

“ARE YOU HOLY ?”

A QUESTION FOR EVERYBODY.

BY THE RIGHT REV.

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J. C. Ryle Tracts.

J. C. Ryle wrote well over two hundred evangelical tracts, of which more than two million were circulated, and many were translated into foreign languages. Throughout his ministry he remained one of the strongest defenders of the evangelical reformed faith within the Church of England. His faithful witness to the Gospel of Christ needs to be heard more than ever today. The following tract is a classic of Gospel Truth that readers came to expect from all his writings. All his tracts are “pure gold.” Some of them, as they were republished by Drummond’s Tract Depot, Stirling, Scotland late in the 19th century, have come into my possession, and I offer them word for word as published while J. C. Ryle was Bishop of Liverpool between 1880–1900AD.

“ARE YOU HOLY?”

“Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” —HEBREWS XII. 14.

Beloved Friends and Brethren,

I offer you this text as a subject for self-inquiry; and I invite you this day to think over the question before your eyes, “Are you holy?”

It is a question that can never be out of season. The wise man tells us, “There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccles. iii. 4, 7); but there is no time, no, not a day, in which a man ought not to be holy. Brethren, are you?

It is a question that concerns all ranks and conditions of men. Some are rich, and some are poor,—some learned and some unlearned,—some masters, and some servants; but there is no rank or condition in life in which a man ought not to be holy. Brethren, are you?

I ask to be heard today about this question. How stands the account between your souls and God? Stay a little, I beseech you, while I reason with you about holiness. I believe I might have chosen a subject more popular and pleasant. I am sure I might have found one more easy to handle. But I feel deeply I could not have chosen one more important and more profita-

ble to your souls. It is a solemn thing to hear God saying, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb. xii. 14.)

I shall endeavour, by God’s help, to set before you what true holiness is, the reasons why it is so needful, and the way in which alone it can be attained. The Lord grant you may all see and feel the importance of the subject, and lay down this paper, when you have read it, wiser and better men.

I. First, then, let me try to show you *what true holiness is,—what sort of persons are those whom God calls holy?*

A man may go great lengths, and yet never reach true holiness. It is not knowledge,—Balaam had that; nor great profession,—Judas Iscariot had that; nor doing many things,—Herod had that; nor zeal for certain matters in religion,—Jehu had that; nor morality and outward respectability of conduct,—the young ruler had that; nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers,—the Jews in Ezekiel’s time had that; nor keeping company with godly people,—Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that. Yet none of these were holy. These things alone are not holiness. A man may have any one of them, and yet never see the Lord.

What then is true holiness? It is a hard question to answer. I do not mean that I find a want of matter on the subject. But I fear lest I should give a defective view of holiness, and not say all that ought to be said; or lest I should speak things about it that ought not to be spoken, and so do harm. Suffer me, however, to say a few words that may help to clear your minds. Remember only, when I have said all, that my account is but a poor imperfect outline at the best.

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 judgment,—hating what He hates,—loving what He loves,—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.

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 a love to all His ways. He will feel what Paul felt when he said, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. vii. 22), and what David felt when he said, “I esteem *all* Thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.” (Psalm cxix. 128.)

A holy man will *strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ*; to have the mind that was in Him, and to be conformed to His image. It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us,—to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself,—to walk in love, even as Christ loved us,—to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no

reputation and humbled Himself. He will remember that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth,—that He came not to do His own will,—that it was His meat and drink to do His Father’s will,—that He would stoop to any work in order to minister to others,—that He was meek and patient under undeserved insults,—that He thought more of godly poor men than of kings,—that He was full of love and compassion to sinners,—that He was bold and uncompromising in denouncing sin,—that He sought not the praise of men, when He might have had it,—that He went about doing good, that He was separate from worldly people,—that He continued instant in prayer,— that He would not let even His nearest relations stand in His way when God’s work was to be done. These things a holy man will try to remember. By them he will endeavour to shape his course in life. He will lay to heart the saying of John, “He that saith he abideth in Christ ought himself also to walk, even as He walked.” (1 John ii. 6.) And the saying of Peter, that “Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps.” (1 Peter. ii. 21.) Much time would be saved, and much sin prevented, if men would oftener ask themselves the question, “What would Christ have said and done, if He were in my place?”

But time would fail me, if I were to mention all the things which go to make up holiness of character. Still I must ask you to bear with me while I name a few things which come uppermost in my thoughts. The days we live in make me anxious that there should be no mistake upon this subject. How can we know whether we are holy, unless we have a clear view of what holiness takes in?

A holy man will follow after *meekness*, long suffering, gentleness, kind temper, government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights. You see a bright example of this in the behaviour of David when Shimei cursed him,—and of Moses when Aaron and Miriam spake against him.

A holy man will follow after *temperance and self-denial*. He will labour to mortify the desire of his body; to crucify his flesh with its affections and lusts; to curb his passions; to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose. Oh, what a word is that of the Lord Jesus to the Apostles, “Take heed to Yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life.” (Luke xxi. 34.) And that of the Apostle Paul, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Cor. ix, 27.)

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 be full of affection towards his brethren,—their bodies, their property, their Charac-

ters, their feelings, their souls. "He that loveth another," says Paul, "hath fulfilled the law." (Rom. xiii. 8.) He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least things. The shekel and cubit of the sanctuary were larger than those in common use. Alas, what condemning words are the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and the Sermon on the Mount, when laid alongside the conduct of many professing Christians!

A holy man will follow after a spirit of *mercy and benevolence towards others*. He will not stand all the day idle. He will not be content with doing no harm, he will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day and generation, and to lessen the spiritual wants and misery around him, as far as he can. Such was Dorcas, full of good works and alms deeds, which she did,—not merely purposed and talked about, *but did*. Such a one was Paul, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you," he says,—"though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved." (2 Cor. xii. 15.)

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. Who shall dare to talk of strength when David can fall? There is many a hint to be gleaned from the ceremonial law. Under it the man who only touched a bone, or a dead body, or a grave, or a diseased person, became at once unclean in the sight of God. And these things were emblems and figures. Few Christians are ever too watchful and too particular about this point.

A holy man will follow after *the fire 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. What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became Governor at Jerusalem he might have been chargeable to the Jews, and required of them money for his support. The former Governors had done so. There was none to blame him if he did. But he says, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." (Nehem. v.15.)

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. He will understand something of Abrahams feeling, when he says, "I am dust and ashes," and Jacob's, when he says, "I am less than the least of all Thy mercies," and Job's, when he says, "I am vile," and Paul's, when he says, "I am chief of sinners." Holy Bradford, that faithful martyr of Christ, would sometimes finish his letters with these words, "A most miserable sinner, John Bradford." Good old Mr.

Grimshawe's last words, when he lay on his deathbed, were these, "Here goes an unprofitable servant."

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, but even better, because he has higher motives, and more help than they. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten, "Whatever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord,"— "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill, if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no occasion against themselves, except as concerning the law of their God. They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children; good masters and good servants, good neighbours, good friends, and good subjects. Holiness is worth little indeed, if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, "What do ye more than others?"

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 not neglect the business of the life that now is, but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come. 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 chiefest enjoyments. He will value everything, and place, and company, just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God. He will enter into something of David's feeling, when he says, "My soul followeth hard after Thee."— "Thou art my portion." (Psalm lxiii. 8; cxix. 57.)

Such is the outline of holiness which I set before you; such is the character which those who are called holy follow after.

But here let me say, I trust no man will misunderstand me. I am not without fear that my meaning will be mistaken, and the description I have given of holiness will discourage some tender conscience. I would not willingly make one righteous heart sad, or throw a stumbling-block in any believer's way.

I do not tell you for a moment that holiness shuts out the presence of *indwelling* sin. No! far from it. It is the greatest misery of a holy man that he carries about with him a body of death,—that often when he would do good evil is present with him; that the old man is clogging all his movements, and, as it were, trying to draw him back at every step he takes. But it is the excellence of a holy man that he is not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. He hates it, mourns over it, and longs to be free from its company.

The work of sanctification within him is like the wall of Jerusalem, the building goes forward, “even in troublous times.” (Dan. ix. 25.)

Neither do I tell you that holiness comes to ripeness and perfection all at once, or that these graces I have touched on must be found in full bloom and vigour before you can call a man holy. No! far from it. Sanctification is always a *progressive work*. Some men’s graces are in the blade, some in the ear, and some are like full corn in the ear. All must have a beginning. We must never despise the day of small things. And sanctification in the very best is an *imperfect work*. The history of the brightest saints that ever lived will contain many a “but,” and “howbeit,” and “notwithstanding,” before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross,— the light will never shine without some clouds, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The sun himself hath spots upon his face. The holiest men have many a blemish and defect when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world, and the devil; and sometimes you will see them not overcoming, but overcome. The flesh is ever lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and in many things they offend all.

But still, for all this, I am sure that to have such a character as I have faintly drawn, is the heart’s desire and prayer of all true Christians. They press towards it, if they do not reach it. They may not attain to it, but they always aim at it. It is what they fain would be, if it is not what they are.

And this I do mean to say, that true holiness is a great reality. It is something in a man that can be seen, and known, and marked, and felt by all around him. It is light: if it exists it will show itself. It is salt: if it exists its savour will be perceived. It is a precious ointment: if it exists, its presence cannot be hid.

I am sure the little I know of my own heart makes me ready to make allowance for much backsliding, for much occasional deadness. I know a road may lead from one point to another, and yet have many a winding and turn; and a man may be truly holy, and yet be drawn aside by many an infirmity. Gold is not the less gold because mingled with alloy, nor light the less light because faint and dim, nor grace the less grace because young and weak. But after every allowance, I cannot see how any man deserves to be called holy, who wilfully allows himself in sins, and is not humbled and ashamed because of them. I dare not call any one holy who makes a habit of wilfully neglecting known duties, and wilfully doing what he knows God has commanded him not to do. Well says Owen, “I do not understand how a man can be a true believer unto whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble.”

Brethren, such is holiness. Examine yourselves whether you are acquainted with it. Prove your own selves.

II. Let me try, in the next place, *to show you some reasons why holiness is so important.*

Can holiness save us? Can holiness put away sin,—cover iniquities,—make satisfaction for transgressions,—pay our debt to God? No! not a whit. God forbid that I should ever tell you so. Holiness can do none of these things. The brightest saints are all unprofitable servants. Our purest works are no better than filthy rags, when tried by the light of God's holy law. The white robe which Jesus offers, and faith puts on, must be our only righteousness,—the name of Christ our only confidence,—the Lamb's book of life our only title to heaven. With all our holiness we are no better than sinners. Our best things are stained and tainted with imperfection. They are all more or less incomplete,—wrong in the motive, or defective in the performance. By the deeds of the law shall no child of Adam ever be justified. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephes. ii. 8, 9.)

Why then is holiness so important? Why does the Apostle say, "Without it no man shall see the Lord?" Let me set before you a few reasons.

For one thing, we must be holy, because *the voice of God in Scripture plainly commands it.* The Lord Jesus says to His people, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v.20.) "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. v.48.) Paul tells the Thessalonians, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." (1 Thess. iv. 3.) And Peter says, "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter i. 15, 16.) "In this," says Leighton, "law and Gospel agree."

We must be holy, because this is one grand *end and purpose for which Christ came into the world.* Paul writes to the Corinthians, "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. v.15.) And to the Ephesians, "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it." (Ephes. v. 25, 26.) And to Titus, "He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus ii. 14.) In short, to talk of men being saved from the guilt of sin, without being at the same time saved from its dominion in their hearts, is to contradict the witness of all Scripture. Are believers said to be elect?—it is "through sanctification of the Spirit." Are they predestinated?—it is "to be conformed to the image of God's Son." Are they chosen? it is "that they may be holy." Are they called?—it is "with a holy calling." Are they afflicted?—it is that they may be "partakers of holiness." Jesus is a complete Saviour. He does not merely

take away the guilt of a believer's sin, He does more,—He breaks its power.

We must be holy, because this is the *only sound evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*. The Twelfth Article of our Church says truly, that “Although good works cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by its fruits.” James warns us there is such a thing as dead faith,—a faith which goes no further than the profession of the lips, and has no influence on a man's character. True saving faith is a very different kind of thing. True faith will always show itself by its fruits,—it will sanctify,—it will work by love,—it will overcome the world,—it will purify the heart. I know that people are fond of talking about deathbed evidences. They will rest on words spoken in the hours of fear, and pain, and weakness, as if they might take comfort in them about the friends they lose. But I am afraid in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred such evidences are not to be depended on. I suspect men generally die just as they have lived. The only safe evidence that you are one with Christ, and Christ in you, is a holy life. They that live unto the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If we would die the death of the righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only, let us seek to live His life. It is a true saying of Traill's, “That man's state is naught, and his faith unsound, that finds not his hopes of glory purifying to his heart and life.”

We must be holy, because this is the *only proof that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*. This is a point on which He has spoken Himself most plainly in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of John. “If ye love Me keep my commandments.” “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.” “If a man love Me he will keep my saying.” “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” Plainer words than these it would be difficult to find, and woe to those who neglect them! Surely that man must be in an unhealthy state of soul who can think of all that Jesus suffered, and yet cling to those sins for which that suffering was undergone. It was sin that wove the crown of thorns,—it was sin that pierced our Lord's hands, and feet, and side,—it was sin that brought Him to Gethsemane and Calvary, to the cross, and to the grave. Cold must our hearts be if we do not hate Sin, and labour to get rid of it, though we may have to cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye in doing it.

We must be holy, because this is the *only sound evidence that we are true children of God*. Children in this world are generally like their parents. Some, doubtless, are more so, and some less,—but it is seldom indeed that you cannot trace a kind of family likeness. And it is much the same with the

children of God. If men have no likeness to the Father in heaven, it is vain to talk of their being His sons. If we know nothing of holiness we may flatter ourselves as we please, but we have not got the Holy Spirit dwelling in us,—we are dead, and must be brought to life again,—we are lost, and must be found. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they, and they only, are the sons of God. We must show by our lives the family we belong to,—we must let men see by our good conversation that we are indeed the children of the Holy One, or our sonship is but an empty name. “Say not,” says Gurnall, “that thou hast royal blood in thy veins, and art born of God, except thou earnestly prove thy pedigree by daring to be holy.”

We must be holy, because this is the *most likely way to do good to others*. We cannot live to ourselves only in this world. Our lives will always be doing either good or harm to those who see them. They are a silent sermon which all can read. It is sad indeed when they are a sermon for the devil’s cause, and not for God’s. I believe that far more is done for Christ’s kingdom by the holy living of believers, than we are at all aware. There is a reality about such living which makes men feel, and obliges them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it which nothing else can give. It makes religion beautiful, and draws men to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. The day of judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been won “*without the word*” by a holy life. You may talk to people about the doctrines of the Gospel, and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape. There is a meaning about holiness which not even the most unlearned can help taking in. They may not understand justification, but they can understand charity.

And I believe there is far more harm done by unholy and inconsistent Christians than we are at all aware. Such men are among Satan’s best allies. They pull down by their lives what ministers build with their lips. They cause the chariot wheels of the Gospel to drive heavily. They supply the children of this world with a never ending excuse for remaining as they are. “I cannot see the use of so much religion,” said an irreligious tradesman not long ago; “I observe that some of my customers are always talking about the Gospel, and faith, and election, and the blessed promises and so forth;—and yet these very people think nothing of cheating me of pence and half-pence, when they have an opportunity. Now if religious persons can do such things, I do not see what good there is in religion.” Oh, brethren, I blush to be obliged to write such things, I fear that Christ’s name is too often blasphemed because of the lives of Christians. Let us take heed lest the blood of souls should be required at our hands. From murder of souls by inconsistency and loose walking, good Lord deliver us! Oh, for the sake of others, if for no other reason, let us strive to be holy!

We must be holy, *because our present comfort depends much upon it*. We cannot be too often reminded of this. We are sadly apt to forget that there is a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation. God has so wisely ordered it, that our well-being and our well-doing are linked together. He has mercifully provided, that even in this world it should be man's *interest* to be holy. Our justification is not by works,—our calling and election are not according to our works,—but it is vain for anyone to suppose that he will have a lively *sense* of his justification, or an *assurance* of his calling, so long as he does not strive to live a holy life. A believer may as soon expect to feel the sun's rays upon a dark and cloudy day, as to feel strong consolation in Christ, while he does not follow Him fully. When the disciples forsook the Lord and fled, they escaped danger, but they were miserable and sad: when shortly after they confessed Him boldly before men, they were cast into prison and beaten, but we are told, "They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." (Acts v.41.) Oh, for our own sakes, if there were no other reason, let us strive to be holy! He that follows Jesus most fully, will always follow Him most comfortably.

Lastly, we must be holy, *because without holiness on earth we should never be prepared to enjoy heaven*. Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of heaven is a Holy Being. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven. The book of Revelation says expressly, "There shall in nowise enter into it, anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." (Rev. xxi. 27.)

Brethren, how shall we ever find a place in heaven, if we die unholy? Death works no change. The grave makes no alteration. Each will rise again with the same character in which he breathed his last. Where will our place be if we are strangers to holiness now?

Suppose for a moment that you were allowed to enter heaven without holiness. What would you do? What possible enjoyment could you feel there? To which of all the saints would you join yourself, and by whose side would you sit down? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes not your tastes, their character not your character. How could you possibly be happy, if you had not been holy on earth?

Now perhaps you love the company of the light and the careless, the worldly-minded and the covetous, the reveller and the pleasure-seeker, the ungodly and the profane. There will be none such in heaven.

Now perhaps you think the saints of God too strict, and particular, and serious. You rather avoid them. You have no delight in their society. There will be 10 other company in heaven.

Now perhaps you think praying, and Scripture reading, and hymn singing, dull and melancholy, and stupid work,—a thing to be tolerated now

and then, but not enjoyed. You reckon the Sabbath a burden, and a weariness; you could not possibly spend more than a small part of it in worshipping God. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sabbath. The inhabitants thereof rest not day or night, saying, “holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,” and singing the praise of the Lamb. How could an unholy man find pleasure in occupation such as this?

Think you that such a one would delight to meet David, and Paul, and John, after a life spent in doing the very things they spoke against? Would he take sweet counsel with them, and find that he and they had much in common? Think you, above all, that he would rejoice to meet Jesus the Crucified One, face to face, after cleaving to the sins for which He died, after loving His enemies, and despising His friends? Would he stand before Him with confidence, and join in the cry, “This is our God: we have waited for Him. We will be glad, and rejoice in His salvation”? Think you not rather that the tongue of an unholy man would cleave to the roof of his mouth with shame, and his only desire would be to be cast out? He would feel a stranger in a land he knew not, a black sheep amidst Christ’s holy flock. The voice of Cherubim and Seraphim, the song of Angels and Archangels, and all the company of heaven, would be a language he could not understand. The very air would seem an air he could not breathe.

Brethren, I know not what you may think, but to me it does seem clear that heaven would be a miserable place to an unholy man. It cannot be otherwise. People may say, in a vague way, “they hope to go to heaven,” but they do not consider what they say. There must be a certain meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Our hearts must be somewhat in tune. To reach the holiday of glory, we must pass through the training school of grace. Brethren, you must be heavenly-minded, and have heavenly tastes, in the life that now is, or else you will never find yourselves in heaven, in the life to come.

And now let me wind up all with a few words, by way of application.

1. For one thing, let me ask everyone who may read this address, *Are you holy?* Listen, I pray you, to the question I put to you this day. Do you know anything of the holiness of which have been speaking?

I do not ask whether you keep to your better regularly,—whether you have been baptized, and receive the Lord’s Supper,—whether you have the name of Christian;—I ask something more than all this: *Are you holy, or are you not?*

I do not ask whether you approve of holiness in others,—whether you like to read the lives of holy people, and to talk of holy things, and to have on your table holy books,—whether you mean to be holy, and hope you will be holy some day,—I ask something further: *Are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not?*

And why do I ask so straitly, and press the question so strongly? I do it because the text says, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” It is written, it is not my fancy,—it is the Bible, not my private opinion,—it is the word of God, not of man: “*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*”

Oh, brethren, what words are these! What thoughts come across my mind as I write them down! I look at the world, and see the greater part of it lying in wickedness. I look at professing Christians, and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn to the Bible, and I hear the Spirit saying: “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

Surely it is a text that ought to make you consider your ways, and search your hearts. Surely it should raise within you solemn thoughts, and send you to prayer.

You may try to put me off by saying, “I feel much, and think much about these things, far more than many suppose.” I answer, This is not the point. The poor lost souls in hell do as much as this. The great question is not what you *think*, and what you *feel*, but what you DO.

You may say, “It was never meant that all Christians should be holy, and that holiness, such as I have described, is only for great saints, and people of uncommon gifts.” I answer, I cannot see that in Scripture. I read that “*every man* who bath hope in Christ purifieth himself.” (1 John iii. 3.)—“Without holiness *no man* shall see the Lord.”

You may say, “It is impossible to be so holy and to do our duty in this life at the same time: the thing cannot be done.” I answer, You are mistaken. It *can* be done. With God on your side nothing is impossible. It *has* been done by many. David, and Obadiah, and Daniel, and the servants of Nero’s household, are all examples that go to prove it.

You may say, “If you were so holy you would be unlike other people.” I answer, I know it well It is just what I want you to be. Christ’s true servants always were unlike the world around them,—a separate nation, a peculiar people, and you must be so too, if you would be saved.

You may say, “At this rate very few will be saved.” I answer, I know it. Jesus said so 1800 years ago. Few will be saved, because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Men will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a season. For this they turn their backs on an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. “Ye will not come unto Me,” says Jesus, “that ye might have life.” (John v. 40.)

You may say, “These are hard sayings: the way is very narrow.” I answer, I know it. Jesus said so 1800 years ago. He always said that men must take up the cross daily, that they must be ready to cut off hand or foot, if they would be His disciples. It is in religion as it is in other things, “there are no gains without pains.” That which costs nothing is worth nothing.

Brethren, whatever you may think fit to say, you must be holy, if you would see the Lord. Where is your Christianity, if you are not? Show it to me without holiness, if you can. You must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge, you must have a Christian *character* also. You must be a saint on earth, if ever you mean to be a saint in heaven. God has said it, and He will not go back: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "The Pope's calendar," says Jenkyn, only makes saints of the *dead*, but Scripture requires sanctity in the *living*." "Let not men deceive themselves," says Owen, "sanctification is a qualification indispensably necessary unto those who will be under the conduct of the Lord Christ unto salvation: He leads none to heaven but whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit of dead members."

Surely you will not wonder that Scripture says "Ye must be born again." (John iii. 7.) Surely *it* is clear as noonday that many of you need a complete change, —new hearts, new natures,—if ever you are to be saved. Old things must pass away,—you must become new creatures. Without holiness no man, be he who he may, no man shall see the Lord.

2. Let me, for another thing, speak a little to believers: I ask you this question, "*Do you think you feel the importance of holiness as much as you should?*"

I own I fear the temper of the times about this subject. I doubt exceedingly whether it holds that place which it deserves in the thoughts and attention of some of the Lord's people. I would humbly suggest that we are apt to overlook the doctrine of growth in grace, and that we do not sufficiently consider how very far a person may go in a profession of religion, and yet have no grace and be dead in God's sight after all. I believe that Judas Iscariot seemed very like the other apostles. When the Lord warned them one would betray Him, no one said, "Is it Judas?" We had better think more about Sardis and Laodicea than we do.

I have no desire to make an idol of holiness. I do not wish to dethrone Christ, and put holiness in His place. But I must candidly say, I wish sanctification was more thought of in this day than it seems to be, and I therefore take occasion to press the subject on all believers into whose hands this paper may fall.

I fear it is sometimes forgotten, that God has married together justification and sanctification. They are distinct and different things, beyond question, but one is never found without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified are justified. What God has joined together let no man dare to put asunder. Tell me not of your justification, unless you have also some marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ's work *for you*, unless you can show us the Spirit's work *in you*. Think not that Christ and the Spirit can ever be divided.

Brethren believers, I doubt not you know these things, but I think it good to put you in remembrance of them. Prove that you know them by your lives. Try to keep in view this text more continually: “Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

I must frankly say, I wish there was not such an excessive *sensitiveness* on the subject of holiness as I sometimes perceive in the minds of believers. A man might really think it was a dangerous subject to handle, so cautiously is it touched. Yet surely when we have exalted Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, we cannot err in speaking strongly about what should be the character of His people. Well says Rutherford, “The way that crieth down duties and sanctification, is not the way of grace. Believing and doing are blood-friends.”

Brethren, brethren, I would say it with reverence, but say it I must, I sometimes fear if Christ were on earth now, there are not a few who would think His preaching legal; and if Paul were writing his Epistles, there are those who would think he had better not write the latter part of most of them as he did. But let us remember that the Lord Jesus *did* speak the Sermon on the Mount, and that the Epistle to the Ephesians contains six chapters and not four. I grieve to feel obliged to speak in this way, but I am sure there is a cause.

That great divine, Owen, said some two hundred years ago, that there were people whose whole religion seemed to consist in going about complaining of their own corruptions, and telling everyone that they could do nothing of themselves.

Brethren, I put it to yourselves,—might not the same thing be said with truth of some of Christ’s professing people in this day?

I know there are texts in Scripture which warrant such complaints. I do not object to them when they come from men who walk in the steps of the apostle Paul, and fight a good fight, as he did against sin, the devil, and the world. But I never like such complaints when I see ground for suspecting, as I often do, that they are only a cloak to cover spiritual laziness, and an excuse for spiritual sloth. If we say with Paul, “O wretched man that I am,” let us also be able to say with him, “I press toward the mark.” Let us not quote his example in one thing, while we do not follow him in another.

Brethren, I do not set up myself to be better than other people, and if anyone asks, “What are you, that you talk in this way?” I answer, “I am a very poor creature indeed.” But I tell you that I cannot read the Bible without desiring to see many believers more spiritual, more holy, more single-eyed, more heavenly-minded, more whole-hearted than they are. I want to see among us more of a pilgrim spirit, a more decided separation from the world, a conversation more evidently in heaven, a closer walk with God,—and therefore I have spoken as I have.

Is it not true that we need a higher standard of personal holiness in this day? Where is our patience? Where is our zeal? Where is our love? Where are our works? Where is the power of religion to be seen, as it was in times gone by? Where is that unmistakable tone which used to distinguish the saints of old, and shake the world? Verily our silver has become dross, our wine mixed with water. We are all more than half asleep. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us awake and sleep no more. Let us open our eyes more widely than we have done hitherto. Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us. Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. "Did Christ die," says Owen, "and shall sin live? Was He crucified in the world, and shall our affections to the world be quick and lively? Oh, where is the spirit of him, who by the cross of Christ was crucified to the world, and the world to him!"

3. Let me, in the last place, offer a *word of advice to those who desire to be holy*.

Would you be holy? Would you become new creatures? Then *begin with Christ*. You will do just nothing till you feel your sin and weakness, and flee to Him. He is the beginning of all holiness. He is not wisdom and righteousness only to His people, but sanctification also. Men sometimes try to make themselves holy first of all, and sad work they make of it. They toil and labour, and turn over many new leaves, and make many changes; and yet, like the woman with the issue of blood, before she came to Christ, they feel nothing bettered, but rather worse. They run in vain, and labour in vain; and little wonder, for they are beginning at the wrong end. They are building up a wall of sand; their work runs down as fast as they throw it up. They are baling water out of a leaky vessel; the leak gains on them, not they on the leak. Other foundation of holiness can no man lay than that which Paul laid, even Christ Jesus. Without Christ we can do nothing. It is a strong but true saying of Traill's, "Wisdom out of Christ is damning folly;—righteousness out of Christ is guilt and condemnation;—sanctification out of Christ is filth and sin;—redemption out of Christ is bondage and slavery."

Would you be holy? Would you be partakers of the divine nature? Then *go to Christ*. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Linger not. Think not to make yourself ready. Go and say to Him, in the words of that beautiful hymn,—

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, flee to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace."

There is not a brick nor a stone laid in the work of our sanctification till we go to Christ. Holiness is His special gift to His believing people. Holiness is the work He carries on in their hearts, by the Spirit whom He puts within them. He is appointed a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance as well as remission of sins. To as many as receive Him, He gives power to become sons of God. Holiness comes not of blood,—parents cannot give it to their children; nor yet of the will of the flesh,—man cannot produce it in himself; nor yet of the will of man,—ministers cannot give it you by baptism. Holiness comes from Christ. It is the result of vital union with Him. It is the fruit of being a living branch of the true vine. Go then to Christ and say, “Lord, not only save me from the guilt of sin, but send the Spirit, whom Thou didst promise, and save me from its power. Make me holy. Teach me to do Thy will.”

Would you continue to be holy? Then *abide in Christ*. He says Himself, “Abide in Me and I in you. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.” (John xv. 4. 5.) It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell,—a full supply for all a believer’s wants. He is the Physician to whom you must daily go, if you would keep well. He is the manna which you must daily eat, and the rock of which you must daily drink. His arm is the arm on which you must daily lean, as you come up out of the wilderness of this world. You must not only be rooted, you must also be *built up* in Him. Paul was a man of God indeed,—a holy man,—a growing, thriving Christian: and what was the secret of it all? He was one to whom Christ was— “all in all.” He was ever “looking unto Jesus.” “I can do all things,” he says, “through Christ which strengtheneth me.” “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” Brethren, go and do likewise.

Brethren, may you and I know these things by experience, and not by hearsay only. May we all feel the importance of holiness, far more than we have ever done yet. May our years be *holy years* with our souls, and then I know they will be happy ones. Whether we live, may we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, may we die unto the Lord: or if He comes for us, may we be found in peace, without spot, and blameless.

And now, if I have erred in anything that I have written, may the good Lord pardon me, and show me what is the mind of the Spirit. But if, as I believe I have, told you the truth, may the Lord open your hearts, and make it a word in season to all who read it.

I remain,

Your affectionate Friend,

J. C. RYLE.