that destroys what was meant to be. And in God's world, holiness is what is normal. When God made the world, and He called it *good* – was that a holy world, or a sinful world? It was a holy world. And notice what it was like in that holy world: it was perfectly beautiful, the life of Earth was blessed and happy, there was no death, no spoil or decay. The Earth was beautiful and becoming more so.

It's no accident that our English word *holiness* is related to the word *wholeness*. They both derive from an Old English word *hāl* meaning “whole, uninjured, sound, healthy, entire, complete.” The Hebrew word for *peace* is *shalom*, and it means more than freedom from conflict; it means wholeness, health, wellness, strength, vitality, beauty. Holiness is **normal** life as God originally planned it – whole, entire, complete. Holiness is life without spoil, decay, ruin, rot, or defilement. Thomas Carlyle said, You could not get any better definition of what holy really is than healthy—completely healthy. So guess where the death, decay, defilement, rot, ruin, corruption, and ugliness came from? Sin – the thing which Satan's world system would have us believe is normal, acceptable, even healthy.

Heaven is the place where that infection is finally and completely removed, and where you have a place and country completely free of sin, and completely whole, complete, and normal. Heaven is not merely a place of rest, and reward, and responsibility, and place of family love. Heaven is the perfection of all that God loves, all that God sees as beautiful. So, as we move towards the inner core of Heaven, we see today that Heaven is about holiness. And to understand that, we'll see two negatives – two things Heaven will not have, and one positive – what heaven will instead be.

I. Heaven Will Have No Sin and No Sinners

7 "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev 21:7-8)

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Rev 21:27)

15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. (Rev 22:15)

Heaven will have no sin. Notice the wording of 21:27 “There shall by no means enter into it anything that defiles.” Heaven is completely free from sinners and their sin. The Bible has made it clear in numerous places what you cannot carry with you into Heaven. Like the airport scanners that immediately pick up weapons or metal objects, and sound the alarm before you get on the plane, so Heaven's gates would immediately slam shut to the smallest hint of sin. Scripture has made it very clear in numerous passages what gets you banned from Heaven, refused at port of entry. You've already seen from Revelation 21:7-8 eight categories that will prevent entry: “cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars” But that's by no means the only list.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-21)

3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know¹, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Eph 5:3-5)

No sinners enter Heaven. And no one who dwells in heaven ever sins. Listen to Spurgeon again: “No person who defiles, no fallen spirit, or sinful man can enter. And as no person, so no tendency, leaning, inclination, or will to sin can gain admission. No wish, no desire, no hunger towards that which is unclean shall ever be found in the perfect city of God. Nor even a thought of evil can be conceived there, much less a sinful act performed. Nothing shall ever be done within those gates of pearl contrary to perfect law, nor anything imagined in opposition to spotless holiness. Consider such purity, and wonder at it: the term “anything that defileth” includes even an idea, a memory, a thought of evil. Thoughts that flit through the mind as birds through the air that never roost or build a nest—even such shall never glance across the skies of the new creation. It is altogether perfect!”

So what possible hope is there for the human race?

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:9-11)

Such were some of you. What wonderful words of hope. Fornicators, idolaters, thieves, covetous, drunkards have no place in heaven, and you were in that category, says Paul, but – you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit.

What does that mean? It means all persons who came to God through the Person and work of Jesus Christ has had three things happen: they have been washed, forgiven of their defiling sin and guilt, they have been justified, declared innocent of sin and pleasing to God, sanctified, set apart for God's use. And though a believer may fall into sin, he is increasingly becoming what he is, he is practising his position, he is fleshing out what God has planted within. So not only in position, but in practice, the Christian can no longer be called by any of those titles, for it is no longer the habit of his life.

Worldliness makes us feel that sin is normal, and so any place where people are, there must be sin. They even mock the idea of being forever in a place where they can't sin. Who wants to be there?, they scorn. Well, I think the justice of the universe is that people will get what they want. People who hate God's holiness won't have to be in it for an eternity. Spurgeon said, "If you were in heaven without a new heart and a right spirit, you would be glad enough to get out of it; for heaven, unless a man is heavenly himself, would be worse than hell." And indeed, if sinful men were allowed to walk around Heaven, be sure of it, they would spread and communicate their sin to others, defiling whatever they touched.

The Christian longs for a place where there is no sin around him, and no sin within him. He can sing Horatio Spafford's words:

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. The language of that place is sinless. So if we're going, we're dispensing with that, too.

II. Heaven Will Have None of the Effects of Sin

4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." (Rev 21:4-5)

3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. (Rev 22:1-3)

Long ago, an evil angel said to our first parents, "the wages of sin is not death. The wages of sin is enlightenment. The wages of sin is independence. The wages of sin is freedom. If anyone or anything is deadly, it's God. He wants to deny you something, He wants to keep something for Himself at your expense. He wants to be the only God, and so He is lying to you. He knows if you eat of this tree, you will be gods too, you will know good and evil for yourselves. You will write the rules of good and evil, you won't have to submit to Him."

The message of Satan on that day was, this world is not perfect. A perfect world lies on the other side of you disobeying God. And the moment they ate, the first thing they felt was shame. They had not grown stronger and brighter, they had been defiled, and they felt it. The presence of sin brought into the world a curse. The curse is why our bodies age, get sick, fade, and eventually die. The curse is why the ground brings forth thorns and not perfect fruit. The curse is why the world has earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, avalanches, floods, volcanoes, droughts, famines, plagues. The curse is why the animal kingdom preys on one another, and is filled with the deadly, the poisonous, the dangerous. The curse is why everything physical, be it mineral, vegetable, or animal runs down:

it decays, spoils, weakens, rusts, rots, fades, cracks, breaks. Everything requires continual maintenance against the law of thermodynamics. Things weaken, devolve, lose energy, power, and beauty. *The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; (Isa 51:6)*

Like many of God's judgements, the curse is both justice and mercy. It is a just punishment for sin. But it is also a mercy. It's a mercy because can you imagine sinful people with sinful hearts in a perfect world – no hindrances, no challenges, no threats, no problems, nothing at all to restrain the exercise and growth of their selfishness. It's also a mercy because you and I have an everyday physical picture of what sin does. We are supposed to see things winding down, rusting, breaking, decaying, and say to ourselves, "This is what sin introduced to our world." You are supposed to look at your own body, see the age, see the weakening, and say, "Here is a parable before my very eyes of what sin does to beauty. Beauty diminishing, beauty fading, beauty declining is what sin does."

Satan does not want you to think about these things as God's continual reminders of what sin does. The world sells eternal beauty on its magazine covers, and sells products by the billions of dollars to fight the onset of age. No sin in doing so, but definitely sin in denying what age and decay point to, why they are here. The world wants to conserve the beauty in nature, which is a good thing, but it wishes to deny why the world is fading and aging. The world wants to pretend that this is all a physical world which can be perpetually renovated.

Carl Sagan, the famous atheistic astronomer once said, "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." And we're told that's all it is – physical. And supposedly the decay is natural – just the cycles of life, just the ebb and flow of an impersonal, material universe.

But the universe you live in is not only a physical universe. It is a moral universe made by a Person and sustained by a Person. Right and wrong, beautiful and ugly are just as real as atoms, light, mass, gravity, and colour. And just like if you jump off a ten storey building, gravity will kill you, or if you shake nitro-glycerine, chemical reactions will kill you, so if you break God laws, sin will kill you. Sin wrecks what God called very good. You need to see the curse not as natural, but as unnatural.

Heaven will have none of those effects. 4 *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* 5 *Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."*

Death is gone altogether, along with sorrow, crying, and pain. Heaven will be perpetually new. Not that there will be no time, but the time will not have a deteriorating effect on anything. All things in Heaven: the people and their bodies, the world and its fauna and flora, mineral, vegetable, or animal will be perpetually in a state of strength, health, perfection. There shall be no more curse in nature: 25 *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," Says the LORD. (Isa 65:25)*

Peter tells us what Heaven will be like: *to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, (1Pe 1:4)*

Imagine a home, a city, a country without decay, destruction, ruin, breakage, where there is no dimming, fading, spoiling, weakening.

Heaven will have no sin and no sinners. Consequently it will have none of the effects of sin. But that leads to the positive thought. No sin, no sinners, no curse, that's what won't be there, but then in its place, what will be there?

III. Heaven Will Be The Perfect Beauty of Holiness

Revelation 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John¹, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev 21:1-2)

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. (Rev 21:10-11)

18 The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass (Rev 21:18) 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. (Rev 21:18-21)

The amount of stones here of course overwhelm our imaginations. But try for a moment to picture the colours of this place. Jasper walls, (red, yellow, brown or green), buildings and streets of transparent gold, foundations of sapphire (blue), chalcedony (gray, grayish-blue or a shade of brown ranging from pale to nearly black), emerald (green), sardonyx (which is a deep shade of red), sardius (an even deeper shade red), chrysolite (a kind of lime-green), beryl (which can be green, blue, yellow, red, and white), topaz (red, yellow, pale gray, reddish-orange, or blue brown) , chrysoprase (shades of green), jacinth (very dark red or deep purple), amethyst (violet or deep purple). The deepest richest colours cut from the most attractive materials we know, light gleaming and refracting through them. The city itself is aglow, gleaming with internal light.

The idea is clearly, the most beautiful, compelling, glorious, rich site we have ever seen. Take away sin and its effects, what do you have? Perfect beauty. Worldliness, which makes sin seem normal and righteousness seem strange, says, take away sin, and it will be so boring, it will be sterile, colourless, lifeless, no fun, no joy. But the real truth is, take away sin, and you have removed the infection, and you have perfect health. You have removed the pain and have only pleasure. You have removed the mould, rot, decay, and have only newness. You have removed the ugliness and have only beauty.

Not just physical beauty, but moral beauty – the beauty of perfect characters, perfect love, perfect kindness, perfect justice.

Do you know why the seraphim fly around the throne, non-stop, covering their feet and their faces, crying “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty”? Because His holiness is the most exquisitely, ravishingly, astonishingly beautiful thing of all.

“Often there is in good men some defect of temper, or character, or conduct, that mars the excellence of what otherwise would seem most amiable; and even the very best of men, are, on earth, imperfect. But it is not so in heaven. There shall be no pollution, or deformity, or unamiable defect of any kind, seen in any person or thing; but everyone shall be perfectly pure, and perfectly lovely in heaven. That blessed world shall be perfectly bright, without any darkness; perfectly fair, without any spot; perfectly clear, without any cloud. No moral or natural defect shall ever enter there; and there nothing will be seen that is sinful or weak or foolish; nothing, the nature or aspect of which is coarse or displeasing, or that can offend the most refined taste or the most delicate eye. No string shall there vibrate out of tune, to cause any jar in the harmony of the music of heaven; and no note be such as to make discord in the anthems of saints and angels...And every member of that holy and blessed society shall be without any stain of sin, or imperfection, or weakness, or

imprudence, or blemish of any kind. The whole church, ransomed and purified, shall there be presented to Christ, as a bride, clothed in fine linen, clean and white, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Wherever the inhabitants of that blessed world shall turn their eyes, they shall see nothing but dignity, and beauty, and glory. The most stately cities on earth, however magnificent their buildings, yet have their foundations in the dust, and their streets dirty and defiled, and made to be trodden under foot; but the very streets of this heavenly city are of pure gold, like unto transparent glass, and its foundations are of precious stones, and its gates are pearls. And all these are but faint emblems of the purity and perfectness of those that dwell therein.” - Jonathan Edwards

Where there is holiness, there is life, beauty, wholeness, shalom.
John Flavel said, What health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul.

Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

In Heaven, there is no sin, and there are no sinners, there are none of the effects of sin, and therefore it is a place of the beauty of holiness. Now that leads to the question of how to know that you'll be there. We saw earlier that God washes us, justifies us, sanctifies us and fits us for Heaven with Christ's merits, not our own. But do you know how you know subjectively, internally, that God has done that work in you? When you have in your heart a growing desire for holiness, a growing disdain for sin. What you are now will be perfected in Heaven, not radically transformed. The radical transformation is to take place in this life. It is in this life that you get a new nature that loves Christ and hates sin.

11 "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous¹ still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." (Rev 22:11)

One writer put it this way: “Whatever the saints are in heaven, they began to be on earth. There is, no doubt, a perfection of character in the world to come; but the character must be formed here. In the next world there will be no real change; where the tree falls, there it will lie; he that is filthy will be filthy still, he that is holy will be holy still.” (Spurgeon)

I cannot love sin, find holiness boring, and imagine that when I die, I will go to Heaven and God will fix that. No, if you find holiness detestable, you have every reason to expect that when you die God will keep you out of the place of holiness, and surround you with people who love sin as much as you do. One of the most important tests for true salvation is that you are coming to see holiness and beautiful and sin as ugly, or to put it this way again, that you are coming to love what God loves, and hate what God hates.

If you are a believer, one day you will live in a world where holiness seems normal and sin seems strange. Let us learn the language of Heaven now if we are going there, adopt the attitudes of Heaven now if we will live there forever.