

HOLINESS OF HAND- ACTION

Our Articles of War, now known as A Soldier's Covenant is divided into two sections: the 11 "I believes" and 10 "I Wills." The "I wills" I submit have been woefully neglected in our preaching and teaching. They point to actions on Monday that match the claims we make on Sunday. Dallas Willard used to say that "the central location for spiritual formation—holiness—is not the church, not your small groups or your worship centers but your workplace."

I Tim. 2:2 "live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." It's a reference to our in-between days, in between Sundays.

I Tim. 2:8," lift up holy hands in prayer." Have you looked at your hands lately? Those hands we hold up on Sunday, have they been holy all week?

We need men and women of integrity. That's essentially what we're talking about when we talk about holiness of hand or actions.

Who are the people who most closely represent holiness to you? Are they those who make the most noise on Sunday, or those who quietly live out holiness in private and business transactions all week long? I recently chatted with a man at the garage while I waited for my car to be serviced. He noticed my uniform and began to talk to me about one of his workmates whose father was a retired officer. He said, "I don't understand how he does it. I don't think this man could even entertain an evil thought. I mean really, I can't even imagine him doing anything wrong." Wow! What a witness.

We need men and women who are transparently Christian. No matter how bright the light behind them all you see is Jesus.

I Peter 1:14, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." In other words, don't bring the lifestyle of the world with you when you become a Christian, leave the world behind. Be transformed and transparent.

Much damage has been done to the cause of Christ by people who call themselves Christians but who don't act anything at all like Jesus. We need to be aggressive and determined to deal

with the sin that would creep into our lives and equally aggressive in pursuing holiness. The grace of God is at work in our hearts and lives to produce holiness and to empower us to be like Jesus, but we must cooperate with that grace and surrender our will to the will of God.

Many Christians want to sit on their comfortable seats and do nothing but wait for God to bless them. It's an unbiblical and unacceptable attitude. There seems to be so little warfare against sin in our hearts and in our communities. We are a SALVATION ARMY. We've been reminded that an Army that does not march is no Army at all and a soldier that doesn't fight is no soldier at all. We are called to march against evil and to fight against sin in our own lives and in the lives of others. One of the things that really concern me since coming back home after so many years overseas is how passive and compliant we've become as a Christian community, as an Army and as individual Christians. Whether it was fighting against a plan to bring legalized gambling to Bermuda, HIV/AIDS in South Africa, or female genital mutilation, bride's pricing, and the impact of the traditional African religion in Tanzania, it seemed we were constantly engaged in a battle against sin and injustice. When I came home I began to wonder, "Where's the war?" For goodness sake, there's even a debate about removing "Onward Christian Soldiers" from some hymnals because it's too militant. Have we lost sight of the enemy? Do we still believe there is one? Some Salvationist are concerned that we call ourselves an Army and want to stop calling our members soldiers. It's too militant they say. Where's the war? I am concerned that in the Western world we are too much a product of our culture and too little a product of the Holy Spirit. We have failed to challenge our culture by looking at it through the lenses of scripture and instead have allowed ourselves to become compliant and conformed to our culture. In Romans 6:12 Paul pleads with us, "Do not let sin reign in your bodies so that you obey its evil desires." Again in 12:2 he challenges us; "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." We must not become spiritually lazy, we must fight against sin and evil in all its forms. God's grace is great and it is free, but it is not cheap. God will not throw us, kicking and screaming into holiness. He will produce the holy life in each of us if we cooperate with the grace that is available to us.

I'm convinced that one of the key actions of holiness for this generation is to more effectively engage with our culture rather than being absorbed by it. In his book *The Last Christian on Earth*, Os Guinness says that, "even though the church has created the modern world it has become hopelessly contaminated by it and is in it up to its neck." I would qualify by that by saying that this is true at least for the church in the Western world. Guinness talks about the levels of cultural contamination.

1. Culture blind—identification to the point where we cannot see where one ends and the other starts. At this point our integrity is neutralized.
2. Culture bound—the church loses its ability and strength to act independently—its effectiveness is neutralized. It cannot act differently or be seen to be different by others.
3. Culture burnt—It becomes apparent, too late, that through its uncritical identification with culture the church has been badly burnt and has to live with the consequences.

Now remember, the church is not the building on the corner or the hill nor is it some abstract, intangible structure. We are the church and this is our journey. What used to be our cultural strengths have been turned into weaknesses. The church looks too much like the world and too little like Jesus. It's difficult to see the water your swimming in and hard to envision alternatives. Like fish swimming in the ocean Christians know their culture so well that they don't know it all. As Guinness says, "To a man with a hammer, everything is a nail." We shake our heads with disdain at what we see in African cultures but fail to see the contradictions in our own.

We are fast becoming a nation of individuals who have little regard or commitment to community or the needs of others because we're simply too busy arguing for our rights while ignoring our responsibilities. Christians have bought into to this obsession with individuality to a fault even though the gospel is diametrically opposed to such a concept. From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden it's obvious that we are made for community.

In Africa it's all about the tribe, the clan and the community, not about the individual and his right to self-determination or self-destruction, the right to die in our new obsession. Jesus

speaks into this in Matthew 25. What is disconcerting for this generation is that the judgment, there's a word you probably haven't heard in a while, the judgment is not about how well we have cared for our "selves" but how well we have cared about others—specifically the least among us; the marginalized and disenfranchised whom Jesus calls his brothers.

Nowhere is our self-absorption more apparent than in the realm of sex and sexuality. I don't know of any other culture in the history of the world that has been more obsessed with sexual identity to the point where we think our whole hope our whole identity is in our sexuality. This is totally unbiblical and yet Christians are as obsessed with it as the rest of culture.

We have some work to do to improve our eyesight and challenge cultural blindness but it begins with turning our eyes upon Jesus, looking full in his wonderful face, only then will the things of earth begin to grow strangely dim and less attractive to our eyes. But I need to caution you. What we've been talking about is the spirit of the age and anyone who goes against the spirit of the age must be prepared to deal with the wrath of the spirit of the age. Maybe that's the crux of the matter. We've become too content with the status quo. We need to begin with a spirit of holy discontent. What was it they said about Abraham, "He looked for a city whose builder and maker was God." Not some social engineer but God himself. I suggest to you that discontent with the world and a longing for the city of God are basic tools for spiritual growth.

Holiness is more than what we do NOT do. It's a matter of doing the things that will make us more like Jesus. "To be like Jesus; this hope possesses me." It needs to be a passion not just a chorus.

As a Corps Officer, Divisional Commander, Chief Secretary and Territorial Commander I've learned a great deal about holiness from people who knew a great deal more about Christ than I did, who were much closer to him than I ever was, and who were more aware of what they themselves were all about and what God in them was all about than I ever was. You see they had experienced him in ways I never had. In Jamaica, Haiti, Tanzania for example I met men and women of God who had been sustained by him in the face of extreme poverty, disease and

tragedy. One of the actions of holiness I believe is watching and learning from people who have experienced God in ways you never have, no matter what your rank or position.

One of the lessons I learned very early in my international service is that my privileged upbringing has not given me an advantage in the pursuit of holiness and the impoverished background of my black brothers and sisters is no handicap to holiness for them.

I didn't see many black people growing up in Chance Cove. It's a bit of an understatement to say that leaving Twillingate in 1986 to become commanding officer of the Allman Town Corps and Community Centre with responsibilities at the Training College was a bit of a challenge. The corps had been there for ninety years but had never had a white officer in charge before. The community was as much in shock as we were. They had never been this close to a white man before much less a wife and two little "whities." The kids in our Basic School used to pinch me to see if I left the same as they did. They would stroke their fingers through my hair and say, "smooth, smooth." They were completely enamored with the differences between us.

When one of our elderly comrades from the corps became ill and needed surgery we were able to access some money from home, actually it was our Christmas gift from the Missionary Fellowship, so we took her to the hospital for admittance. There was money enough to pay for the surgery alright but the hospital was low on blood and refused to accept any patient that couldn't provide at least two units of blood. A cadet had been assigned to our corps on internship so naturally she accompanied me as I took our sister to the hospital. There was something to be learned about pastoral care in this situation. I'm sure she did not expect to hear me say, "Roll up your sleeve, Cadet." However, she willingly complied and it was one of the most moving experiences of my life as I sat next to her watching the blood flow from her black arm and from my white arm. Naturally, I knew it all along but suddenly it became powerfully obvious to me that our blood was exactly the same color. Our differences are only skin deep. Mutual acceptance of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is an essential action of holiness.

As Sister Hall, the oldest soldier in the Allman Town Corps said on our welcome Sunday, "We have prayed for you to come and we will support you." That was the dominant attitude of the corps as we served among them for the next four years.

When you look at the scriptures and our tradition of holiness through Wesley and Brengle for example, you see some theological differences that have been much debated but you also see a great number of commonalities particularly as it relates to our role in holiness.

- Those who pursue holiness don't seem interested in second guessing their decision to follow Jesus. They know they've been saved, they know what they have been saved from and they long for others to be saved.
- They organize and reorganize their lives so that they spend quality time in personal worship, reflection on Scripture, and prayer; not just talking to God but listening to him.
- They are very deliberate in building their lives around the values of Jesus and not the values of the world. They simply will not give in to the spirit of the age.
- They invest quality time in cultivating healthy relationships because they understand that their connection with God is often in the context of "community" and not merely as solo-saints.
- They engage the larger world with a humbled mind to serve and seek justice and mercy for those weaker than they.

It may be time for all of us to rethink the meaning of being holy. Peter is credited with the question, "What kind of people ought you to be?" He asked this while sensing that civilization as he knew it was unraveling. Given today's realities (climate change, terrorism, globalism, human-engineering, incredible human suffering), his question is just as relevant now. And the answer if it speaks into the situation at all is probably the latest description of what it means to be holy.

Many of you are Corps Officers, like me. Every Corps, regardless of size, deserves a holy Corps Officer who lives in a glass house but who is worth following. That's what Paul says to Timothy: be an example for the believers in speech (how you speak and what you speak about), in life (your personal life), in love (how you maintain healthy relationships—spouse and children first), in faith (how you visibly walk in alignment with God), and in purity (your morality and ethics in everyday life).

Every Corps deserves a holy CSM and Local Officers; ministry board and pastoral care council. A worship team deserves a holy worship leader. A band deserves a holy bandmaster. Our children deserve holy Sunday School teachers. Most of us wouldn't disagree with that but we're still intimidated by the subject of holiness. We're just afraid of setting ourselves up for criticism or failure.

There are risks in the pursuit of holiness. We shouldn't pretend that living for the Lord is painless, easy, or always fun. It's not. Whenever we pretend that holiness is easy, we undermine those who must take a stand in the world. There are still Christians dying for their faith.

There is a fellowship of risk that enfolds all who strive for holiness. We will each be more willing to stand for the Lord and less prone to fall into discouragement when we are aware of the risks we share with faithful believers, missionaries before us, business leaders before us, Daniels before us—and a Savior before us.

We love the story of Daniel but we don't tell the half of it. Don't forget where the story leads. From these captive people; Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their peers will come generations of suffering people who will be relieved by a suffering Savior. We should expect nothing else. The world that opposes the things of God will oppose those who seek to live for him. This is part of the story; we just have to remember it's not the end of the story.

We have to realize that if we practice holiness today God will protect us from the spirit of the age tomorrow. But conversely, if we do not practice holiness today, God will not protect us

from the consequences. The ultimate consequence is failure to become all that God created us to be. God loves us enough to protect us from such a future by calling us to present holiness.

I want to challenge you to commit to holiness regardless of what's going on in your life right now. Our present trials may be personal, private, moral, financial, or familial, if you are not preparing for tomorrow's battles with holiness today, you will not be spiritually strong enough to stand for the Lord later. Today's trials are the training ground for tomorrow's battlefield. The time to be undefiled is now. Later is too late.

But now we have a problem, don't we? These "success stories," whether its biblical characters or modern heroes of the faith, turn out so nice and neat. We tend to idealize our heroes. God is able, but is he always willing to rescue the holy from earthly trials?

We've mentioned Daniel but you know his welfare isn't quite as idyllic as is often painted. Yes, Daniel is preserved from the Lion's den, but he's still in captivity. He will remain a captive his entire life—until he's over 90 years old. He will see his people enslaved for many decades. He will see them made to bow to pagan gods. He will never again see his homeland. And the visions and prophecies God will grant him include predictions of the suffering of his people for many generations to come. When you look at the reality of Daniel's life how can we speak of God really preserving him and his people?

There are few lessons we can learn from Daniel but more so I suggest from Jesus.

1. Live your life on God-grounded confidence. Move beyond doubt to knowing God.

Cornelius Plantinga Jr. has written a great devotional book to which I keep returning; it's called *Beyond Doubt*. In one devotional he reflects on Nehemiah, especially 4:10 where it talks about the "strength of the laborers is failing" and he relates this to Christians today who succumb to discouragement and despair. Here's what he writes: "Someone needs to speak a stout comfort to these people. Someone with strength and tenderness needs to tell these people that God loves them and that Jesus suffered for them.

Someone with the strength of God must pray for them when they can't pray for

themselves, grieve with them when grief is the only sign they are still alive.” Listen to this, “Someone with a faith that has known doubt and has then gone beyond doubt.” It’s the kind of confidence Jesus displays in John 13:3, “Jesus knew that God had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” Holiness is about God-grounded confidence that motivates us to servant-like action.

2. Submit to the will of God for your life.
3. Remember, it’s not about you, it’s about following Jesus and practicing his servant approach to leadership. We learned an important lesson about that in our first overseas appointment.

The Allman Town Corps in Kingston Jamaica provided many programs and services to the impoverished neighborhood in which it dwelt. One of those ministries was our Wednesday afternoon Senior Citizen’s Program. Elderly people from the area looked forward to this weekly entertainment, fellowship and refreshment time. Lynette and I would often join them either as guest speakers or simply to assist the leaders. Very early in our tenure we presented a program and then, as we often do, made our way to the kitchen to assist with serving refreshments. I returned to the group with a large pitcher of juice and Lynette with a tray of sandwiches. As we approached the group, what had been a din of joy and laughter suddenly became deafeningly quiet with an awkward silence. I turned to the leader of the group and noticing the tears in his eyes, asked what was wrong. Had we done something to offend our people? “No, Captain,” he said, “you have not offended them you have honored them. These people are the descendants of slaves. They have lived in these slums all their lives. They have never been this close to a white man before. Their perception is that they should be serving you but without even knowing it you have turned the tables and they don’t know how to respond to that.” When Lynette and I returned to our little quarters upstairs above the corps building we listened to what once again had become a happy gathering downstairs and prayed that God would never let us forget this experience. The only form of leadership acceptable to God is servant leadership.

God has done a remarkable thing in saving us, sanctifying us, and sustaining us by his grace. But we are not to keep the bread of life locked up in the cupboard. If God has planted a song in our heart then we must sing it for others. If he has given us any gift by his grace then we must give it to others. If we are not confessing the name of Christ then we are not Christians. But let us never forget that everything we do in his name must be done with the heart of a servant.

I'm convinced that when God saves us by his grace he also plants a spark of holiness in our heart, a desire to be holy as Jesus was holy. If he gives us the desire he will also give us the grace to embrace that which we desire. Changed behavior is all about living out my holiness in my daily routine.

Lynette and I served with our two children in that little corps deep in the heart of a major slum area in Kingston for four years. While the corps people were very affirming and appreciative of our ministry many times we wondered what impact, if any, we had made on Allman Town as a neighborhood. It wasn't until the last day of our term that we finally received some indication. Our bags were all packed and loaded in the vehicle. We had said our tearful goodbyes to the corps people and were about to enter the vehicle when one by one the neighbors began to file out of their homes and approach the vehicle. One dear lady who had lived directly across the street from us represented them all when she said, "Captine, we will never forget you. We have been watching you. You have shown us what it is to be a Christian family."

Philippians 1:27, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." The most powerful witness you can give is that of a life well lived.

We have said that holiness is a matter of the head: because every word you believe and repeat tends to shape the way you behave. Know the power of what you believe. The thoughts you hold create the kind of life you are living. You are made to function from the inside out. You are in control of what goes on inside of your life. You alone can control your attitude, no one can take that freedom from you

Holiness is a matter of the heart, the desires of the heart. The thoughts you entertain become feelings and attachments to which you become addicted.

Holiness is a matter of the hand because feelings become behavior and those behaviors become results.

It is possible to enjoy holiness of head, heart, and hand, only because of what God accomplished in sending us his Son. At Calvary he dealt finally and fully with Adam's sin. He provided grace enough to deal with my sins. He left me the Holy Spirit to empower me to live the holy life, and his promised Second Coming provides me with hope in a world of darkness and peace in a world of despair.

Holiness is Christlikeness made possible by grace and grace alone. The same grace that saves me now shapes me into the image of Christ on a daily basis as I cooperate with God to fulfill his will in my life.

Claiming the blessings of holiness: Brengle

1. Believe there is such a blessing.
2. Believe the blessing is for you.
3. Believe the blessing is for you now.
4. Be willing to renounce everything for the blessing.
5. Claim the blessing now.