A Heart Talk on Holiness

By the late C. W. Butler, D. D.

I once met a man who hated the doctrine of holiness. This man was superintendent of a Sunday school. He entered the room where I was in conversation with his pastor. As he saw me his countenance clouded, but he made a quick adjustment so that by the time he faced me, he extended his hand in a fairly friendly way. His pastor who knew his attitude toward holiness noted this, and after his departure explained to me some facts I had not known before. This incident set me to thinking.

A man hating holiness, yet a fundamentalist in faith, and professing grace. I said to his pastor, perhaps he associates holiness with something which is not holiness at all. This is the most charitable conclusion one could come to, to at all respect his profession of grace. It is too bad that there has ever been associated with the profession of this beautiful grace anything so inconsistent with the fact and nature of true holiness as to give birth to the kind of deep prejudice which filled this man's mind.

Misinformation about anything, or anyone, may lead to utterly wrong conclusions. This in turn may lead to utterly wrong attitudes and even wrong conduct. It seems natural for people to say when they see extremes and inconsistencies in people professing faith to say, "Well, if that is Christianity; or if that is holiness, I don't want any of it."

When Jesus says, "Pure religion and undefiled is" —he recognizes that there may be religion mixed with, and defiled by that which is untrue and mistaken or even false. I said to the pastor I was talking with, I would like the privilege of sitting down alone with that man and talking with him for an hour or two. I believe I could disarm, and win any honest individual with the reality of truth regarding any part of our holy Christian faith.

Let us look at "true holiness." The basis of all holiness is the character of God himself. God is holy. God is glorious in holiness. "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Psa. 97:12). He is "the Holy One of Israel." His holiness is the eternal standard by which all moral values are measured. Any holiness in angels or men grows out of and is based upon his original, underived, eternal holiness. Then too, we have a holy Bible. This Word reveals to us that heaven is holy. Also it reevals that all unfallen angels are holy.

Man was holy in his origin. It was rebellion against the will of our holy God that made him a sinner. It follows as a necessary conclusion that sin destroys holiness and renders any moral being who chooses sin, a sinner.

Now let us analyze and define holiness. Whatever more it is, it is absolutely and eternally the very opposite of sin. Indeed, the one and only thing which true holiness is against, is sin. Darkness is to light what holiness is to sin. Light and darkness are mutually exclusive one of the other. So sin and holiness are mutually exclusive each of the other in the essential nature of each of these qualities. It follows that if we reject one of these elements the opposite is embraced. When one loves he hates sin. If we hate holiness, we must love sin. The embrace of either of these alternatives necessarily excludes its opposite.

When rightly understood, no Christian can hate holiness. It is the most reasonable proposition thinkable, that the God who created man, and who has undertaken to redeem him, should provide as the supreme purpose of that redemption, the full moral recovery of man. Could a lesser moral objective motivate a holy God to make the supreme and unspeakable sacrifice for a lesser moral objective? Why think our infinite Creator and Redeemer, after making such a sacrifice to provide salvation for man, unable to create him anew 'in righteousness and true holiness"? (Eph. 4:24).

The holiness provided for in God's plan of redemption recovers man to a state of heart purity, and perfect love, which takes out of man's disposition all that rejects God's holy will, yea, all in man that is out of harmony with God's will and nature, so that we are freed from sin (Rom. 6:22) and saved from all that causes fear of God in final judgment (I John 4:17, 18). This experience is rightly designated by Wesley as "Christian Protection"; it fits Christianity. It makes us just such Christians as we ought to be. It results in our power to keep the greatest commandment in the law, also the second greatest, which is like unto it, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39).

The experience of true holiness not only frees us from sin, but it empowers us to measure up to the standards of devotion and of living enjoined upon us by our divine Lord. It is truly an empowering of our entire moral selfhood for the life of victory. I like one of John Wesley's definitions because it presents the two sides of the experience, the negative and the positive. "Holiness is an instantaneous deliverance from all sin, and an instantaneous power then given always to cleave to God." Bishop Asbury witnessed to this experience in the following lauguage, "I live in patience, in purity, and in the perfect love of God. He fills my soul with pure spiritual life, and keeps me altogether devoted to my Lord."

There are two other reasons why some good but mistaken people oppose holiness. One is the fallacy of identifying sin with our humanity so that they are one and inseparable until death do us part. Of course if it is sin to be human, then while we are human we can never be holy. But it is not sin to be human. Sin is no essential part of our true humanity. If this proposition were true we would be compelled by the logic of the situation to make God the author of sin, also to believe Christ was sinful.

God did not create sin, but he did create man. He not only created man but he loves us as humans, and made the great provision of "grace" not to save us from being human, but to save us as humans from being sinful. John 3:16 assures us of this great fact.

The second reason I have in mind is the error of making every infirmity and limitation of our humanity sin. This error issues in a legal or absolute perfection, whereas holiness provided for believers, by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, brings us to an evangelical of Christian perfection, where 'love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

There is no moral quality in our infirmities, nor in our limitations. Sin is wilful wrong, in it is the spirit of rebellion against the known will of God. From all of this true holiness delivers us, and centers our will in God's will, and purifies our affectional nature, so that love dominates and controls our lives. We can live where we say with Jesus, "I do always the things that please him." This is according to I John 4:17, 18. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." This most desirable experience is provided by the blood, and obtained by faith.