

## Except Your Righteousness Shall Exceed . . . . .

By Laurence K. Mullen

The Bible is clear in pointing out that one of the most common weaknesses among the early Hebrews was their persistent attempt to construct a substitute religion, or a substitute God. This fact is illustrated first in the two kinds of sacrifices that were offered by Cain and Abel. Abel's sacrifice expressed his own unworthiness, and dependence upon God, in the form of a blood sacrifice, whereas the sacrifice of Cain was an attempt to exalt the significance of his own efforts.

A little later in scripture, we read that at one time the children of Israel grew impatient in the wilderness while waiting for Moses to come down from the heights of Sinai. Completely forgetting the miraculous way in which God had so recently delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians, the people came to Aaron saying, "Up, make us gods." Joshua faced the same problem, even after the Israelites had become established in the promised land. He sought to set a good example by his ringing challenge, "Choose you this day whom ye shall serve . . . but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Contrary to their promise, however, the people soon forsook the true God of Joshua, and begun to worship heathen gods. The whole period of Judges, following the death of Joshua, is characterized by a persistent turning away to other gods.

Amos, the rough herdman from the hills of Tekoa, found a substitute religion in the northern part of the divided kingdom. Under the power and inspiration of the spirit of God, he proclaimed to Israel the coming judgments of God. God spoke the following words through Amos: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies" (Amos 5:21).

The prophet Jeremiah found that the people of God had committed two evils. "They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). What a picture indeed! Jeremiah saw in the rebellious and idolatrous people a religion—a false one—that he likened to a broken cistern that could hold no water.

Illustrations could be multiplied from the Old Testament which show clearly the two groups which called themselves religious, but which at the same time were set in complete antithesis to each other. All through the period of Israel's development ran a strain of true religion, where God was the under-girding motivation for a life of sincere devotion, but on the other hand there ran a strain of make-believe religion that denied God, that persecuted his true followers, and which eventually brought destruction upon all.

Is there any lesson that we today can learn from the Old Testament record? I believe there is. For it was not only in Old Testament times, nor even in New Testament times, that the tendency for man to create a substitute has existed. The tendency is a contemporary fact.

In the Holiness Movement itself lies a monster that is threatening to poke its ugly head into our midst and poison our very souls. True, this monster has not made his appearance obvious to all, but it lurks in the shadows where if you look closely, you can see its features and detect the satanic smile that plays across its face. This monster is a "substitute" but a substitute that is wrapped and tagged under the same name as the genuine product. Here is the awful danger.

The Holiness Church today is in danger of finding itself left with a form—but a form in which dwells no living religious content. Most of us rather complement ourselves on the fact that our churches are not formalistic and that we make no place for ritual, as such, in our regular church program. But, we might ask, what is the difference between one kind of form and another kind of form? In relation to God, one kind of empty form is equally as repulsive as another. In our case, the "form" is the holiness doctrine itself, and the time has come when many are putting more effort into an attempt to build a defense for the doctrine than they are in preaching the glorious message of a gospel that can save a man's soul from sin, and can cleanse his heart from inward depravity.

Certainly the doctrine of holiness is a valid doctrine. The whole theme of scripture reveals the fact that God is a holy God and demands a holy people—and there can be no question as to the reasonableness of the doctrine. However, doctrine alone does not save men's souls; doctrine alone does not make man get off his high-horse and help the poor man in the ditch who is on his way to Jericho; doctrine alone does not keep men from persecuting others and consenting to their death; doctrine alone does not inspire men to have a social consciousness and sense the needs of others; doctrine alone does not make one love God, and in turn love his fellow man. No, doctrine by itself is not enough.

The monster that lurks near us today is the monster of pharisaism. We pride ourselves on a doctrine, which without question is a valid one; but right in the midst of being willing to fight, and even die for the doctrine, it is possible to harbor all the evils of a sinful heart that are a stench in God's nostrils.

Paul, in writing to young Timothy, hit the very core of the problem when he said, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Tim. 3:5). Weymouth translates this verse, "And will keep up a make-believe of piety and yet live in defiance of its power." In Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches*, the verse reads: "They will maintain a facade (or face) of religion, but their conduct will deny its validity." What these verses are really saying is that it is possible to testify to the experience of holiness, but at the same time live contrary to its demands.

There are two methods which I fear cannot solve the problem. First, the attempt to make an authoritarian defense for the holiness doctrine is bound to fail, for it has within itself the seeds of its own destruction. By "authoritarian" here, I do not mean the authority of God's word—for in the word of God lies our only hope of salvation—but rather, I mean the arbitrary setting up of certain infallible dogmas that are necessarily true in themselves, and which cannot be subject to intelligent evaluation, comparison, and judgment, in relation to other standards of truth. Such an attempt is an appeal to ignorance, and on the same level with the so-called infallible authoritarianism of a pope or a Stalin. On the other hand, the holiness doctrine can endure the test of analysis, evaluation, and comparison. If not, let someone offer us a more reasonable answer to the problem of sin in the world. The holiness doctrine is rationally justifiable from every point of view, and does not need an arbitrary authoritarianism to guarantee its preservation—let it speak for itself!

Secondly, the method of purposely "running down" those who do not agree with our way of thinking is most certainly a wrong answer. No one was ever born into the kingdom of God simply by seeing the fallacies in some other point of view, and much less so when those fallacies were pointed out in a bad and bitter spirit. It may be perfectly justifiable to criticize constructively another point of view, but this in itself does not provide the motivation necessary to stimulate in the heart of an unbeliever the response and the desire that are necessary for the salvation of his soul.

Let us consider two suggestions that may help us, and if followed might well lead us into a more vigorous and healthy holiness church. First, let us have an intelligent awareness of the problem. Let us realize that the danger exists, and seek the help of the Lord that we might fortify ourselves against an empty formalism. We have only two choices. One is to let things continue until the process of time produces the inevitable end result of formalism. The other choice is to shake ourselves from our lethargy, call upon God to lead us into deeper spiritual experience, and thereby save ourselves from a slow death.

The second suggestion is that every believer in the doctrine of Christian perfection examine himself before God and ask himself this question, "Is my testimony, both in word and in actual life, merely sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, or is it a living, dynamic, energizing force that motivates every fibre of my being?" If those of us who profess the experience of Christian perfection would ask ourselves this simple question, and would honestly follow the dictates of our own conscience in the light of it, the holiness church would find itself possessed with power, hitherto unknown.

It would be well if each of us were to keep in our minds the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:20, "For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

## Wishing You God's Best For The New Year