

Truth about Holiness

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness,
without which no man shall see the Lord.”

(Hebrews 12:14)

INTRODUCTION:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God..." (II Corinthians 5:17, 18).

When a person repents and comes to Christ there is an evident and immediate change in his life. This is not to say that he immediately becomes perfect, but he does turn from his sinful deeds and embarks on a beautiful life, separated unto God.

This life of separation is referred to as a life of holiness. Scripture also uses the terms perfection and sanctification in speaking of holiness.

CHRISTIAN'S CALL TO HOLINESS:

To deny that Christians are called to holiness is to deny scripture itself. From the calling out of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, to the calling home of His church, God expects separation from the things of the world by His chosen people. God expressed it to Abraham this way, "I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Genesis 17:1). Paul spoke of Jesus' intent for His bride (the church), "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:17).

To have followed the gospel plan of salvation, which is repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues (Acts 2:38) is not an end in itself. To stop there without presenting your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God is to fail to fulfill your reasonable service unto God: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1).

After being filled with the Spirit of God, man has a great responsibility to both God and man. Paul felt this responsibility and expressed it unto Governor Felix, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). Paul admonished the Corinthians, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (I Corinthians 3:16,17). In the Chapter 6 of the same Book addressed to the church in Corinth Paul said: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (I Corinthians 6:19)

Jesus told His disciples that they were the light of the world and that they should let their light shine as an example unto others so that they might glorify God (Matthew 5:14-16). The holy life of a Christian is an essential part of their witness and testimony to others. "Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippines 2:15).

To claim to be a Christian and to live like the world is an insult to Christ. Those who do are hypocrites and are not of God. Jesus let it be known that some would profess without possessing, but He also gave a truth by which to tell the difference, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:20, 21). It is the will of God for man to be holy because He is holy: "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (I Peter 1:16).

Therefore, "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (II Timothy 2:19).

God emphasized the importance of holiness with the children of Israel by commanding it of them on several occasions, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). "For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). "And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine" (Leviticus 20:26). These are but a few of the Old Testament scriptures on holiness. But they are indicative of God's emphasis on the importance of the truth of holiness.

The New Testament also stresses the importance of holiness by recording many commands of God for it. However, it goes even further by putting it bluntly, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). God's demand of holiness carries with it strong repercussions for disobedience. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (II Corinthians 6:17).

WHAT IS HOLINESS?

Since scripture proves that holiness is an essential part of the life of the believer, the next step is to investigate what holiness is. Holiness is a divine attribute of God. Holiness is the quality or state of being set apart to the service of God. Holiness in reference to man is a separation of heart, mind and soul from all that which is sinful.

A man who has come to Christ is made a new creature in Him, and conscientiously tries by the help of God's Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing before God. Holiness is not being conformed to the world but being transformed by a renewing of the mind to a life that takes on the obtainable characteristics of God and His Word (Romans 12:2). These characteristics are exhibited both in body and in Spirit:

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (II Corinthians 7:1).

Holiness is bringing oneself in obedience to God's Word.

True holiness covers both the inward and outward man:

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thessalonians 5:23)

To clean up one, without the other, is a contradiction. Such was the case of the scribes and Pharisees upon whom Jesus pronounced woe and called them hypocrites. He accused them of cleaning up the outside of the cup but leaving the inside full of extortion and excess:

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

(Matthew 23:23-27).

As a man strives for perfection in Christ Jesus he must

- *think honestly, justly on pure things, on lovely things, on things of good report:*

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippines 4:8).

- *dress modestly, decently, godly and not in expensive clothes:*

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works." (I Timothy 2:8-10).

- *have his speech not corrupt, but good; that he tell no lies but only truth*

"22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Ephesians 4:22-25, 29)

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

- *make sure that his members are not yielded in any way as instruments of unrighteousness or sin, but unto God and righteousness:*

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." (Romans 6:13).

"..even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." (Romans 6:19)

IS HOLINESS OBTAINABLE?

Since holiness is referred to as perfection and sanctification at times, some try to rationalize that holiness is unobtainable and therefore should not be striven for. God would not command His church to do the impossible. God expects holiness from His people because, with the help of the Holy Ghost in an individual, they can obtain it. In fact, men both in the past and in the present are living holy and acceptable lives before God. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). Such was the state of a man in the Old Testament who did not have the opportunity of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. God presented him to Satan as an example of a perfect man:

"And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8).

In the New Testament, Cornelius who did not at the time possess the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, provides an example to others, "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway" (Acts 10:2). How much more should those who have repented, been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and filled with His Holy Spirit be **able** to obtain holiness in God's eyes. Paul did. As Paul's end drew near he wrote to Timothy, "I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith; Henceforeth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." (II Timothy 4:7.8).

It is true that the holiness of the believer is not the same as God's. His is absolute and perfect. The believer's is relative and should constantly be worked upon. Finally, upon obtaining heaven, the believer will ascertain his ultimate perfection: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13). Until then, his duty is to press toward the mark! And until then temptation to sin will be present. But through God's Spirit a

believer can become an overcomer of temptation. God will not allow man to be tempted beyond that which he can endure:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (I Corinthians 10:13).

CONCLUSION:

Holiness is a privilege that is available and expected of a new creature in Christ Jesus. It should not be considered as a hindrance to becoming a Christian but a reward for becoming one. To be separated from God in a sinful state is a curse. But to be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people (I Peter 2:9) unto God is a blessed experience to be desired of all.

The reason for being a holy people is because of God's holiness (I Peter 1:16) and because of God's mercy, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). As long as the Christian bears in mind that the Holy God of creation, robed Himself in flesh, and died on a bloody cross for his individual sin, holiness unto God should be a natural consequence and honor. Jesus died a vicarious death for him; it is only reasonable that he should live a holy life for Jesus.