

Perfecting Holiness

"Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou"—Isaiah 65:5

IT IS interesting to notice, in comparing the context of the chapter, that this expression is made by those who had turned away from the ways of the Lord unto the basest of the idolatries of the surrounding nations.

They had dishonoured the prophets of God and despised the name of the Lord. Was it not a true word which Christ declared of their long and wicked history—

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee!"

The wicked generation of Christ's time esteemed themselves above the lowly Nazarene and his followers—

"He was despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:3).

Christ said (Luke 10:16)—

"He that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me."

This last declaration was made as a result of the attitude of the people of Capernaum toward his teachings. That attitude called forth the terrible words of Christ (Luke 10:15)—

"Thou Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shall be thrust down to hell."

Israel's apostate position is characterised by the words in our heading. It was applicable to the leaders in the time of Christ, particularly the scribes and Pharisees, and priests. They had come to feel themselves above common people.

The Pharisees rejected the counsel of God and esteemed Christ as—

". . . a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

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How strange, then, considering the class really intended, that these words from Isaiah—

"I am holier than thou."

—has been cruelly and unfairly attributed to those who are endeavouring to maintain the Truth in its purity.

It is charged that such is their attitude toward those who are complacent about the modern worldwide ecclesial trend to a broader way.

Thus the application of the words is made exactly opposite to their scriptural intent. A striving for holiness is belittled as extremeness and narrow-mindedness. Unholiness is condoned and excused under the plea of "love and mercy."

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IT IS very important that we understand our position before God and our relation to holiness and our views concerning it. Perhaps if we fully realized it we would all act in a much more circumspect manner in all we do, say, and think. We read concerning the Creator (Isa. 57:15 & 6:3)—

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose Name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit . . ."

"And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts."

God said, in the first quotation, that He dwells also with those of a contrite and humble spirit. We remember Paul's solemn warning—

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:17).

Therefore if we have agreed to have God dwell in us we must keep ourselves as clean and holy as we can. We are commanded to pattern our lives after His holiness—

"Be ye holy, even as I am holy."

Peter tells us that we are a—

"Chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation."

Certainly in view of this high position that we are called unto we should do everything we can to be sure that we are as holy as possible, the while compassed with humility and kindness. We must make our lives completely subservient to the will of the Lord.

Holiness will be the mark of God dwelling: with us and in us. We stand, as it were, in the presence of God.

Remember when Moses stood at the burning bush, he was instructed to remove his shoes from his feet because he was standing in God's presence.

Recall also, that when Moses came down from the mount after receiving the Oracles of God that his face shone with the glory of God.

Interesting also is the fact that when the disciples stood in defence of the Truth before the leaders of Israel, their determination to preach caused their enemies to note "that they had been with Jesus." Holiness is manifested as a way of life.

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HOW shall we view ourselves in the light of God's Word? If we are wise, we shall judge ourselves by the standard of holiness which has been set in the person of God's Son, the pattern now in the heavens.

We shall see that we make our lives according to the pattern shown in the mount. As the Levitical enactments taught holiness in every detail, so we are impressed of our duty.

Yet, instead of being high-minded and puffed up we will feel our own unworthiness. We will realize more fully the extent of the mercy which has been shown on our behalf by God, as we see ourselves fall far short of the mark of perfection. We will be humbled and brought very low.

We shall realize that the garment of holiness which we shall be clothed with in the future is the righteousness of Christ—that is, if we remain steadfast unto the end.

Such an attitude will commend itself to God and man alike. It will be expressed in the frame of mind of Paul—

"I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

It will put us on our guard against "comparing ourselves with ourselves and judging ourselves by ourselves," which Paul says is very unwise. The Divine standard of holiness is manifested in Jesus. Let us seek it diligently (2 Cor. 10:17):

"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."

Our daily readings, faithfully meditated upon, direct us in the course of holiness. We have just read from Lev. 10:10 that it was necessary to make a distinction between things holy and unholy, and the clean and the unclean. Israel was chided through Ezekiel for not making the distinction.

We are specifically told that these things were written for our learning and exhortation. Israel was called to a life of separation from corrupt worldly practices, indulged in by their neighbours. Their examples of failure are preserved that we might heed the admonition, as Paul declares—(1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4).

But though the servants of God are in every way to be an example of the holiness of God, they are to be of a humble and contrite spirit. The opening up of the door to the Gentiles being fellow-heirs and of the same promise, clearly sets out the fact that God is no respecter of persons.

But whether Jew or Gentile, we are called unto holiness, to a dedicated life, to a life of living sacrifice, for we are a holy nation. Therefore—

"In every nation he that feareth God AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS is accepted of Him."

Though we must ever be kind and humble, we must never confuse our call to separation and holiness with sociability and worldly good-will—

"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"

"Come ye out and be ye separate and touch not the unclean (unholy) thing."

"Have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness."

When we accept the call of the Truth, we believe we are putting the uncleanness and unholiness of the world behind us. We agree to live a holier life than the world. This will be acknowledged by those who have misapplied the passage in question—

"I am holier than thou."

So, in submitting to baptism, we agree we are to strive for greater holiness. We shall, if we continue faithful, strive higher and higher in the scale of holiness. Paul said he felt he was still striving upward through his life. Not until the end could he say that he had attained.

So when some turn backward to the ways and teachings of the world, and others cannot agree to go along, the distinction between holiness and unholiness becomes apparent. It is not that those striving higher are high-minded. It is because **the Word of God itself makes the distinction and lays down the requirements of holiness.**

Having the glorious promises of becoming sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:18), dearly beloved brethren and sisters—

"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"
—F.H.
