

HOLINESS:
ITS NATURE,
HINDRANCES,
DIFFICULTIES, AND
ROOTS

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With an Introduction by Jared Longshore

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INTRODUCTION

The Reformed and Evangelical Church finds itself with enemies behind and before. Like David's mighty men, we face the Ammonites marshaled against us by the city gate and turn only to see the Syrians arrayed in battle, opposing us on the countryside (2 Sam. 10). The various idols of American culture have seemed to converge against the bride of Christ simultaneously. But these false gods did not come out of thin air. We have had many kings who for some time now have failed to remove the high places—"And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done; save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places" (2 Kings 15:3-4).

As these idols metastasize, many Christians are not sure what to do. Some have sought to claim the crown rights of King Jesus all the way up to the high places only to find themselves sacrificing to idols upon arrival. Others have opted for the monastery in a Benedictine attempt to preserve the faith amid the rise of Barbarian culture. Neither of those options will suffice. We need a recovery of the root and the fruit. You cannot have the latter without the former, and the former must always produce the latter. The kingdom of Christ will flourish on earth, and that kingdom is heavenly. It is past time for a recovery of the full exercise of the Christian religion. And such a

recovery requires the vital, life-animating power of holiness—“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4).

In his classic work *Holiness*, J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) supplies biblical truth for revival and reformation. He defines holiness as “the habit of being of one mind with God.... It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment—hating what he hates—loving what he loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of his Word” (64). Holiness involves the mind and heart agreeing with God. So there is no room for carnality, secular humanism, paganism, or the pragmatism which marks so much of evangelical Christianity in the 21st century. Moreover, Ryle adds that holiness concerns everything in the world being brought under the standard of Holy Scripture. So neither is there any room for the individualism, pietism, and rampant denial of Christ’s Lordship which also plagues evangelical culture. Through direct and vigorous prose, Ryle sets right several things that are out of place among us.

Holiness demonstrates that Christian godliness does not involve a retreat from society—

Sanctification does not consist in retirement from our place in life, and the renunciation of our social duties. In every age it has been a snare with many to take up this line in the pursuit of holiness. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness, and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents, under the vain idea that by so doing they would escape sin and become eminently holy. (51–52)

Godliness actually runs in the other direction, toward responsibility in the public square—

INTRODUCTION

The twenty papers contained in this volume are a humble contribution to a cause which is exciting much interest in the present day—I mean the cause of Scriptural holiness. It is a cause which everyone who loves Christ, and desires to advance His kingdom in the world, should endeavor to help forward. Everyone can do something, and I wish to add my mite.

The reader will find little that is directly controversial in these papers. I have carefully abstained from naming modern teachers and modern books. I have been content to give the result of my own study of the Bible, my own private meditations, my own prayers for light, and my own reading of old divines. If in anything I am still in error, I hope I shall be shown it before I leave the world. We all see in part, and have a treasure in earthen vessels. I trust I am willing to learn.

I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country. Politics, or controversy, or party-spirit, or worldliness, have eaten out the heart of lively piety in too many of us. The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters. The immense importance of “adorning the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10), and making it lovely and beautiful by our

daily habits and tempers, has been far too much overlooked. Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that “religious” persons, so-called, are not so amiable and unselfish and good-natured as others who make no profession of religion. Yet sanctification, in its place and proportion, is quite as important as justification. Sound Protestant and Evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless: it does positive harm. It is despised by keen-sighted and shrewd men of the world, as an unreal and hollow thing, and brings religion into contempt. It is my firm impression that we want a thorough revival about Scriptural holiness, and I am deeply thankful that attention is being directed to the point.

It is, however, of great importance that the whole subject should be placed on right foundations, and that the movement about it should not be damaged by crude, disproportioned, and one-sided statements. If such statements abound, we must not be surprised. Satan knows well the power of true holiness, and the immense injury which increased attention to it will do to his kingdom. It is his interest, therefore, to promote strife and controversy about this part of God’s truth. Just as in time past he has succeeded in mystifying and confusing men’s minds about justification, so he is laboring in the present day to make men “darken counsel by words without knowledge” about sanctification. May the Lord rebuke him! I cannot however give up the hope that good will be brought out of evil, that discussion will elicit truth, and that variety of opinion will lead us all to search the Scriptures more, to pray more, and to become more diligent in trying to find out what is “the mind of the Spirit.”

I now feel it a duty, in sending forth this volume, to offer a few introductory hints to those whose attention is specially directed to the subject of sanctification in the present day. I know that I do so at the risk of seeming presumptuous, and possibly of giving offence. But something must be ventured in the interests of God’s truth. I shall therefore put my hints into the form of questions, and I shall request

CHAPTER 1: SIN

“Sin is the transgression of the law.”—1 John 3:4

He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption. I make no apology for beginning this volume of papers about holiness by making some plain statements about sin.

The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are “words and names” which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creature in Christ is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The material creation in Genesis began with “light,” and so also does the spiritual creation. God “shines into our hearts” by the work of the Holy Ghost, and then spiritual life begins (2 Cor. 4:6). Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies, and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies.

I believe that one of the chief wants of the Church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.

(1) I shall begin the subject by supplying some definition of sin. We are all of course familiar with the terms "sin" and "sinners." We talk frequently of "sin" being in the world, and of men committing "sins." But what do we mean by these terms and phrases? Do we really know? I fear there is much mental confusion and haziness on this point. Let me try, as briefly as possible, to supply an answer.

I say, then, that "sin," speaking generally, is, as the Ninth Article of our Church declares, "the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone (*quam longissime* is the Latin) from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation." Sin, in short, is that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race, of every rank, and class, and name, and nation, and people, and tongue; a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?

I say, furthermore, that "a sin," to speak more particularly, consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining, anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God. "Sin," in short, as the Scripture saith, is "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God's revealed will and character constitutes a sin, and at once makes us guilty in God's sight.

Of course I need not tell any one who reads his Bible with attention that a man may break God's law in heart and thought, when there is no overt and visible act of wickedness. Our Lord has settled that point beyond dispute in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-28). Even a poet of our own has truly said, "A man may smile and smile, and be a villain."

CHAPTER 2: SANCTIFICATION

“**S**anctify them through Thy truth.”—John 17:17.

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”—1 Thess. 4:3.

The subject of sanctification is one which many, I fear, dislike exceedingly. Some even turn from it with scorn and disdain. The very last thing they would like is to be a “saint,” or a “sanctified” man. Yet the subject does not deserve to be treated in this way. It is not an enemy, but a friend.

It is a subject of the utmost importance to our souls. If the Bible be true, it is certain that unless we are “sanctified,” we shall not be saved. There are three things which, according to the Bible, are absolutely necessary to the salvation of every man and woman in Christendom. These three are, justification, regeneration, and sanctification. All three meet in every child of God: he is both born again, and justified, and sanctified. He that lacks any one of these three things is not a true Christian in the sight of God, and dying in that condition will not be found in heaven and glorified in the last day.

It is a subject which is peculiarly seasonable in the present day. Strange doctrines have risen up of late upon the whole subject of sanctification. Some appear to confound it with justification. Others

fritter it away to nothing, under the pretense of zeal for free grace, and practically neglect it altogether. Others are so much afraid of “works” being made a part of justification, that they can hardly find any place at all for “works” in their religion. Others set up a wrong standard of sanctification before their eyes, and failing to attain it, waste their lives in repeated secessions from church to church, chapel to chapel, and sect to sect, in the vain hope that they will find what they want. In a day like this, a calm examination of the subject, as a great leading doctrine of the Gospel, may be of great use to our souls.

1. Let us consider, firstly, the true nature of sanctification.
2. Let us consider, secondly, the visible marks of sanctification.
3. Let us consider, lastly, wherein justification and sanctification agree and are like one another, and wherein they differ and are unlike.

If, unhappily, the reader of these pages is one of those who care for nothing but this world, and make no profession of religion, I cannot expect him to take much interest in what I am writing. You will probably think it an affair of “words, and names,” and nice questions, about which it matters nothing what you hold and believe. But if you are a thoughtful, reasonable, sensible Christian, I venture to say that you will find it worthwhile to have some clear ideas about sanctification.

1. In the first place, we have to consider the nature of sanctification. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a “sanctified” man?

Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, puts a new principle in his heart, and makes him practically godly in life. The instrument by which the Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations “without the Word” (1 Peter 3:1). The

CHAPTER 3: HOLINESS

“**H**oliness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”—Heb. 12:14.

The text which heads this page opens up a subject of deep importance. That subject is practical holiness. It suggests a question which demands the attention of all professing Christians—Are we holy? Shall we see the Lord?

That question can never be out of season. The wise man tells us, “There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh—a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccles. 3:4, 7); but there is no time, no, not a day, in which a man ought not to be holy. Are we?

That question concerns all ranks and conditions of men. Some are rich and some are poor—some learned and some unlearned—some masters, and some servants; but there is no rank or condition in life in which a man ought not to be holy. Are we?

I ask to be heard to-day about this question. How stands the account between our souls and God? In this hurrying, bustling world, let us stand still for a few minutes and consider the matter of holiness. I believe I might have chosen a subject more popular and pleasant. I am sure I might have found one more easy to handle. But I feel deeply I could not have chosen one more seasonable and more profitable

to our souls. It is a solemn thing to hear the Word of God saying, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

I shall endeavor, by God's help, to examine what true holiness is, and the reason why it is so needful. In conclusion, I shall try to point out the only way in which holiness can be attained. I have already, in the second paper in this volume, approached this subject from a doctrinal side. Let me now try to present it to my readers in a more plain and practical point of view.

I. First, then, let me try to show what true practical holiness is—what sort of persons are those whom God calls holy.

A man may go great lengths, and yet never reach true holiness. It is not knowledge; Balaam had that: nor great profession—Judas Iscariot had that; nor doing many things—Herod had that; nor zeal for certain matters in religion—Jehu had that; nor morality and outward respectability of conduct—the young ruler had that; nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers—the Jews in Ezekiel's time had that; nor keeping company with godly people—Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that. Yet none of these was holy! These things alone are not holiness. A man may have any one of them, and yet never see the Lord.

What then is true practical holiness? It is a hard question to answer. I do not mean that there is any want of Scriptural matter on the subject. But I fear lest I should give a defective view of holiness, and not say all that ought to be said; or lest I should say things about it that ought not to be said, and so do harm. Let me, however, try to draw a picture of holiness, that we may see it clearly before the eyes of our minds. Only let it never be forgotten, when I have said all, that my account is but a poor imperfect outline at the best.

(a) Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment—hating what He hates—loving what He loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.