

# Rediscovering Holiness

*Know the Fullness of Life with God*

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 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
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## Preface

THIS BOOK HAS GROWN out of four talks that I gave at a conference in 1991. This conference was sponsored by the Alliance for Faith and Renewal, an interdenominational organization that seeks to empower pastors and other Christian leaders in building the kingdom of God and in strengthening those they serve in the Christian life. The shape this book has taken reflects my belief that there is need to blow the whistle on the sidelining of personal holiness that has been a general trend among Bible-centered Western Christians during my years of ministry. It is not a trend that one would have expected, since Scripture insists so strongly that Christians are called to holiness, that God is pleased with holiness but outraged by unholiness, and that without holiness none will see the Lord. But the shift of Christian interest away from the pursuit of holiness to focus on fun and fulfillment, ego massage and techniques for present success, and public issues that carry no challenge to one's personal morals, is a fact. To my mind it is a sad and scandalous fact, and one that needs to be reversed.

With the fading of interest in supernatural holiness, interest has grown in supernatural healing and in the supernatural powers of evil with which Christians must battle. My hope is that this

## PREFACE

heightened awareness of the reality of the supernatural will soon reconnect with what Walter Marshall, the Puritan, long ago called the “gospel mystery of sanctification.” If this book helps in that reconnection, I shall think myself fully rewarded.

This second edition of the book includes a new afterword titled “Holiness in the Dark: The Case of Mother Teresa,” which deals with the issue of spiritual desertion using, as the title suggests, the much-discussed case of Mother Teresa. Also included in this new edition is a study guide for use in exploring the principles discussed in this book. I am enormously grateful to my daughter Naomi, who labored at some inconvenience to herself to put the book on computer, and to my wife, Kit, who was willing to be neglected for a time so that it might be born.

J. I. Packer  
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## What Holiness Is, and Why It Matters

*Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

1 PETER 1:15–16

*Make every effort . . . to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

HEBREWS 12:14

### Loss of a Precious Past

Our grandfather clock, which tells us not only the hours, minutes and seconds but also the days of the week, the months of the year, and the phases of the moon, is something of a veteran. Scratched on one of its lead weights is the date 1789—the year of the French Revolution and George Washington’s first term as President. Our clock was going before the great Christian theologian John Wesley stopped going, if I may put it so.

It is a musical clock, too, of a rather unusual sort. Not only does it strike the hour, but it also has a built-in carillon (knobs on a brass cylinder tripping hammers that hit bells which play a tune for three minutes every three hours). Two of its four tunes we recognize, for we hear them still today. However, the other two, which sound like country dances, are unknown—not just to us but to everyone who has heard them played. Over the years they were forgotten, which was a pity, for they are good tunes; and we would like to know something about them.

In the same way, the historic Christian teaching on holiness has been largely forgotten, and that also is a pity, for it is central to the glory of God and the good of souls.

It is nearly 60 years since I learned at school the opening verse of a poem by Rudyard Kipling, titled “The Way through the Woods.” It goes like this:

They shut the road through the woods  
 Seventy years ago.  
 Weather and rain have undone it again  
 And now you would never know  
 There was once a road through the woods.

I suppose it is because I love walking through woods that these lines move me so deeply. Again and again, when I find myself mourning the loss of a good thing that has perished through stupidity, carelessness, or neglect (and I confess that, both as a conservationist and a Christian, I have that experience often), Kipling’s verse jumps into my mind. It haunts me now, as I contemplate the Church’s current loss of biblical truth about holiness.

*Our Christian Heritage of Holiness*

There was a time when all Christians laid great emphasis on the reality of God's call to holiness and spoke with deep insight about His enabling of us for it. Evangelical Protestants, in particular, offered endless variations on the themes of what God's holiness requires of us, what our holiness involves for us, by what means and through what disciplines the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, and the ways in which holiness increases our assurance and joy and usefulness to God.

The Puritans insisted that all life and relationships must become "holiness to the Lord." John Wesley told the world that God had raised up Methodism "to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land." Phoebe Palmer, Handley Moule, Andrew Murray, Jessie Penn-Lewis, F. B. Meyer, Oswald Chambers, Horatius Bonar, Amy Carmichael, and L. B. Maxwell are only a few of the leading figures in the "holiness revival" that touched all evangelical Christendom between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.

On the other side of the Reformation divide, Seraphim of Sarov (Russian Orthodox) and Teresa of Ávila, Ignatius Loyola, Madame Guyon and Père Grou (all Roman Catholics) ministered as apostles of holiness in a similar way. We must realize that, as John Wesley, for one, clearly saw, the Reformation cleavage was much less deep on sanctification and the Spirit than it was on justification and the Mass.

Formerly, then, holiness was highlighted throughout the Christian church. But how different it is today! To listen to our sermons and to read the books we write for each other and then to watch the zany, worldly, quarrelsome way we behave as Christian people, you would never imagine that once the highway of holiness was clearly marked out for Bible believers, so that ministers and people knew what it was and could speak of it with authority and confidence.



“Weather and rain have undone it again.” Now we have to rebuild and reopen the road, starting really from scratch.

In the Old Testament we read how Isaac, forced to relocate his large household, “reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died” (Gen. 26:18). Isaac thus secured the water supply without which neither his family, nor his servants, nor his cattle, nor he himself, could have survived. He did not prospect for new wells in a water-divining quest that might or might not have succeeded, but he went straight to the old wells. He knew he would find water in them, once he had cleared them of the earth and debris that malevolent Philistines had piled on top of them.

Isaac’s action reflects two simple spiritual principles that apply here in a very direct way:

1. The recovering of old truth, truth that has been a means of blessing in the past, can under God become the means of blessing again in the present, while the quest for newer alternatives may well prove barren.
2. No one should be daunted from attempting such recovery by any prejudice, ill will, or unsympathetic attitudes that may have built up against the old truth during the time of its eclipse.

These are the principles whose guidance I follow in this book. No novelties will be found here. I shall draw, gratefully, from an older Christian wisdom.

### *The Lost World*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, also wrote an adventure story called *The Lost World*. In it, Professor Challenger

and his friends climb to a supposedly inaccessible plateau in South America and there find both dinosaurs and a previously unknown pattern of human life. The story was clearly meant for boys from nine to ninety, and I vividly recall being thrilled by it, I think at the age of ten, when I heard it serialized on British radio's Children's Hour. It ends with Challenger battling frozen disbelief among his scientific peers as he tells them what he had found.

In this book I try to testify to the reality of the lost world of authentic Christian holiness. Will what I say about the supernaturalizing of our disordered lives be believed, I wonder? Will my account of what will appear to many as an unknown pattern of human life have any credibility at all? And what sort of spiritual dinosaur shall I be seen as for producing such ancient ideas? Never mind. In the memorable words of Cary Grant, "A man's got to do what a man's got to do." For me, that means moving without fuss into my expository task, whether or not I am going to be taken seriously. To this task I now turn.

### **School of Holiness, School of Prayer**

One of the titles I proposed for this book was *With Christ in the School of Holiness*. That was a deliberate echo, almost a steal, of *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by Andrew Murray, a much appreciated South African devotional author of two generations ago. I adapted Murray's title in this manner in order to highlight three truths that to me seem basic to all I propose to say. (Murray would—indeed, did—fully agree with all three, as his own many books make plain.)

#### *First Truth*

Holiness, like prayer (which is indeed part of it), is something that, though Christians have an instinct for it through their new

birth, as we shall see, they have to learn in and through experience. As Jesus “learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8)—learned what obedience requires, costs and involves through the experience of actually doing His Father’s will up to and in His passion—so Christians must, and do, learn prayer from their struggles to pray and holiness from their battles for purity of heart and righteousness of life.

Talented youngsters who go to tennis school in order to learn the game soon discover that the heart of the process is not talking about tactics but actually practicing serves and strokes, thus forming new habits and reflexes, so as to iron out weaknesses of style. The routine, which is grueling, is one of doing prescribed things over and over again on the court, against a real opponent, in order to get them really right. Prayer and holiness are learned in a similar way as commitments are made, habits are formed and battles are fought against a real opponent (Satan, in this case), who with great cunning plays constantly on our weak spots. (That these are often what the world sees as our strong points is an index of Satan’s resourcefulness: presumptuous self-reliance and proud overreaching on our part serve his turn just as well as do paralyzing timidity, habits of harshness and anger, lack of discipline, whether inward or outward, evasion of responsibility, lack of reverence for God and willful indulgence in what one knows to be wrong.) Satan is as good at judo throws as he is at frontal assaults, and we have to be on guard against him all the time.

### *Second Truth*

The process of learning to be holy, like the process of learning to pray, may properly be thought of as a school—God’s own school, in which the curriculum, the teaching staff, the rules, the discipline,

the occasional prizes and the fellow pupils with whom one studies, plays, debates and fraternizes, are all there under God's sovereign providence. As pushing ahead on the path of prayer and holiness is a prime form of spiritual warfare against sin and Satan, so it is an educational process that God has planned and programmed in order to refine, purge, enlarge, animate, toughen and mature us. By means of it He brings us progressively into the moral and spiritual shape in which He wants to see us.

Physical education in grade school and adult workouts in fitness centers offer perhaps the closest parallels to what is going on here.

They, too, require us to endure things we find it hard to enjoy. As a schoolboy I was gangling and clumsy. I loathed "P.T." (physical training, as it was called in those days). I was in fact very bad at it, but I do not doubt that it was very good for me. Having to heave and bump my dogged way over a period of years through physical jerks that others found easy (and treated as fun and did much better than I could) may well have helped me grasp the virtue of keeping on keeping on in other disciplines that are not immediately gratifying: and God's program of holiness training always includes quite a number of these.

We must be clear in our minds that whatever further reasons there may be why God exposes us to the joys and sorrows, fulfillments and frustrations, delights and disappointments, happinesses and hurts, that make up the emotional reality of our lives, all these experiences are part of His curriculum for us in the school of holiness, which is His spiritual gymnasium for our reshaping and rebuilding in the moral likeness of Jesus Christ.

It is reported that on one occasion when Teresa of Ávila was traveling, her conveyance dumped her in the mud. The spunky saint's first words as she struggled to her feet were: "Lord, if this is

how you treat your friends, it is no wonder that you have so few!” One of the most attractive things about Teresa is that she could be playful like this with her God. But none knew better than she that the ups and downs of her life were divinely planned in order to mold her character, enlarge her heart and deepen her devotion. And what was true for her is true for us all.

### *Third Truth*

In God’s school of holiness our Lord Jesus Christ (the Father’s Son and the Christian’s Savior) is with us, and we with Him, in a controlling relationship of master and servant, leader and follower, teacher and student. It is crucially important to appreciate this. Why is it that in the school of holiness, as in the schools to which we send our own children, some move ahead faster than others? How are the different rates of progress to be explained? Fundamentally, the factor that makes the difference is neither one’s intelligence quotient, nor the number of books one has read nor the conferences, camps and seminars one has attended, but the quality of the fellowship with Christ that one maintains through life’s vicissitudes.

Jesus is risen. He is alive and well. Through His Word and Spirit He calls us to Himself today, to receive Him as our Savior and Lord and become His disciples and followers. Speaking objectively—with reference to how things really are, as distinct from how they might feel at any particular moment—the “thereness” of Jesus, and the personal nature of His relationship with us as His disciples, are as truly matters of fact as were His bodily presence and His words of comfort and command when He walked this earth long ago. Some, however, do not reckon with this fact as robustly and practically as others do. That is what makes the difference.

I mean this. Some who trust Jesus as their Savior have formed the habit of going to Him about everything that comes up, in order to become clear on how they should react to it as His disciples. (“Going to Him” is an umbrella phrase that covers three things: praying; meditating, which includes thinking, reflecting, drawing conclusions from Scripture, and applying them directly to oneself in Jesus’ presence; and holding oneself open throughout the process to specific illumination from the Holy Spirit.) These Christians come to see how events are requiring them to:

- consecrate themselves totally to the Father, as Jesus did;
- say and do only what pleases the Father, as Jesus did;
- accept pain, grief, disloyalty, and betrayal, as Jesus did;
- care for people and serve their needs without either compromise of principle or ulterior motives in practice, as Jesus did;
- accept opposition and isolation, hoping patiently for better things and meantime staying steady under pressure, as Jesus did;
- rejoice in the specifics of the Father’s ways and thank Him for His wisdom and goodness, as Jesus did; and so on.

Kept by this means from bitterness and self-pity, these Christians cope with events in a spirit of peace, joy, and eagerness to see what God will do next. Others, however, who are no less committed to Jesus as their Savior, never master this art of habitually going to Him about life’s challenges. Too often they start by assuming that their life as children of God will be a bed of roses all the way. Then when the storms come, the best they can do is stagger through in a spirit of real if unacknowledged disappointment with God, feeling all the time that He has let them down. It is easy to understand

why those in the first category advance farther and faster in the love, humility, and hope that form the essence of Christlike holiness than those in the second category.

### Defining Holiness

But what exactly is holiness? We need a full-scale definition, and my next task is to attempt one.<sup>1</sup>

Consider first the word itself. “Holiness” is a noun that belongs with the adjective “holy” and the verb “sanctify,” which means to make holy. (It is a pity in one way that we have to draw on two word groups in English to cover what is a single word group in both Hebrew and Greek, but the verb “holify” would be so ugly that maybe we should be glad it does not exist.) “Holy” in both biblical languages means separated and set apart for God, consecrated and made over to Him. In its application to people, God’s “holy ones” or “saints,” the word implies both devotion and assimilation: devotion, in the sense of living a life of service to God; assimilation, in the sense of imitating, conforming to, and becoming like the God one serves. For Christians, this means taking God’s moral law as our rule and God’s incarnate Son as our model; this is where our analysis of holiness must start.

In his great book *Holiness* (published in 1879, still in print, and going strong), the Anglican Bishop John Charles Ryle set out in simple biblical terms a classic twelve-point profile of a holy person. (Being a Victorian, he said “man,” but he meant woman, too.) His description runs as follows:

1. 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 judgement, hating what He hates, loving

what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. . . .

2. A holy man will endeavour 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 . . . will feel what Paul felt when he said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). . . .
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 (Rom. 8:29). It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others . . . to be unselfish . . . to walk in love . . . to be lowly-minded and humble. . . . He will lay to heart the saying of John: "He that saith he abideth in [Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). . . .
4. A holy man will follow after meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, kind tempers, government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights
5. A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. He will labour 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 . . . [Ryle then quotes Luke 21:34; 1 Cor. 9:27].
6. A holy man will follow after charity and brotherly kindness. He will endeavour 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 abhor all lying, slandering,



- backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least things. . . .
7. A holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others. . . . Such was Dorcas: “full of good works and almsdeeds, which she did”—not merely purposed and talked about, but *did*. . . . (Acts 9:36).
  8. A holy man will follow after purity of heart. He will dread all filthiness and uncleanness 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. . . .
  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. . . .
  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. . . .
  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. . . . Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill if they can help it. . . . They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbours,

good friends, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good by their firesides. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to his people, when he says, “What do ye more than others?” (Matt. 5:47).

12. Last, but not least, a holy man will follow after spiritual-mindedness. He will endeavour to set his affections entirely on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. . . . He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim travelling 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. . . .<sup>2</sup>

### Aspects of Holiness

All Ryle’s declarations, surely, are abiding and challenging truths with which no sane Christian can quarrel. Building on what he says, and thinking things through from the vantage point to which he has brought us, I now proceed to make on my own account the assertions that follow. I cast them in first person form, partly to help my readers apply what is said to themselves, and partly because I accept Calvin’s dictum that it would be best for a preacher to fall and break his neck as he mounts the pulpit if he is not himself going to be the first to follow God in living his own message. This applies when one preaches on paper no less than when one does so in church, so I need to be preaching to myself as much as to anyone.

Here, then, are my points. There are four of them.

*Holiness Has to Do with My Heart*

I speak of the heart here in the biblical sense, according to which it means, not the body's blood pump, but the center and focus of one's inner personal life: the source of motivation, the seat of passion, the spring of all thought processes and particularly of conscience. The assertion that I make, and must myself face, is that holiness begins with the heart. Holiness starts inside a person, with a right purpose that seeks to express itself in a right performance. It is a matter not just of the motions that I go through but also of the motives that prompt me to go through them.

A holy person's motivating aim, passion, desire, longing, aspiration, goal, and drive is to please God, both by what one does and by what one avoids doing. In other words, one practices good works and cuts out evil ones. Good works begin with praise, worship, and honoring and exalting of God as the temper of one's whole waking life. Evil works start with neglect of these things, and coolness with regard to them. So I must labor to keep my heart actively responsive to God. Of George Herbert, his favorite poet, the Puritan Richard Baxter said: "*heart-work* and *heaven work* make up his books." By "heart-work" Baxter meant cultivating the spirit of grateful, humble, adoring love to one's divine Lover and Savior, as Herbert does in this poem (nowadays a familiar hymn):

King of glory, King of peace,  
 I will love thee;  
 And that love may never cease  
 I will move [ask] thee.  
 Thou hast granted my request,  
 Thou hast heard me;

Thou didst note my working breast,  
Thou hast spared me.

Wherefore with my utmost art  
I will sing thee,  
And the cream of all my heart  
I will bring thee. . . .<sup>3</sup>

This kind of heart-love to God is the taproot of all true holiness. So asceticism, as such—voluntary abstinences, routines of self-deprivation and grueling austerity—is not the same thing as holiness, though some forms of asceticism may well find a place in a holy person's life. Nor is formalism, in the sense of outward conformity in word and deed to the standards God has set, anything like holiness, though assuredly there is no holiness without such conformity. Nor is legalism, in the sense of doing things to earn God's favor or to earn more of it than one has already, to be regarded as holiness. Holiness is always the saved sinner's response of gratitude for grace received.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day made all three mistakes, yet were thought to be very holy people until Jesus told them the truth about themselves and the inadequacies of their supposed piety. After that, however, we dare not forget that holiness begins in the heart. Who wants to line up with those Pharisees?

Charles Wesley wrote:

O for a heart to praise my God,  
A heart from sin set free;  
A heart that always feels thy blood  
So freely shed for me;

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,  
 My great redeemer's throne,  
 Where only Christ is heard to speak,  
 Where Jesus reigns alone;

A heart in every thought renewed  
 And full of love divine,  
 Perfect and right and pure and good:  
 A copy, Lord, of thine.

It is with this focus, and this prayer, that real holiness begins.

*Holiness Has to Do with My Temperament*

By temperament I mean the factors that make specific ways of reacting and behaving natural to me. To use psychologists' jargon, it is my temperament that inclines me to *transact* with my environment (situations, things, and people) in the way I usually do.

Drawing on the full resources of this jargon, psychologist Gordon Allport defines temperament as "the characteristic phenomena of an individual's nature, including his susceptibility to emotional stimulation, his customary strength and speed of response, the quality of his prevailing mood, and all the peculiarities of fluctuation and intensity of mood, these being regarded as dependent on constitutional make-up, and therefore largely hereditary in origin."<sup>4</sup> Allport's statement is cumbersome but clear. Temperament, we might say, is the raw material out of which character is formed. Character is what we do with our temperament. Personality is the final product, the distinct individuality that results.

Temperaments are classified in various ways: positive and negative, easy and difficult, introverted and extroverted, outgoing and

withdrawn, active and passive, giving and taking, sociable and forthcoming as distinct from manipulative and self-absorbed, shy and uninhibited, quick and slow to warm up, stiffly defiant as contrasted with flexibly acquiescent, and so on.

While these classifications are useful in their place, perhaps the most useful of all, certainly to the pastoral leader, is the oldest one that Greek physicians had already worked out before the time of Christ. It distinguishes four basic human temperaments:

- the sanguine (warm, jolly, outgoing, relaxed, optimistic);
- the phlegmatic (cool, low-key, detached, unemotional, apathetic);
- the choleric (quick, active, bustling, impatient, with a relatively short fuse); and
- the melancholic (somber, pessimistic, inward-looking, inclined to cynicism and depression).

It then acknowledges the reality of mixed types, such as the phlegmatic-melancholic and the sanguine-choleric, when features of two of the temperaments are found in the same person. In this way it covers everybody. The ancient beliefs about body fluids that supported this classification are nowadays dispelled, but the classification itself remains pastorally helpful. People do observably fall into these categories and recognizing them helps one to understand the temper and reactions of the person with whom one is dealing.

The assertion that I now make, and must myself face, is that I am not to become (or remain) a victim of my temperament. Each temperament has its own strengths and also its weaknesses. Sanguine people tend to live thoughtlessly and at random. Phlegmatic people tend to be remote and unfeeling, sluggish and unsympathetic.

Choleric people tend to be quarrelsome, bad-tempered, and poor team players. Melancholic people tend to see everything as bad and wrong and to deny that anything is ever really good and right. Yielding to my temperamental weaknesses is, of course, the most natural thing for me to do, and is therefore the hardest sort of sin for me to deal with and detect. But holy humanity, as I see it in Jesus Christ, combines in itself the strengths of all four temperaments without any of the weaknesses. Therefore, I must try to be like Him in this, and not indulge the particular behavioral flaws to which my temperament tempts me.

Holiness for a person of sanguine temperament, then, will involve learning to look before one leaps, to think things through responsibly, and to speak wisely rather than wildly. (These were among the lessons Peter learned with the Spirit's help after Pentecost.) Holiness for a person of phlegmatic temperament will involve a willingness to be open with people, to feel with them and for them, to be forthcoming in relationships, and to become vulnerable, in the sense of risking being hurt. Holiness for a choleric person will involve practicing patience and self-control. It will mean redirecting one's anger and hostility toward Satan and sin, rather than toward fellow human beings who are obstructing what one regards as the way forward. (These were among the lessons Paul learned from the Lord after his conversion.) Finally, holiness for a melancholic person will involve learning to rejoice in God, to give up self-pity and proud pessimism, and to believe, with the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich, that through sovereign divine grace, "All shall be well and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." What are my temperamental weaknesses? If I am to be holy, as I am called to be, I must identify them (that is the hard part) and ask my Lord to enable me to form habits of rising above them.

*Holiness Has to Do with My Humanness*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is both God for man and man for God; He is God's incarnate Son, fully divine and fully human. We know Him as both the mediator of divine grace and the model of human godliness. And what is human godliness, the godliness that is true holiness, as seen in Jesus? It is simply human life lived as the Creator intended—in other words, it is perfect and ideal humanness, an existence in which the elements of the human person are completely united in a totally God-honoring and nature-fulfilling way. (Since God made humanity for Himself, godliness naturally fulfills human nature at the deepest level. As experience proves, no contentment can match the contentment of obeying God, however costly this may prove.)

Human lives that are lived differently from this, however, though human in a biological and functional sense, are less than fully human in terms of their quality. Holiness and humanness are correlative terms and mutual implicates (as the logicians would put it). To the extent that I fall short of the first, I fall short of the second as well.

All members of our fallen race who, because they do not know Jesus Christ, still live under the power of that self-deifying, anti-God syndrome in our spiritual system which the Bible calls sin, are living lives that are qualitatively subhuman. Sin in our minds says otherwise, but in this, as always, sin is lying.

The twentieth century will doubtless go down in history as the century of secular humanism. It began with the euphoric, sin-spawned confidence that human endeavor in science, education, the harnessing of nature, and the increase of wealth would generate human happiness to the point of achieving something like heaven on earth. It ends, however, with none of these hopes realized, but



with sickening memories of many great evils committed, and with hearts everywhere full of restless and gloomy unease regarding humanity's future prospects and life's present worth.

Our proud humanism, so-called, has made the world more like hell than heaven. "What the world hungers for today," say British writers Brain and Warren, rightly, is:

The discovery of what it means to be truly human. The world sees the destructive effect of devotion to the pursuit of money, sex and power in the lives of many of its heroes. What people long for is a way of integrating the various parts of themselves, and the insights of modern psychology and sociology, in a way that leads to wholeness. Humanism cannot provide the answer. It is through the person of Jesus Christ alone that true humanity can be found. . . . Holiness is not primarily about submission to authoritarian rules or narrow or conformist notions of acceptable behavior. It is about the celebration of our humanity.

To hammer this home, they subjoin a telling quotation from the Scottish preacher James Philip:

Above all the life of the early church was characterized—and surely this is a paramount need in evangelical life today—by humanity. The deepest word that can be spoken about sanctification is that it is a progress towards true humanity. Salvation is, essentially considered, the restoration of humanity to men. This is why the slightly inhuman, not to say unnatural, streak in some forms and expressions of sanctification is so far removed from the true work of grace in the soul. The greatest saints of God have been characterised, not by haloes and an atmosphere of distant

unapproachability, but by their humanity. They have been intensely human and lovable people with a twinkle in their eyes.<sup>5</sup>

The assertion I make, and must now myself face, is that Brain, Warren and Philip are right. Genuine holiness is genuine Christlikeness, and genuine Christlikeness is genuine humanness—the only genuine humanness there is. Love in the service of God and others, humility and meekness under the divine hand, integrity of behavior expressing integration of character, wisdom with faithfulness, boldness with prayerfulness, sorrow at people’s sins, joy at the Father’s goodness, and single-mindedness in seeking to please the Father morning, noon, and night, were all qualities seen in Christ, the perfect man.

Christians are meant to become human as Jesus was human. We are called to imitate these character qualities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, so that the childish instability, inconsiderate self-seeking, pious playacting, and undiscerning pigheadedness that so frequently mar our professedly Christian lives are left behind. “Holiness, rightly understood, is a beautiful thing, and its beauty is the beauty and tenderness of divine love”—which is precisely the beauty of truly mature humanity.<sup>6</sup> I need to remember all this, and take it to heart, and set my sights accordingly.

### *Holiness Has to Do with My Relationships*

Sometimes it has been thought that a state of isolation and solitude, permanently detached from ordinary human involvements, is a help, or perhaps even a necessity, for the practice of holiness. It is true that holy living calls for regular times of aloneness with God. But the notion here is that one gains freedom to move ahead with God by cutting oneself off from the communal life of family and

church and society, and that does not seem to be true at all. This idea, it seems, broke surface in the fourth century when pioneer Christian monks habitually went off on their own to practice the bodily austerities and spiritual athletics by which holiness was defined at that time. Thus, Antony withdrew into the Egyptian desert for twenty years. Simeon Stylites mounted his pillar and lived on top of it for thirty years. There was much of this kind of thing.

In turn, people in the Middle Ages cherished the thought of holiness as an optional “higher life” of prayerful austerity for the super-serious. They took for granted the propriety of seeking the detachment that was supposedly necessary for such a life by renouncing marriage and wealth and becoming a monk, a nun, or a hermit. It was thus revolutionary for social life and thought when the Reformers reconceived holiness as the fulfilling of one’s relationships, the stewarding of one’s talents and time, and the maintaining of love, humility, purity, and zeal for God in one’s heart. The ideal of isolationism was then jettisoned completely and replaced by an insistence that holiness—viewed now as the consecrated life of the grateful, forgiven sinner—must be worked out in the way in which, as worshiper, worker, and witness, one relates to one’s family, church, and wider community. It is not open to dispute, however, that the Reformers had the Bible on their side.

No doubt the Reformers went too far when, in the heat of their reaction against the prevailing pattern, they sought to close all monasteries and denied there ever was such a thing as a call to serve God in the solitude of withdrawal from the world’s affairs. But they were certainly right to negate the idea that such withdrawal is a necessary condition of thoroughgoing holiness, and that involvement in the world rules out all possibility of a full-scale holy life. Biblical holiness is in this sense an unambiguously

worldly holiness. Without conforming to the world by becoming materialistic, extravagant, or a grabber and empire-builder of any kind, the Christian must operate as a servant of God in the world, serving others for the Lord's sake. So the assertion I make, and must now myself face, is that the way I relate to others is the essence of my holiness in the sight of God, just as it is one index of it in the sight of men and women.

Here I recall something I once read about a lady who was a popular speaker on holiness platforms and a fluent writer on holiness themes over a hundred years ago. (To avoid scandal, I will not give her name, or reference the quotation that follows.) Her son-in-law wrote that many thought her "a sage and a saint," but he himself "came gradually to think of her as one of the wickedest people I had ever known." Why? His list of reasons began thus: "Her treatment of her husband, whom she despised, was humiliating to the highest degree. She never spoke to him or of him except in a tone that made her contempt obvious. It cannot be denied that he was a silly old man, but he did not deserve what she gave him, and no one capable of mercy could have given it."

The son-in-law was not a Christian, but there is nothing un-Christian about this bit of reasoning. For love to be replaced by resentful contempt between husband and wife, or for that matter between parent and child, or colleague and colleague, is a negation of holiness, whatever stuff one may display in books or relay from pulpits and platforms. I need to remember that, and I do not think I am the only one.

In the book that Brain and Warren cited, James Philip points to the way in which some Christians are unwilling to show any kind of empathetic feelings (the macho-syndrome of those who fancy themselves as God's tough guys), and to give up their love of the

limelight and the desire to control others (the Diotrephes disease of 3 John 9); all these things, he tells us, induce a hardness of heart that from God's standpoint ruins their relationships:

There are many Christians who have never learned to say "Thank you" graciously, and who cause their best friends much distress by their apparent thoughtlessness and lack of gratitude, when they take so much costly love and friendship . . . for granted. . . . There is nothing so calculated to cause trouble . . . as persisting in holding unrealistic estimates of oneself. . . . Very often, of course, it is the relentless drive of an inferiority complex that expresses itself in high and exalted ideas of one's own importance, out of all proportion to reality. The problem of inferiority complex is more closely allied to self-centeredness than most of us would like to believe. . . . We must recognize the root of the problem for what it is. This is why, ultimately, the gospel is the only true psychology, for no less a power can break the tyranny of self in the human heart.

The essential problem is "a self that has not learned to die." But "a true surrender to Christ shrinks our inflated ego to its proper size in relation to him and our fellows, and imparts reality to our lives."<sup>7</sup> Wise words! Let none suppose that they advance in holiness while such lapses in Christian relationships still mark their path.

To summarize, then, it appears that Christian holiness is a number of things together. It has both outward and inward aspects. Holiness is a matter of both action and motivation, conduct and character, divine grace and human effort, obedience and creativity, submission and initiative, consecration to God and commitment to people, self-discipline and self-giving, righteousness and love.

It is a matter of Spirit-led law-keeping, a walk, or course of life, in the Spirit that displays the fruit of the Spirit (Christlikeness of attitude and disposition). It is a matter of seeking to imitate Jesus' way of behaving, through depending on Jesus for deliverance from carnal self-absorption and for discernment of spiritual needs and possibilities.

It is a matter of patient, persistent uprightness; of taking God's side against sin in our own lives and in the lives of others; of worshipping God in the Spirit as one serves Him in the world; and of single-minded, wholehearted, free and glad concentration on the business of pleasing God. It is the distinctive form and, so to speak, flavor of a life set apart for God that is now being inwardly renewed by His power. Holiness is thus the demonstration of faith working by love. It is wholly supernatural in the sense of being God's gracious achievement within us, and wholly natural in the sense of being our own true humanness, lost through sin, misconceived through ignorance, and through listening too hard to current culture—but now in process of restoration through the redirecting and reintegrating energy of new creation in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Oswald Chambers called God's gift of holiness "our brilliant heritage." The phrase was well chosen. *Brilliant*—bright, shining, precious, glorious—is the word that fits.

### **Is Holiness Important Today?**

But is holiness really important? Does it matter, in the final analysis, whether Christ's professed followers live holy lives or not?

From watching today's Christian world (and in particular the great evangelical constituency of North America), you might easily conclude that it does not matter. I once had to respond in print to the question, "Is personal holiness passé?" I found it hard not

to conclude that most present-day believers deep down think it is passé. Here is some of the evidence for that conclusion.

### *Preaching and Teaching*

What do we Christians mainly preach and teach and produce TV programs and DVDs about these days? The answer seems to be not holiness, but success and positive feelings—getting health, wealth, freedom from care, good sex and happy families. I remember seeing in a Christian journal a group of eight new “how-to” books reviewed on a single page. How long, I wonder, is it since you heard about eight new books on holiness? Shall I guess?

### *Leadership*

What do we Christians chiefly value in our leaders—our preachers, teachers, pastors, writers, televangelists, top people in parachurch ministries, money-men who bankroll churches and other Christian enterprises, and other folk with key roles in our setup? The answer seems to be not their holiness, but their gifts and skills and resources. The number of North American leaders (and other Christians too) who in recent years have been found guilty of sexual and financial shenanigans, and who when challenged have declined to see themselves as accountable to any part of the body of Christ, is startling. Much more startling is the way in which, after public exposure and some few slaps on the wrist, they are soon able to resume their ministry and carry on as if nothing had happened, commanding apparently as much support as before. To protest that Christians believe in the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of sinners is beside the point. What I am saying is that the speed of their reinstatement shows that we value them more for their proven gifts than for their proven sanctity, since the thought

that only holy people are likely to be spiritually useful does not loom large in our minds.

More than a century and a half ago, the Scottish parish minister and revival preacher Robert Murray McCheyne declared: “My people’s greatest need is my personal holiness.” It seems clear that neither modern clergy nor their modern flocks would agree with McCheyne’s assessment. In the past when your church has appointed a calling committee to hunt for the next pastor, I am sure that a very adequate profile of required gifts has been drawn up, but how much emphasis has been laid on the crucial need to find a holy man? Shall I guess?

### *Evangelism*

How do we Christians formulate the gospel to others in our evangelism, and to ourselves as born-again believers who are called to live by it? I do not think it can be disputed that while we lay heavy stress on faith (coming to Christ, trusting His promises, believing that God knows what He is doing with our lives, and hoping for heaven), we touch very lightly on repentance (binding one’s conscience to God’s moral law, confessing and forsaking one’s sins, making restitution for past wrongs, grieving before God at the dishonor one’s sins have done Him, and forming a game plan for holy living). The post-Christian culture of the West doubts whether there are any moral absolutes. It is sure that in any case private morality or immorality really matter to nobody except the persons directly involved. Western Christians act as if they agreed, especially where sex and shekels (H. Hensley Henson’s apt phrase) are concerned.

Some even argue that to speak of repentance as a necessity rather than a mere beneficial option, and to affirm that the gospel call



to faith is also a call to repentance, is to lapse into anti-Christian legalism.<sup>8</sup> You have heard, I am sure, many, many sermons on faith. How often, I wonder, have you heard a series, or even one, preached on repentance? You have books in your home on living the Christian life successfully. Do they even mention repentance, let alone make much of it as a vital lifelong discipline?

When you explain the gospel to others, do you emphasize repentance, and the holiness by which repentance is expressed, as a spiritual necessity? Shall I guess? But if we play down or ignore the importance of holiness, we are utterly and absolutely wrong.

Holiness is in fact commanded: God wills it, Christ requires it, and all the Scriptures—the law, the gospel, the prophets, the wisdom writings, the epistles, the history books that tell of judgments past and the book of Revelation that tells of judgment to come— call for it.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified. (1 Thess. 4:3)

Go now and leave your life of sin. (John 8:11)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. (Josh. 1:8)

Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom

of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:19)

It is written, “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:16)

In reality, holiness is the goal of our redemption. As Christ died in order that we may be justified, so we are justified in order that we may be sanctified and made holy.

The grace of God that brings salvation . . . teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11–14)

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church . . . holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25–27)

Holiness is the object of our new creation. We are born again so that we may grow up into Christlikeness.

We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)

[You] were taught . . . in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus . . . to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its

deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:21–24)

Holiness, as a sign and expression of the reality of one's faith and repentance, and of one's acceptance of God's ultimate purpose, is genuinely necessary for one's final salvation.

Nothing impure will ever enter it [new Jerusalem], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful. (Rev. 21:27)

Without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Heb. 12:14)

Holiness is actually the true health of the person. Anything else is ugliness and deformity at character level; a malfunctioning of the individual; a crippled state of soul. The various forms of bodily sickness and impairment that Jesus healed are so many illustrations of this deeper, inward deformity.

Holiness effectively thwarts Satan in his designs on our lives. By contrast, unconcern about holiness and failure to practice the purity and righteousness to which we are called play into his hands every time.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him. . . . (1 Pet. 5:8–9)

Do not give the devil a foothold. (Eph. 4:27)

Righteousness, meaning holy integrity and uprightness, is the breastplate in the armor of God that Christians are called to wear

in order to counter the devil's attacks (Eph. 6:14). Holiness also gives credibility to witness. But those who proclaim a life-changing Savior will not impress others if their own lives seem to be no different from anyone else's. Holy ways will enhance our testimony, while worldly ways will undermine it. "You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds [good works, backing up good words] and praise your Father in heaven [about whom you told them, and whose power they now see in your living]" (Matt. 5:14, 16).

If we want to be fruitful in evangelism, we must cultivate holiness of life.

Finally, holiness is the substance of which happiness is the spin-off. Those who chase happiness miss it, while to those who pursue holiness through the grace of Christ, happiness of spirit comes unasked. "I delight in your commands because I love them. . . . They are the joy of my heart" (Ps. 119:47, 111).

Can anyone still doubt, after all this, that for every Christian without exception holiness is important?

### **Systematic and Time-Tested**

The account of holiness in the following chapters is, for better or for worse, that of a systematic theologian. Systematic theology is, in Anselm's famous phrase, faith seeking understanding—faith trying to think everything through, and think it all together, in relation to God the Creator as the central reality. The study of holiness is a mapping of the life of God in the human soul, a study that is nowadays usually called Christian spirituality. (The adjective "Christian" is important there, for every religion has its own spirituality. Christian spirituality, however, stands as far apart from other spiritualities as Christian doctrine does from other forms of

belief.) This book should be seen as a venture in systematic spirituality. What is that? It is a subsection of systematic theology in which one tries to think everything through, and think it all together, in terms of communion with God as the central relationship.

As I said at the outset, I regard Christian holiness as a topic on which better teaching was given in the past than in the present, and the lines of thought I shall offer have all been tested by time. I make no apology for drawing on Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox wisdom from yesterday in order to help us see how the relevant biblical instruction applies to us today. Rather, I urge that this is good sense. By standing on the shoulders of the giants, little people like ourselves may hope to see more than we would if we stayed on the ground.