



Holiness

"Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord".

Hebrews 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"* (Ecclesiastes 3:4, 7); but there is no time, no, not a day, in which a man ought not to be holy. Are we holy? 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 holy?

I ask to be heard today about this question. How does the account stand 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 easier 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"* (Hebrews 12:14).

I will endeavor, by God's help, to examine what true holiness is and the reason why it is so needful. In conclusion, I will try to point out the only way in which holiness can be attained. Having considered the doctrinal side, let us now turn to the plain and practical application.

1. The NATURE of true practical holiness

First then, let me try to show what true practical holiness is – what sort of people are those whom God calls holy?

A man may go great lengths in religion – and yet never reach true holiness.

It is not knowledge – Balaam had that.

It is not great profession – Judas Iscariot had that.

It is not doing many things – Herod had that.

It is not zeal for certain matters in religion – Jehu had that.

It is not morality and outward respectability of conduct – the rich young ruler had that.

It is not taking pleasure in hearing preachers – the Jews in Ezekiel's time had that.

It is not keeping company with godly people – Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that.

Yet none of these were holy people! 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 lack 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 Biblical 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.

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.

2. A holy man will endeavor to shun every known sin, and to keep every known commandment

He will have ... a decided bent of mind towards God, a hearty desire to do His will, a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a love to all His ways.

He will feel what Paul felt when he said, *"I delight in the law of God after the inward man"* (Romans 7:22), and what David felt when he said, *"I esteem all Your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:128).

3. A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ

He will not only live the life of faith in Him and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength – but he will also labor to have the mind that was in Him, and to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). It will be his aim ... to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us; to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself; to walk in love, even as Christ loved us; to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself.

He will remember...

- that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth;
- that He came not to do His own will;
- that it was His food and drink to do His Father's will;
- that He would continually deny Himself in order to minister to others;
- that He was meek and patient under undeserved insults;
- that He thought more of godly poor men, than of kings;
- that He was full of love and compassion to sinners;
- that He was bold and uncompromising in denouncing sin;
- that He sought not the praise of men, when He might have had it;
- that He went about doing good;
- that He was separate from worldly people;
- that He continued instant in prayer;
- that He would not let even His nearest relations stand in His way when God's work was to be done.

All these things, a holy man will try to remember. By them, he will endeavor to shape his course in life. He will lay to heart the saying of John: *"He who says he abides in Christ, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked"* (1 John 2:6); and the saying of Peter, that *"Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps"* (1 Peter 2:21). Happy is he who has learned to make Christ his "all," both for salvation and example! Much time would be saved, and much sin prevented – if men would oftener ask themselves the question: "What would Jesus have said and done – if He were in my place?"

4. A holy man will follow after meekness, patience, gentleness, patience, kind tempers, and government of his tongue

He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much and be slow to talk of standing on his rights. We see a bright example of this in the behavior of David when Shimei cursed him, and of Moses when Aaron and Miriam spoke against him (2 Sam. 16:10; Num. 12:3).

5. A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial

He will labor ... to mortify the desires of his body, to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts, to curb his passions, to restrain his carnal inclinations – lest at any time they break loose.

Oh, what a word is that of the Lord Jesus to the apostles: *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life – and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap!”* (Luke 21:34); and that of the apostle Paul: *“I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize!”* (1 Corinthians 9:27).

6. A holy man will follow after love and brotherly kindness

He will endeavor to observe the ‘golden rule’ of doing as he would have men do to him – and speaking as he would have men speak to him. He will be full of affection towards his brethren, towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, their souls. *“He who loves another,”* says Paul, *“has fulfilled the law”* (Romans 13:8). He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty and unfair dealing – even in the least things. He will strive to adorn his religion by his entire outward demeanor, and to make it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all around him.

Alas, what condemning words are the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and the sermon on the mount – when laid alongside the conduct of many professing Christians!

7. A holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others

He will not stand idle all the day. He will not be content with doing no harm – he will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day and generation, and to lessen the spiritual needs and misery around him as far as he can. Such was Dorcas: *“full of good works and alms-deeds, which she did”* – not merely purposed and talked about – but did. Such a one was Paul: *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for you,”* he says, *“though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (Acts 9:36; 2 Corinthians 12:15).

8. A holy man will follow after purity of heart

He will dread all immorality, and impurity of spirit, and seek to avoid all things that might draw him into it. He knows his own heart is like tinder – and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation. Who shall dare to talk of their own strength – when David can fall?

There is many a hint to be gleaned from the ceremonial law. Under it the man who only touched a bone or a dead body or a grave or a diseased person – became at once unclean in the sight of God. And these things were emblems and figures. Few Christians are ever too watchful and too particular about this point.

9. A holy man will follow after the fear of God

I do not mean the fear of a slave – who only works because he is afraid of punishment and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child – who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father’s face, because he loves him.

What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became governor at Jerusalem, he could have been supported the Jews and required money from them for his sustenance. The former governors had done so. There was none to blame him, if he did. But he says, *“The*

former governors, in contrast, had laid heavy burdens on the people, demanding a daily ration of food and wine, besides forty pieces of silver. Even their assistants took advantage of the people. But because I feared God – I did not act that way!” (Neh. 5:15).

10. A holy man will follow after humility

He will desire, in lowliness of mind, to esteem all others better than himself. He will see more evil in his own heart – than in any other in the world.

He will understand something of Abraham’s feeling, when he says, *“I am dust and ashes!”*

And Jacob’s feeling, when he says, *“I am unworthy of the least of all Your mercies!”*

And Job’s feeling, when he says, *“Behold! I am vile!”*

And Paul’s feeling, when he says, *“I am the chief of sinners!”*

Holy John Bradford, that faithful martyr of Christ, would sometimes finish his letters with these words: *“A most miserable sinner, John Bradford.”* The godly William Grimshaw’s last words, when he lay on his deathbed, were these: *“Here goes an unprofitable servant!”*

11. A holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life

He will try, not merely to fill his place as well as others who take no thought for their souls – but even better, because he has higher motives and more help than they. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten: *“Whatever you do – do it heartily, as to the Lord.”* *“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”* (Colossians 3:23; Romans 12:11).

Holy people should aim at doing everything well and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything poorly, if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no “occasion” against themselves, except concerning the law of their God (Dan. 6:5). They should strive to be...

- good husbands and good wives,
- good parents and good children,
- good masters and good servants,
- good neighbors,
- good friends,
- good subjects,
- good in private and good in public,
- good in the place of business and good by their firesides.

Holiness is worth little indeed – if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people when He says, *“What are you doing more than others?”* (Matthew 5:47).

12. Last – but not least, a holy man will follow after spiritual-mindedness

He will endeavor to set his affections on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the present life; but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to eternal realities. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in Heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim traveling to his home.

To commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people – these things will be the holy man’s chief enjoyments. He will value everything and place and company – just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God. He will enter into something of David’s feeling, when he says, *“My soul follows hard after You!”* *“You are my portion!”* (Psalm 63:8; 119:57).

Here let me insert, that I am not without fear that my meaning will be mistaken, and the description I have given of holiness will discourage some tender conscience. I would not willingly make one righteous heart sad, or throw a stumbling block in any believer's way.

I do not say for a moment that holiness shuts out the presence of indwelling sin. No, far from it. It is the greatest misery of a holy man, that he carries about with him a "*body of sin and death*"; that often when he would do good – but evil is present with him; that the old man is clogging all his movements and, as it were, trying to draw him back at every step he takes! (Romans 7:21).

But it is the excellence of a holy man – that he is not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. He hates it, mourns over it and longs to be free from its company. The work of sanctification within him, is like the wall of Jerusalem – the building goes forward "*even in troublous times*" (Dan. 9:25).

Neither do I say that holiness comes to ripeness and perfection all at once; or that these graces I have touched on must be found in full bloom and vigor, before you can call a man holy. No, far from it! Sanctification is always a progressive work. Some men's graces are in the blade, some in the ear, and some are like full grain in the ear. (Mark 4:28) All must have a beginning. We must never despise "*the day of small things.*"

Sanctification in the very holiest man – is an imperfect work. The history of the brightest saints that ever lived, will contain many a "but" and "however" and "notwithstanding" before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross, the light will never shine without some clouds – until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The sun itself has spots upon its face. The holiest men have many a blemish and defect when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world and the devil; and sometimes you will see them not overcoming – but overcome! The flesh is ever lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. In many things we all stumble. (Galatians 5:17; James 3:2).

But still, for all this, I am sure that to have such a character as I have faintly drawn, is the heart's desire and prayer of all true Christians. They press towards it – if they do not reach it. They may not attain to it – but they always aim at it. It is what they strive and labor to be – if it is not what they are.

And I do boldly and confidently say, that true holiness is a great reality. It is something in a man that can be seen and known and marked and felt by all around him.

It is light – if it exists, it will show itself. It is salt – if it exists, its savor will be perceived.

It is a precious ointment – if it exists, its fragrance cannot be hidden.

I am sure that we should make allowance for much backsliding, for much occasional deadness in professing Christians. I know a road may lead from one point to another – and yet have many a winding and turn. Just so, a man may be truly holy – and yet be drawn aside by many an infirmity. Gold is not the less gold because mingled with alloy; nor light the less light because faint and dim; nor grace the less grace because young and weak.

But after every allowance, I cannot see how any man deserves to be called "holy" – who will fully allow himself in sins, and is not humbled and ashamed because of them. I dare not call anyone "holy" – who makes a habit of willfully neglecting known duties and willfully doing what he knows God has commanded him not to do. Well says Owen, "*I do not understand how a man can be a true believer, unto whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow and trouble!*"

Such are the leading characteristics of practical holiness. Let us examine ourselves and see whether we are acquainted with it. Let us prove our own selves.

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