

Two Takes on Holiness **2. Holiness the Baggage Handler**

by Captain Andrew Bale

A man was walking across the concourse of a busy mainline station. Wanting to know the time he stopped a stranger carrying two very large suitcases and said ‘excuse me sir do you have the right time?’ The man put down the two very large suitcases and pulled up his sleeve to reveal a very impressive watch. ‘What time zone do you want he responded, Greenwich Mean Time, American Eastern Time, Pacific Time, Australia, Central Europe?’ The man asking the question replied ‘Wow that’s amazing’

‘Amazing – that’s nothing watch this!’ The stranger then proceeded to demonstrate all the other features of this amazing piece of horological technology. The watch featured a DAB radio, Ipod, satellite TV, Global positioning navigation, electronic dictionary and thesaurus. The watch also doubled up as a mobile communicator and could even produce a short burst of electrical energy powerful enough to light a small fire. The man was so impressed he offered to buy the watch, the owner explained that such a watch would cost an enormous amount of money in fact it would cost everything the man had. The man wanted the watch so much and quickly handed over all he had, strapped the watch proudly on his wrist and went to walk off. ‘Hang on a moment’ said the previous owner of the watch holding up the two large suitcases ‘don’t forget the batteries’.

Holiness is an incredible blessing, one that promises so much. Like the watch in the story above it is a blessing that will cost anyone who wants it everything they have. The problem with holiness is that over years of neglect the theology that drives it has become cumbersome and complicated, making the experience seem, to many people, impractical and too difficult to obtain. Many people hear about holiness, begin to accept the truth about what it promises to deliver even get to the point where they are willing to pay the price to receive it, when the ‘batteries’ make the whole transaction suddenly seem less desiring.

The truth is that holiness is a very simple doctrine which when understood and correctly applied will revolutionise the life of a believer beyond all recognition. In addition holiness is an essential component of Christianity which remains ‘the privilege of all believers’ and something without which ‘none shall see the Lord’.

One of the most debilitating diseases that attacks the faith and optimism of the Christian soldier is sin. When sin is active in our lives we are unable to preach the gospel with any real conviction. When sin is active in our lives we become shy and withdrawn in worship. When sin is active in our lives we try and cover our tracks with a cloak of compromise and hypocrisy. The situation becomes even sadder when we realise that the power of sin is nothing more than a malevolent confidence trick.

“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”
(Romans 6:14)

“Jesus declared.”Go now and leave your life of sin.” John 8:11

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.” (1John 2:1)

There is a strange spirit abroad at present within The Salvation Army which, theologically speaking, wants to have its cake and eat it.

Talk about ‘sin in the camp’ discuss personal and corporate sin, point out the Army’s failings and foolishness and people become very passionate and argue in defence of the Army’s righteousness. Talk about holiness, about purity, about victory over temptation and sin and people quote the following part of the bible verse above “if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” Or they quote the following from the same letter “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)

On the one hand Salvationists seem to shrink from accusations of apostasy and rebellion declaring that all is far from bad within our ranks. Yet with the same breath they decry the possibility of purity and victory over sin. Too proud to retreat and to scared to advance they simply camp precariously in no-man’s land pinned down by the enemy’s big guns.

Holiness is the thin line drawn by the Holy Spirit between the fact that sin, though probable, does not have to be obligatory. Yet even with this truth most Christians and Salvationists (who really ought to know better) prefer to live within a cycle of sin/repent/sin rather than try and understand the theology of holiness.

Holiness is becoming increasingly fashionable – everyone seems to be talking about it - and as a result holiness is being misrepresented. The front end of holiness is well presented like the watch in the story that opened this article but the back end is as already stated, cumbersome and complicated. Let’s make sure we understand what holiness is by stating very clearly what it is not.

- Holiness is not self control
- Holiness is not self discipline
- Holiness is not self denial
- Holiness is not a desire to be one with God
- Holiness is not growth
- Holiness is not maturity
- Holiness is not Christ likeness
- Holiness is not spiritual formation!

Holiness may result (indeed will result) in a manifestation of all of these things but none of them either separately or collectively are holiness.

Holiness is what happens when God creates within us a new heart and a new mind.

The heart is the seat of our emotions (our feelings, motives and desires) and our mind is the seat of our intellect (our will, our ability to understand and decide). The human heart and mind are what make Christian service impossible.

The closest that humanity has ever got to holiness without a new heart or mind is probably best illustrated in the life of the rich young ruler. Here was a man who had kept the commandments since his youth. When the disciples heard Christ dismiss his efforts as incomplete they were astounded and exclaimed 'who then can be saved'. Jesus replied 'with man this is impossible'.

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus he spoke to him about the importance of being 'born again'.

When David wrote his classic repentance prayer in Psalm 51 he asked God to 'create' in him "a pure heart."

In Ezekiel chapter 11 God promises to replace old hearts 'of stone' with new hearts 'of flesh' and later in the same book (Ezekiel 18:31) he commands the Israelites to repent *and* to 'get a new heart and a new spirit.'

In Romans 8:7-8 Paul says 'The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.'

Holiness happens when God gives us new hearts and minds in which he can (according to Ezekiel) actually move us to follow his decrees and keep his laws. Human hearts, as already shown from scripture, cannot follow God whereas holy hearts have a natural desire to obey. Holiness is the result of a conditional covenant between God and man; God promises and provides us with a new heart and a new mind on the condition that we consecrate ourselves. Consecration is that simple action whereby we give up all that is sinful and doubtful and surrender everything we have left to God.

We must want a new heart and mind; we must prove that desire through our willingness to repent of all sin, renounce all that is doubtful and consecrate everything that remains to God. Holiness, like all aspects of Christianity is fuelled by faithful obedience. Only if I believe God's power to work the change, faithfully obey God and speak to others about what he has done can holiness manifest itself in my life.

Like the man at the train station buying the watch is an instant transaction. We might wander around the concourse for days, weeks, months - even years - but holiness happens when we surrender all to possess the miracle. There may be a process that leads us to the point of consecration but the taking up our cross is a deliberate act of the will and takes but a moment.

If you want holiness then ignore the bunkum that the modern church tries to weigh it down with. Leave the bulk batteries behind and you will find that holiness runs on the silent, invisible and perpetual energy of Pentecost. If you want a life that 'lives above

feeling' if you want a life that is 'more than conqueror' then simply meet the conditions of the covenant and experience the peace, joy, optimism and purposeful productivity that holiness delivers.

"The most impossible of all
Is that I e'er from sin should cease;
Yet shall it be; I know it shall;
Jesus, look to thy faithfulness
If nothing is too hard for thee,
All things are possible to me."
(Charles Wesley)