

Holiness is the Solution

by Captain Stephen Court

No holiness but social holiness. John Wesley

I had often felt God speaking to me about girls who were being forced to the Ganta streets to earn money for food. Now here was Naomi, desperate and reaching out. She was 15 years old and had never been to school. She told me that she has nowhere to live but had been sleeping, blanketless, on a cold concrete hallway floor.

She was crying out... we had to do something. To turn her away would be like turning away Jesus himself (read Mathew 25). I prayed "God, grant wisdom; Please, Father, we don't want short-term solutions." As He always does... God heard.

I gave her some money (equivalent of \$1 USD) so she didn't have to find a man that night, made her promise not to go on the street that night, prayed with her and told her to come back tomorrow. As she walked off I desperately began to think of the best way to help her. We could give money for food today but she would just have to find more money tomorrow and would be tempted to go back to the street to find a John. I could rent her a room, but that would just give here a potential place of operation for "business" and leave her open to harassment by men as no one would be there to watch out for her. The more I pondered it became less clear what the right solution was. (Faytene Kryskow, missionary newsletter, Liberia)

Holiness is the solution to every problem? Is this a fantasy panacea served up in evangelical conviction terms to a disinterested postmodern culture?

Who is naïve enough to suggest *any* solution to the world's ills, manifold as they are?

We are. The Salvation Army will preach it until the world both hears *and* listens.

Before pulling out your various arguments against, settle in with an open Bible and an open heart, and consider the truth.

DIRT UNDER YOUR FINGERNAILS

This isn't just some good idea. Neither is it specifically the mission. But holiness applied outwardly to a hurting world is both a supernatural expression of compassion and a means of accomplishing our noble goal to 'tear hell's throne to pieces and win the world for Jesus' (William Pearson, SASB 800).

What God Commands, God Enables

First, let's confirm that God is good. By that, we understand that God is not mean-spirited, commanding the impossible from His subjects. We know that God *is* good and that what God commands, God enables.

So, when He commands that we be holy as He is holy, as He does in a few places in scripture, He does it with the expectation of obedience and the expectation of punishment in the case of disobedience. When He commands us to be perfect, as Jesus does in the Mountain Sermon, He actually provides the means for us to be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing. “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3 NIV).

There are two common mistakes regarding personal holiness: 1. The bar is too low; 2. The bar is too high.

1. We can equate holiness with being filled with the Spirit, in Paul’s use of the term. However, many Christians testify to being ‘Spirit-filled’ while at the same time insisting that they sin every day. Impossible! Paul, explaining holiness from another perspective, depicts the sinful nature, our natural inclination to do what is selfish, being crucified and done away with. One margin note suggests that he intended that this natural inclination is ‘neutralized’. Now, if your sinful nature is neutralized and the Holy Spirit is filling you, you do not sin every day. In fact, sin is a rare exception to the rule of a godly life for which Jesus’ divine power provides. So, usually by not thinking or understanding Scripture, people set the bar too low for Scriptural holiness and neither experience it nor understand its world-changing power.

2. Some people set the bar too high. These people approach the issue of holiness from the perspective of sin, noting that we all fall short of God’s glory. Because falling short is one of sin’s definitions, they conclude that holiness is impossible in this lifetime and is reserved exclusively for heaven. While starting with a correct presumption, they make two serious errors as they careen to this God-insulting conclusion. One, they cast God as mean-spirited, in that He has commanded the impossible- to be holy- and so will judge and punish us for something for which we are not culpable. Two, they make death out to be more powerful than God inasmuch as they ascribe to it the authority they assert God lacks, the ability to wholly sanctify us.

There is a *via media*, a way down the middle that possesses the truth. This way holds God up to be good, and understands His word to be true. John Wesley explained this way when he distinguished between blamelessness and faultlessness. The issue revolves around intention. Based on our understanding of the two common New Testament types of sins, we conclude that while unintentional sins put us at fault, intentional sins result in both fault and blame. In other words, there are sins of falling short, unintentional sins, of which we are all guilty but are not culpable. Scriptural holiness is freedom from intentional sins, and the promise is that we can be preserved blameless.

Holy How?

Now that we're agreed that scriptural holiness is both expected and enabled, how do we get there? Other chapters will explain this more profoundly, but here is a thumbnail sketch for you: Repent, believe, and receive.

The Dirt On Holiness?

John Wesley, grandfather of Salvationism, believed that you cannot be authentically holy unless that experience plays itself out among the poor.

This conviction was Biblically grounded, starting with Jesus' instruction to address God the Father as 'Our Father'. The fatherhood of God implied the brotherhood of men and women. Wesley's favorite epistle challenged him, "whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:21 NIV). Wesley's comment on this verse carefully defined "brother" as "everyone, whatever his opinions or mode of worship be, purely because he is the child and bears the image of God (Frank Baker, 'Wesley's Principals for Social Action', in *Good News*, January/February 1985).

The dual command to love the Lord and to love your neighbor, the latter broadly defined by Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, aborted Wesley's flirtation with a separate Christian community. In one of his sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, he asserted, "Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it" (Frank Baker, 'Wesley's Principals for Social Action', *Good News*, January 1985).

He funded several initiatives toward the poor on faith, although he did make appeals for support, one of which invited, "Join hands with God to make a poor man live" (Frank Baker, 'Wesley's Principals for Social Action', in *Good News*, January/February 1985).

And he put his own money where his mouth was. One year he made the equivalent of \$1.4 millions and gave 98% to the Kingdom ("Thinking Drafts," Keith Drury -- <http://www.indwes.edu/tuesday>). In his lifetime he made what would be equal today to \$30 millions, yet at his death he left a few books, a few coins and a spoon! The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a famous measure for all good Wesleyans today, but the Wesleyan Trilateral is less well-known (Quadrilateral sets up four checks for Christian life: Bible, experience, reason, tradition). It concerns money. Wesley taught us to 'make all you can, save all you can, and give all you can'. The only problem was, by the time he got to the end of his sermon, his third point went from 'give all you can' to 'give all you have'. And he lived it.

Wesley's social justice burden was birthed in the Holy Club of Oxford, in 1729. Holy Club social action focused on two Oxford prisons, poor families, the workhouse, and a school for underprivileged children (Craven E. Williams, 'Origins: Social Holiness', <http://www.gborocollege.edu/prescorner/holiness.html>).

As early as 1740, Methodist collections fed nearly 150 unemployed people each day. Wesley looked upon this effort as, "redemption of society by economic means" (Craven E. Williams, 'Origins: Social Holiness', <http://www.gborocollege.edu/prescorner/holiness.html>). He initiated London's first financial institution to make interest-free loans to the poor. He followed that up with a free medical dispensary. He founded schools. As a champion of prison reform, he often skipped meals so he could help prisoner pay off debts (Carolyn Moore. 'The Dirt On Holiness', Athens Banner-Herald, March 2, 2002.).

Many argue that it was a letter from John to William Wilberforce that led to the end of slavery in England (Carolyn Moore. 'The Dirt On Holiness', Athens Banner-Herald, March 2, 2002.).

He vowed never to spend more than was absolutely necessary to live. He even wrote his brother Samuel that by letting his hair grow unfashionably long he was able to save a bit of money for the poor (Letter to brother Samuel, Nov. 17, 1731).

Impact Through Contact

John Wesley believed that visiting the poor, establishing first hand contact with them, was in itself a means of grace. After all, it is difficult to influence someone if you can't reach out to touch them. He preached that it is better to *take* food to the poor than to *send* it (Sermon "On Zeal", cited in Craven E. Williams, 'Origins: Social Holiness', <http://www.gborocollege.edu/prescorner/holiness.html>). Opines General John Gowans :

Nothing can be done at arms length. We must get alongside the impoverished whatever form their poverty takes. The old time slum sisters not only worked in their districts but they lived in them. They did not live at a distance and drive in every day. Is nobody called to this kind of dedication any more? (General John Gowans, 'Poverty and The Salvation Army - The Call to the Excluded', Keynote Address for The Salvation Army's International Summit on Poverty)

Wesley had a three-part plan for addressing the needs of the poor:

Meet the needs yourself.

Solicit resources for the poor

Become an advocate for the poor.

(Craven E. Williams, 'Origins: Social Holiness', <http://www.gborocollege.edu/prescorner/holiness.html>)

Inside-Out Christianity

This is an inside-out Christianity; one that starts in the heart and ends somewhere over the horizon. It starts by doing all in our own power to meet the needs ourselves. That means emptying our closet for a coat before sending them down to the Thrift Store.

And from our closet and wallet it goes to others' closets and others' wallets. And finally, as we see below, we become advocates for the poor, the excluded, the marginalized.

Of course, Wesley isn't the only one to wed holiness with social justice.

The people called Salvationists 'wedded' themselves to the excluded. They dedicated their lives to the business of raising the 'submerged tenth' by God's help and offering them salvation both physical and spiritual. They were fanatics but they were holy fanatics. They were determined to include the excluded or die in the attempt. (General John Gowans, 'Poverty and The Salvation Army - The Call to the Excluded', Keynote Address for The Salvation Army's International Summit on Poverty)

Throughout history the saints have found that an authentic experience of one supernaturally leads to supernatural impact in the other. General William Booth testified as much:

As in those days St. Francis of Assisi and the heroic band of saints who gathered under his orders were wont to go and lodge with the lepers at the city gates, so the devoted souls who have enlisted in the Salvation Army take up their quarters in the heart of the worst slums... They live the life of the Crucified for the sake of the men and women for whom He lived and died. (William Booth, IN DARKEST ENGLAND AND THE WAY OUT)

The Slum Sisters of The Salvation Army lived out this holiness that found solutions to every problem. They set a heroic example to all of us today. Booth described them:

They go forth in Apostolic fashion, two-and-two living in a couple of the same kind of dens or rooms as are occupied by the people themselves, differing only in the cleanliness and order... they live all the year round, visiting the sick, looking after the children, showing the women how to keep themselves and their homes decent, often discharging the sick mother's duties themselves; cultivating peace, advocating temperance, counselling in temporalities, and ceaselessly preaching the religion of Jesus Christ to the Outcasts of Society. (William Booth, IN DARKEST ENGLAND AND THE WAY OUT)

Slum Brothers and Sisters of every era deserve our honour and imitation as we seek the authentic experience promised in scripture. What does this mean as far as a minimum reaction by us today? Carolyn Moore concludes:

Wesley said so himself: "There is no such thing as social holiness without personal holiness, nor personal holiness without social holiness." In other words, it is a risky thing... to raise your hands in praise if you do not have the dirt of service under your fingernails. (Carolyn Moore. 'The Dirt On Holiness', Athens Banner-Herald, March 2, 2002)

EVERY PROBLEM?

But the third of Wesley's instructions is to become an advocate for the poor. And holiness, when deeply and widely experienced, transforms society on a macro level. We suggested that holiness is an inside-out type of Christianity. Well, once it gets outside of a lot of people, you call it revival. I use this line to explain the power of prayer: Prayer brings revival that lack of prayer makes necessary. It is similarly true of holiness. Consecration brings holiness that that lack of consecration makes necessary. And revival impacts society.

With the possible exception of the commuter revivals (e.g. Toronto Blessing, Pensacola Outpouring) in which people travel from all around the world to be impacted, the face of the earth changes as the hearts of its people are transformed.

'Revival' is a term of questionable value to us these days. It means different things to different people. Like 'baptism of the Spirit' it is difficult to use efficaciously in conversation today.

Anyway, 'revival' means dramatically different things to different people. We have friends who organize and throw 'revivals' a couple of times a year. Along this historic vein I have a book on my shelf, by evangelist R.A.Torrey, called **HOW TO PROMOTE AND CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL**.

At the other end of the spectrum are those scandalized by the affront to God's sovereignty caused by the first group, who insist that we cannot do anything to bring about revival, that it is entirely up to God. This school holds the sway in much of the Body of Christ today.

As if often the case I am playing hooky from both schools. I side with one of my heroes, Charles Finney, who argued that just as you follow certain laws to get a crop of wheat, so you can follow several rules to get a revival. To get a crop of wheat you have to break up the fallow ground, plant, water, weed, and harvest. For revival you need to break up the fallow ground, plant, water, weed, and harvest. Contagious holiness becomes revival.

If we are His people, if we are called by His name, if we humble ourselves, if we pray, if we seek His face, and if we turn from our wicked ways, He WILL hear from heaven, He WILL hear our prayers, and He WILL heal our land. If we follow the divine rules He WILL give revival.

Contamination v. Defilement

This outward impact of corporate holiness is best illustrated by what I call the Contamination/Defilement Theory of Holiness in the Old Testament. There are two kinds of holiness in the Old Testament. One type of holiness gets easily defiled by the world. So there are all kinds of warnings and rules to protect this holiness from defilement. The other doesn't get defiled by contact with the world. The opposite occurs. It actually contaminates the world with the essence of holiness (examples abound: Exodus 29:37; 30:29; 2 Chronicles 8:11; Leviticus 6:27, etc.). In other words, the world gets holy when it comes into contact with someone who is holy! That's my kind of holiness!

In the Church we're too often living in a Defilement Holiness mindset. Whatever extent of holiness we think we have, we try to protect by walling things off from the world, building barriers to interaction. Instead, we need to be living boldly with Contaminating Holiness, the kind that makes other people and other things and even other systems holy when we come into contact with them.

This is more than mere theory. Watch how this has worked in history.

THE ASA AWAKENING: 2 Chronicles 15

From the compromise of comfort to the commitment of covenant.

Two to one odds are pretty daunting- maybe not in tiddlywinks, but certainly in war. Judah's third king, Asa, faced just these odds as his 480,000 soldiers, half armed with large shields and spears, the others equipped with small shields and bows, faced the million-strong army of Cush, led, by General Zerah (2 Chronicles 14:8,9). And they had chariots.

How's this for strategy? Asa prayed:

Lord, there is no one like You to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord... for we rely on You, and in Your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You. (2 Chronicles 14:11)

The Army of Cush was crushed beyond recovery (2 Chronicles 15:13), and every village around Gerar was sacked and pillaged by the Lord and His forces.

What a blessing! Israel had enjoyed a decade of peace and righteous leadership under Asa, and now the Army had lambasted Cush. The people of God were also living in a period when God manifestly spoke through His prophets. Michael Brown suggests that times of social stability can provide, "fertile ground for revolution, and it is out of such soil that revolutionary movements often grow" (Michael L. Brown, REVOLUTION. 2000, p59,60). Social stability nourished spiritual compromise. And so, though King Asa practised righteousness, many of his people dabbled in idolatry.

It was into this context that Asa marched his army in triumph.

We know nothing about Oded, except that he had a prophetic son named Azariah. Azariah went out from his tent on the morning after the victory. What he encountered was a celebratory parade atmosphere. Cheers and shouts accompanied the songs that the weary but joyful soldiers sang as they skipped and danced and strutted and sauntered in loose formation to the wild appreciation of the surrounding crowds. The happy pandemonium consisted of a smorgasbord of dusty colours wrapped around gaudy treasures, children playing among Cushite donkeys and sheep, victorious shofar blasts, and the rumbling rhythm of thousands upon thousands of stomping Hebrews, delirious with conquest.

He found the King and prophesied this qualified commendation and cautionary encouragement:

Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought Him, and He was found by them. In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress. But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded. (2 Chronicles 15:2-7, NIV)

How we respond to the word of the Lord not only says a lot about who we are but also determines who we will become. In the din of his success Asa could easily have shrugged off the warning aspect of this prophecy. He could have complacently basked in the glow of the promise. He could have let it get to his head. He did none of these things.

Instead, Asa took courage. The Lord's word spurred him to even great works. He made identificational repentance on behalf of Judah, removing all of the detestable idols from his lands. He re-established the spiritual priorities of the nation by repairing the altar of the Lord. In doing so, Asa made possible daily sacrifices and offerings and service.

But Asa did not stop there. He deposed his wicked, idol-worshipping grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother. He chopped down her repulsive Asherah pole, smashed it up, and had it burned. He was purifying himself and his household and ridding himself of pagan, contaminating influence in his counsel.

Asa brought to the temple all the gold and treasure that he and his father had dedicated to the Lord, belatedly honouring his promises to God.

Outright, Contaminating Holiness

Then, in an act of outright contaminating holiness, King Asa assembled the people of Judah in Jerusalem. In a melee of neighing and 'baah-ing' and spraying blood and glistening swords they sacrificed thousands of animals to the Lord in repentance and acknowledgement of His sovereignty. All of the people swore and oath to enter a covenant with God that they would seek Him with all their heart and soul! They also determined to put to death all who would not seek Him with all their heart and soul.

So, they all determined to get holy. And the corporate holiness becomes revival that transforms society.

The results were dramatic. Imagine a country wholeheartedly dedicated to serving God! We're talking about social and spiritual revolution- a generation of shalom! Religious hypocritical was displaced by the voluntary imposition of the law on what emerged into covenantal community. The Torah not only steers daily life, it pervades it. Diets, relationships, attire, leisure activities, family time, work schedules, reading habits, life ambitions, worldviews, business practices, disposable income, and hobbies are all transformed at the individual and family level (covenant tends to do the same thing today!). The landscape changed as horizons dotted with idolatrous high places were abandoned and dismantled. Even the breezes of the towns wafted with a different aroma, as the exotic incenses of idolatry were superceded by a mingling of the earthy odors of raw, sacrificed meat with the unique scents of Levitical perfume sacrifice. The widow was honoured and cared for. The poor were blessed- in fact, their socioeconomic class was almost eliminated. The orphan was defended. The alien was integrated into community. Invisible people were seen. Everyone committed, heart and soul, to the Lord- we're describing paradise on earth. This Godly utopia is the goal of everyone seeking revival. And so the Asa Awakening is a model of contaminating holiness solving every problem.

STILL TODAY?

However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. Deuteronomy 15:4-5

Sure, God's Contaminating Holiness transformed countries thousands years ago. But today's problems are overwhelming. AIDS is pandemic. Religious persecution created more martyrs in the last century than in all of the others combined. Half the world's population lives on less than \$2/day (The Officer Magazine, April 2000). One tenth of that number are children in chains, slaves or exploited workers as young as four years old. As many children are fighting in wars right now in 32 countries. One third of that number of children are homeless.

Can we seriously claim that Contaminating Holiness can solve all of these problems?

Yes, on a larger scale. If contaminating holiness spreads through a people and revival transforms a city or a country, as we've seen, and if that process is multiplied across the globe, holiness will prove to be the solution to every problem.

If Iraqi's civil servant (in the fallen regime), whose position is called Women's Honour Violator, and whose responsibility is to go around raping women, complete with ID card, pension, and benefits, gets saved and sanctified, he stops raping women.

If a tin pot dictator, who oppresses his people and siphons billions of dollars from humanitarian aid, gets saved and sanctified, he will start to bless his people with food and the Gospel.

If wealthy Christians, that is, those of us in the first world, who normally extravagantly exhaust energy and food, get sanctified, that holiness can play itself out into our lifestyles and pocketbooks and overflow blessing to starving people of this world with their share of the world's food.

If we build courage to go with our convictions, if we start sponsoring third world children, if we support relief and development agencies, if we lobby for law and policy changes, if we pray for leaders to be saved, if we support evangelisation of non-Christian territories, if we help generate micro-enterprise in the third world, if we get a contaminating holiness, we will see whole inequitable systems and governments and policies changed.

That sort of big picture stuff can tend to immobilize. After all, who are we, as individuals? Faytene, our missionary friend with a problem, allowed her contaminating holiness to change Naomi's world:

I continued to think and consulted another missionary for advice. We concluded that Naomi could be started in a small business to help support her but that she would need a mentor to walk along side her to keep her accountable.

We talked with Naomi and confronted her with difficult questions regarding whether or not she was sincerely willing to leave the "quick buck" lifestyle of the streets. She said she was. Said our mentor, "Well, if you are willing to change, there is a room near where I live we can rent..."

By God's grace we were able to set the girls up with a peanut, rice, and egg selling business. To this day they have been working hard at their business... not at the street, and Amelia is keeping a close eye on their activity. I am so proud of them and so thankful to God. He truly is the God that lifts the needy from the ash heap (Ps 113). Praise be to God! (Faytene Kryskow, missionary newsletter, Liberia)

Prayer: Christ of compassion grant the people called Salvationists a fresh baptism of compassionate, contaminating holiness. Make us genuine 'carers' for the

impoverished. Help Your Salvation Army everywhere to recapture a passion for the poor and the determination to integrate the excluded in Your Name (adapted from General John Gowans, International Conference on Poverty).