

MAKING MEN HOLY

By

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“You shall be holy, for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16).

Holiness is not to be confused with funeral-toned speech, nor with ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues. “Holiness” comes from the same root word as “whole”. What Christ does is to make men “whole” again. And what is a “whole” person but one who fulfills completely the design of the Creator, one who is truly in God’s image?

We all know that a church like that described in the New Testament should express a high degree of enthusiasm, devotion and a spirit of holiness. Churches are trying to simulate these characteristics by employing skilled professionals to stir the audience to excitement with a stage full of electronic apparatus. Men who know more about psychology than Biblical theology are engaged to motivate people to decisions. Yet, after all this, there is still a great lack of that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Many, like the “Jesus People”, have deserted the institutional church because they see it as worldly and materialistic. Spiritual growth does not come from promotional gimmicks, nor where success is measured by the popularity of the professionals rather than by the measure of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thousands have left the high steeple and plush pews to meet for prayer and Bible study in homes, called the “underground church.” You can starve while writing books on food. And you can be active in church and yet be unholy in God’s eyes, and in your own.

It was for rejecting the holy image of God that Adam and Eve were condemned to death. Made in God’s image and pronounced “good” by the Creator, they followed Satan’s suggestion to make up their OWN image, to know “good and evil”, to decide for themselves what is whole.

The purpose of God through Christ is to restore man to that true image, and make him holy once again.

Reality of The Need. Peter was writing to Christians when he said, “But you are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may show forth the excellence of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; Who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God; who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (I Pet. 1:9). A Holy Nation! Not a certain racial group and not citizens of a particular country, but a people who have obtained holiness through the mercy of God. Not members of a “holiness” church, but people seeking life that is lived WHOLLY for God and in obedience to His word.

Christ came into the world as part of the original plan of God to have men whole, in His image. Jesus was not a “super-star” caught up in the excitement of His own ambition as some muddled musicians would tell us. At the center of His purpose in coming to the world was the task of solving the problem of sin, which is simply the lack of a holy nature. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, everyone that commits sin, is the bondservant of sin. And the bondservant abides not in the house forever; the son abides forever. Therefore if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34–36). Every person who is honest with himself will admit that he has sinned. When he

considers the person of God, he must feel as did Isaiah when he was brought into confrontation with God. He saw God high and lifted up, with the angels singing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Then he cried out, “Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips...for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). In the presence of Holiness, he knew himself to be unholy.

“Undone,” he said. Christ’s teaching is that sin is punishable by death. “The bondservant (of sin) abides not in the house forever.” God will not have sinners inherit eternal life and inhabit his new and perfect creation. To put it another way, life in its eternal state — immortal life in God’s image – is possible only for those who are free of sin. It is His express intention to have a holy nation, therefore the simple requirement: “You shall be holy.”

Holy Feelings. Living under God’s laws in a challenging experience. Our emotions are stirred to the core when we realize the awesome power of God, His tender mercy, our own sin, and the means by which we are forgiven.

But there is no place for the artificially induced emotion such as often appears in so-called evangelistic campaigns. I mean such excitement as is “whooped-up” by the staged music and professional leaders. Neither is the deep feeling of patriotism to be mistaken for holy aspirations. Atheistic communists in China are stirred by the rolling drum and waving flag. It is not indication of a contrite heart or a pure and meek spirit.

What God demands is not sentimentalities, but hard, thought-out, intelligent acceptance of God’s truth and obedience to it. Not cheap emotions produced by talented personalities, but deep and painful repentance based on God’s word. Jesus Christ is more than the trigger for an emotional “Jesus trip.” He is real. He is One who partook of flesh and blood that he might die the sinner’s flesh and blood death, thus taking the ultimate punishment for man’s un-holiness (Heb. 2:14–15). The death He suffered was real. This means that the elimination of sin is real, that Christ really did pay the penalty for sin.

A man’s forgiveness which makes him holy in God’s eyes is not mere subjective experience. That is, the question of whether or not you are cleansed from sin does not rest upon your day-to-day feelings. Such feeling may easily be manipulated by the spiritual hucksters of religion, or even by a change in the weather. The justice of God is not whimsical, but based upon an unalterable fact of whether or not the penalty for sin has been met. Christ actually died, and we are actually baptized into His death, for “he that has died is justified from sin” and reckoned to be free from sin, and therefore holy (Rom. 6:3–11).

Making Man Over. But you don’t stop there. Not only God insist that the punishment for sin be met in Christ’s death, but He insists that we live out our lives in fulfillment of His holy design. The fact is, in the day of resurrection every person who is redeemed through Christ will be made absolutely holy as Christ is, for “we shall be like him” (I John 3:3). In the meantime, all of life for a Christian is to be lived in the **direction of that ultimate perfection.** Jesus said, “Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33), which is another way of saying, seek to be holy, as God is holy. There is no use thinking that you can fool God, that you can seek all the unholy things of the world and make God believe that true holiness is what your really want. It’s no good attending church and giving up a few of the more glaring habits, such as drunkenness and swearing, while at the same time letting covetousness and lust grow unchecked in your heart. Many teenagers have been cured of drug addiction and may

alcoholics have been sobered by joining some religious group. But that doesn't make them into the image of God. Being holy does not mean merely running to Christ for help over some particular problem bugging you. Christ wants to cleanse your life of every thought and desire which is different from the Holy Image of God. He wants to make you like Himself.

Which brings up another fact about holiness. It is God who makes us holy, and not ourselves. Obviously He is the One who removes the sin, for ONLY He can forgive it. But that is just the beginning. The rest of life is an experience under His power, as He removes the unholy pollutants of life and forms a "new man" which is being renewed "after the image of Him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

He is the worker, "we are His workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). "For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

This is where many go off on "holiness" tangents. We want to improve certain facets of life, the ones that seem to us the most offensive. We get a sense of pride in being a bit more holy — in certain things. We don't want to overdo it — no sense in becoming radical — so we rest at that stage. Then a campaign is started to make everyone else arrive at this same stage — no less, no more. The result is a "sect" with certain requirements for "Holiness."

Making men holy is God's work, through Christ. The whole thing was His idea in the first place, and He will complete the job for all those who are His people. This is where the rub comes in. To surrender fully to Him means He is going to make us over completely. Not only will He purge us of some sins we are glad to be rid of anyway, but He will expose a lot of things we didn't even know were present. When He takes on the job, he doesn't quit until it is finished; all the pet sins torn loose from our loving embrace and thrust out forever; our secret unholy desires brought to the light and burned out; our pride crushed to the ground until the tears come. It is surprising how unholy we may see ourselves when we really; get into communication with the One who created us.

On the other hand, we cannot sit back and just say, "I am perfectly willing, Lord, to be holy, as long as you do the job and I don't have to bother." Holiness demands that we do a few things ourselves. It requires obedience to His commands, so we must read God's word to find out what the commands are. After reading it we must actually do that which is commanded. Even so, the transformation is by His power and our part is simply to surrender to Him.

Holy Humans! This is what God created, and His purpose is immutable; it does not change. In the final and eternal state of things, the people given immortality and an eternal home will be the holy nation, the people of God cleansed and made holy through Christ.

Whatever the church is doing, if it isn't aimed at this goal it is missing the boat. God will have holy people, or none at all. "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

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