

## THE MYSTERY OF HOLINESS

Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of being a follower of Jesus is 'holiness'. Regrettably, many, perhaps the vast majority of Christians spend a lot of time feeling downcast because they are not measuring up to what they feel are God's standards – especially in their inner thought life. And the problem does not get less with age; as the Hymn writer Henry Twells said: "They who fain would serve Thee best are conscious most of wrong within" ('At even, ere the sun was set', 1868). In my understanding, such people are still operating in the snare of the devil, i.e. the knowledge of good and evil. Hopefully this tract might help them understand that God has made a way of escape from this snare for all who will trust Him.

First of all, let's look at the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words used in the scriptures and translated 'holiness' or 'holy' in the English Bible. The Hebrew word is *qodesh*, meaning '**separation**', a place or thing '**set apart**'. The Greek word is *hagios* and its derivative *hagiotēs* which mean (you guessed it) '**separation**' i.e. '**setting apart**'. So, we start by seeing that to be holy means to be 'set apart', not to live in some state of sinless perfection in your thought life.

Do not get me wrong, I am not saying that persistently living in a perverted imagination is a good thing. Jesus made that plain in the Sermon on the Mount: "whoever looks upon a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt.5:28). What I am saying is that you are not necessarily being holy, living in holiness, when you are fortunate enough to find your mind is clear and thinking positive clean thoughts. The trap at such times is to think that you are being 'good' because you are conforming to some list of rules which you have concocted for yourself. That is pure Freud, the super-ego judging the ego! If you are doing that, you have not appropriated grace, that grace which derives from the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

What we need to understand is that being GOOD is an unattainable objective! The rich young ruler came to Jesus and said: 'Good Master...' but Jesus replied: 'Why are you calling me good? Nobody is good, only God'. Striving to be good is a hopeless occupation; it can only lead to inner conflict and despair because it is an impossible aim. Once you think you have overcome your bad temper you can be sure another 'bad' attribute will manifest!

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**JOHN POTTER**

## ESCAPING THE PROBLEM

The devil's snare is a universal problem and humans, through time, have devised a number of useless ways of escaping from it:

### Confession



This idea was developed by the architects of the Great Apostasy. It starts with the proposition that we can never stop 'sinning' but we can be absolved if we confess our sin before one of God's representatives, a priestly caste. The priest will prescribe some action for us to undertake to demonstrate our penance and the whole process will be completed on Sunday morning during Mass which concludes with the pronouncement 'you are a forgiven people'! This system certainly makes people feel better, and there is certainly no lack of people who seek to find benefit in it. (It is also a good economic system as the 'old churches' have amply demonstrated). But with regard to 'holiness',

the problem with this system is that the benefit only lasts for a week – weekly confession and attendance at Mass is obligatory if we wish to remain 'holy'! Missing Mass for any reason is still listed as a 'mortal sin', although, these days, most Catholics take this idea 'with a grain of salt'.

### Traditional Legalism

Primal groups across the world have devised a system based on a set of actions that were approved by the ancestors in the distant past and have been passed down from generation to generation. The idea here is that if you follow the tribal rules you can be sure that we are acting righteously; if you act outside of the rules you can be sure you are not acting righteously and are in danger of being cast out of tribal society. It is a better system than confession in that it provides an on-going assurance that we are walking in 'holiness' when we stick to the rules. In such societies, the behaviour of children under twelve is closely watched by adults; in a village



all adults can discipline any child, and children are warned that when they are totally on their own the ancestors are still watching. At puberty girls and boys are instructed in the rules in initiation schools. After that they enter a time of training in adult practices which climaxes when they reach full adulthood at age thirty. The spiritual connection in

this case is that the spirits of the ancestors (in the sky) are available to provide counsel to tribal leaders and, because they are located close to God in the heavens, able to carry requests based on tribal needs to the Creator God. An important responsibility for village headmen is to meet with the ancestors each month on the full moon and present offerings and make requests with regard to certain needs which are of current concern. The problem with this system is that innovation is impossible with the result that most primal groups tend to live in abject poverty.

### Dualism

In 216 AD an Arsacid Persian named Amani developed a religion called Manicheism which spread like a wild fire throughout the Roman Empire. Amani's key proposition was that the human soul was essentially good but the body was essentially evil – a strong dualism. Manicheism eventually declined as a world religion but the idea persisted in such practices as the Inquisition (which burned people at the stake to rid their good soul of their evil body) and self-immolation practices like flagellation (beating the body to get the mind free of evil thoughts). Sadly, many people sitting in Christ-



ian churches today still see the body as evil and the close association of the sexual organs with excreta still leads many to hold Victorian attitudes with regards to sex. I knew a missionary (an excellent man by the way) who used to ride a motor-bike over rough ground when he was feeling a little randy. But this was perhaps

better than the case reported by Cohn of a monk who beat himself with a spiked whip until his body was covered with blood and then asked God to forgive his sins!

## BEING SET APART

The first thing we need to know is that God is not interested in 'good' and 'evil'. What he is interested in is His program to develop His plan for the *cosmos* that He created for His own pleasure, and He is interested in knowing who will join in Him in this project, i.e. act as the 'sons of God' (John 5:19; Romans 8:14; Galatians 3:26- and Hebrews 2:10). **The call is for us to abandon our own projects and find a part in God's purposes** – this is what the scriptures are talking about when it speaks of being 'set apart', i.e. being in a **genuine state of 'holiness'**.

If we are out of relationship with God we have no way of knowing what God's purposes are and have no way of knowing what He would like us to do. **Everything we do 'misses the mark'**, i.e. is 'sinful'. To participate in God's agenda we need some way of connecting with Him. We cannot arrange this ourselves but God has organised it. He has arranged that we can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, in the *koilia* (belly) region and from there the Spirit can break the veil and set up an intimate communication directly with our hearts and minds – see *the Tract: The Holy Spirit*. This is the New Covenant relationship (Heb.8:10-12) by which God writes His 'laws' on our inward parts. It is not a matter of being sinless but of being **RIGHTEOUS**, that is, **thinking God's thoughts**. When we are thinking God's thoughts and acting upon His instructions we are said to be acting in **FAITH** and can be sure that what we are doing is **RIGHT**. We do not get our instructions from traditions, even though they are good traditions; we get our instructions directly from the Holy Spirit within us. Paul reminds us that when we do this we are **NOT UNDER SOME LAW** which determines what is good and what is evil (Galatians 5:18). Where the Spirit of the Law is there is liberty!!!

There remains one problem: even the best of us is not always found walking in the mind of the Holy Spirit. There are two main reasons for this: (1) we tend to fall back into old human patterns of thinking in the midst of our busy lives; and (2) we are constantly being attacked by demonic forces which put ideas in our heads which are contrary to what the Spirit would want. Both problems can be dealt with by developing a healthy praise life, continually speaking to ourselves in 'psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord' (Ephesians 5:18-19). (NB the Holy Spirit helps us do this – we are not alone). The second problem requires the Holy Spirit to take us through lessons in spiritual warfare that lead to us having a spirit of discernment as to what is God and what is not God; this can take time because the enemy's attacks can be extremely subtle. While we are learning healthy life practices **we are going to make plenty of mistakes**. The Lord understands our frailty and ignorance and has ways (disciplines) which help keep us on track. If we **welcome His disciplines** He continues to treat us as sons; if we walk away from His disciplines, like Cain, we lose our relationship with Him. This is what **GRACE** is all about – God over-looks it when we are missing the mark through ignorance, **giving us time to set ourselves apart** to serve His interests rather than some useless venture of our own. This is genuine **HOLINESS!**

## THE HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS

Sadly, many believers continue to look to principles and laws to guide their daily living. For such people Jesus provided a few laws of His own, not to call us into a new legalism but to show us how impossible it is to please God by our own efforts. If you wish to live this way maybe you should consider the following;

- Rule 1: Do not worry about what you will eat or drink, or what you will wear; seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you. (In other words 'do not worry', just ask the Lord what to do about eating and drinking and He will give you the guidance you need). And don't worry about tomorrow, just concentrate on dealing with the problems you face today (Matthew 6:25-34).
- Rule 2: Do not lay-up treasures for yourself on earth, rather lay-up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-24).
- Rule 3: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you (Matthew 5:43-48).
- Rule 4: When you give a supper, do not call your friends, relatives and rich neighbours (they will only invite you back again) but call those who are really needy (Luke 14:12-14).

These few rules will do for a start. If you find yourself walking well in these rules you will find some more to 'get your teeth into' in the New Testament Gospels.

Personally, I have abandoned trying to meet all of these objectives by my own efforts, for it is a works trip and not faith. My approach is simply to seek God's face each day for His instructions. Left to myself I would fail badly even in this relatively simple task, but the Holy Spirit is my Accomplice – He starts my day with a song in my spirit when I wake each morning and keeps me in the way with numerous encouragements throughout my waking moments. I thank Him continually for the incredible grace that allows me, a very inadequate human being with all kinds of evident faults and weaknesses, to be in daily touch with His Majesty (Galatians 4:9a); and to be HOLY, set apart to walk with Him.



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