

# THE DOCTRINE OF HOLINESS

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**M**ANY names are given to this doctrine after which our Sunday morning meeting and one week-night meeting are entitled. But the second blessing, Christian perfection, entire sanctification, the blessing of perfect love, all stand for one and the same experience; they are varying descriptions of the same reality. So that we may understand each other better, however, we will keep to the companion words holy and holiness.

Both these words go back to the earliest days of the religious education of the people of God and, to begin with, applied to that which belonged to God and which therefore provoked awe.

For example, a thing or a place could be holy. 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' was the word which came to Moses. In other words: take care; show reverence; this burning bush is holy ground.

When the children of Israel came to Sinai, bounds were set about the smoking mountain lest they should unwittingly trespass on what was holy (Exodus 19: 10-13). The command

was: Keep away! Keep off! These slopes are holy!

Similarly, none but accredited persons could handle the Ark, for that too was holy in that it belonged to God. No ordinary person could touch it. One who did so, even with good intentions, fell dead (2 Samuel 6: 7). What was holy belonged to God; men must keep away from what was His. Who could tell what harm would befall them if they trespassed on what was holy? Increasing holiness was denoted by increasing remoteness from the common life of man.

Perhaps the fullest expression of this idea is found in the construction of the third temple—the one standing in Jerusalem when Jesus was on earth. Larger in construction than either St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey, it can be best compared to a giant series of unroofed boxes, one inside the other, all—save the last—open to the sky.

To the huge outer court of the Gentiles anyone might come—men, women, Jews, Gentiles, visitors, traders. This was where the buying and selling went on which so offended Jesus. But just as every visitor to Paris 'does' Notre Dame and every new arrival in London must see Buckingham

Palace, so all who came to Jerusalem visited the Temple.

Within that open court ran a low stone balustrade which carried a notice forbidding any Gentile to pass under pain of death (see Acts 21: 27-29). This was the point beyond which Gentiles were not permitted to go. Within was the court of the women— not a place reserved for women only, but the area beyond which women might not go. Within again was the court of the priests to which priests only were admitted. Here stood the giant altar of unhewn stone, 48 feet square behind which stood the dark, windowless cube known as the Holy of Holies. To this most holy place came the High Priest only, and he but once a year, and then only after having undergone the prescribed ceremonial cleansings.

Increasing holiness was expressed by increasing remoteness from the ordinary man. It was all keep out; keep your distance; keep away. Gentiles keep out of the Jewish reserves; women keep out of the men's; men keep out of the priests'; priests keep out of the Holy of Holies; High Priest keep out but once a year! The greater the degree of

holiness, the greater the separation from man. It could, then, only be expected that this idea, current in Hebrew thought and expressed in their religious architecture, should shape the lives of those who were most earnest about their religion. The Gospels give us glimpses of a group of men who sought to live a holy life in obedience to this principle of separation. They were the Pharisees and their name meant 'the separated ones'. Their name gives us a clue to their way of life.

The picture which Jesus drew of a Pharisee in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee is not a caricature (Luke 18: 10-14). The Pharisee was not as other men. They might sit loosely to the faith of their fathers but not he.

Jewish law demanded that a man should fast once a year—on the Day of Atonement; the Pharisee did so twice a week. (It is not a bad thing to have one's physical appetites under control.)

Jewish law demanded that tithes be paid on agricultural produce only; this man gave a tenth of all his income. (It is not wrong to support God's work generously and consistently.)

So far as morality was concerned, this man came out well. As another one-time Pharisee observed: 'as touching the law, blameless'. Yet holiness is not morality, though morality is a necessary part of holiness. It is when we set side by side the holiness of the Pharisee and the holiness of Jesus that we see

The little more, how much it is,  
The little less, how many miles away.

The Pharisee was not a bad man, if by bad we mean one who was unchaste and intemperate, foul in language and filthy in habits. Morally, he was above reproach. But the holiness of Jesus was not only the negative grace of sinlessness. Holiness is not a conscious rectitude, a continual watching of one's step lest the wrong foot be put forward first. Separation, by itself, is not enough. Holiness is not just not doing things and not going places. I am not made good by what I do not do.

Think of Scrooge. He never went to the theatre or haunted low dives, yet no one would call him a holy man. And why? Because there was absent from his life one particular element or quality which constitutes the essence of Christian holiness.

What was there in Jesus that there was

not in the average Pharisee ? Not the element of morality. We have already noted that in the Pharisee and given him full marks for it. Not the practice of religious exercises. The outward signs of his faith were evident in the Pharisee's dress and conduct. But with Jesus there was the quality of love which is the first of the fruits of the Holy Spirit's presence. The ceaseless activity of love as seen in Jesus is the distinctive element in the Christian experience of holiness. Therefore Christ-likeness is holiness. Where Christ is enthroned, there is holiness. Yet holiness is not merely an 'imitation' of Christ, if by that we mean a self-conscious external patterning. Christian holiness will spring from an inward possession of that same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus and by whose power He wrought and taught.

So the blessing of holiness is never an 'it'. No Salvationist should ever say: 'I've got it!' The blessing of holiness is an experience born of the presence of the Holy Spirit who is not a thing. We now see that things and places can never be holy because of any intrinsic virtues which they may possess of themselves. There is no 'holy' water save such water as is chemically fit for human use.

There is no 'holy' ground—save that all ground where good people meet to worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is holy ground.

A quiet voice, a muffled beat is heard,  
In foggy street a simple song is raised;  
Here is true worship, though unshriven by church  
Nor helped by signs and symbols dear to age.  
No organ music sounds, no cross is seen,  
No altar raised, no sacrament adored;  
But cornet reinforces drum and bass  
Till chilly basement and the third floor back  
Hear notes unornamented which proclaim  
God's immemorial love for erring man.  
Late lie-a-beds awake, an unwashed child  
Runs to a window and peeps round a blind.  
For such the bush still burns: God may be found;  
The Army ring is consecrated ground.

Is St. Peter's holy, but not the Clapton Congress Hall? And if either is holy it is only because those who gather there are men and women in whose hearts dwell that same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus. His work was perfectly exemplified in Jesus, and He can make us like Him, not through outward conformity, but by the workings of inward grace.

Finally, if it be asked whether this experience is the work of a moment or that of years, I answer—both. In this matter, I

borrow with grateful acknowledgments an illustration found in *Meant for You* by Will Brown.

A bandmaster is appointed to take charge of a band. There is a moment when he is commissioned as such by his corps officer, who hands him a paper giving him authority to act in this particular capacity. But the work of that bandmaster with his band will go on for years. There will always be improvements to be made. Perfection in a final and complete sense will never be gained. Ever there will be the glory of going on.

I can yield my forgiven life to God that He may accept me and give me of His Spirit as much as I am able to receive. That may take place in a moment of time. But the work of His Spirit in my heart and life will never be ended. Indeed, it is the greatest of saints who have ever been most conscious of their imperfections. Those who live closest to Jesus are most aware how unlike Him they are. Yet that same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus is in them. Their sense of their shortcomings is not due to His absence, but to His presence.

So the presence of the Holy Spirit can do a twofold work in the human heart. He can

purify, but He will reveal what more remains to be purified. He can provoke us to that disinterested service for God and man which we call love in action, but He will make us long to serve more selflessly still. His work will never be done, though His coming may be the work of a moment. Our separateness will not be a separateness from people, however sinful, which is Pharisaism; but a separation from sin unto God and a dedication to people, which is Christian holiness.

Finally, the presence of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee immunity from temptation nor exempt us from failure, but He will enable us to keep our eye upon Jesus as our pattern, giving us grace to grow like the Master in whom He dwelt in all fullness.