

HOLINESS

THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET AND A LIGHT UNTO
MY PATH. (Psalm 119:105)

A SERIES OF BIBLE STUDIES BY: JAMES E. MULLAN

The subject of holiness is one of vital importance as evidenced by such texts as Hebrews 12:14 "Follow ... holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord". We who are referred to as "Pentecostals" are often accused of stressing the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking with tongues to the neglect of holiness, both in teaching and practice. No doubt this accusation is merited in certain sections of the Pentecostal movement, where the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is regarded as an indication of the attainment of the highest spiritual standard. However, there are many, and possibly the majority of "Pentecostals", who regard the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as that which should rightly take place at the commencement of the Christian life, and not as something which is to be regarded as a sign of the believer having attained to a high degree of spiritual perfection.

Nevertheless, it is well for Pentecostal people to take stock of themselves, lest they be guilty of smug complacency by believing that one who is baptised with the Holy Spirit has now received all that is required. It should be carefully noted that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, while accelerating growth in holiness, is not to be regarded as the hallmark of holiness in itself. One has only to consider a few examples from the Scriptures to demonstrate this fact. Take, for instance, the Corinthian believers - they were baptised with the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues. In fact, Paul praises them because they had been enriched by the gifts of utterance and knowledge, i.e. tongues, interpretation and prophecy. Indeed, they, as Paul states (1 Cor 3:1-3), as well as permitting in their midst gross sin, and various heresies, as is to be seen from later chapters.

Further to the above, it can be pointed out from Acts 10, that the household of Cornelius, coming fresh from heathendom, which probably included the worship of the Emperor, had "their hearts purified by faith" during the preaching of Peter, and were, the next instant, baptised with the Holy Spirit. Where they used to be considered, therefore, as having arrived already at a state of spiritual advancement, on reflection, most believers would be prepared to acknowledge the necessity for these Gentile believers to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The belief held by some, that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit equates holiness, is not to be altogether laid at the door of Pentecostals. Actually, what is perhaps the most accepted teaching on holiness, outside the Pentecostals movement is that known as the Keswick teaching; which is, if one understands it correctly, that the believer must come to a place of full surrender, until, as it is expressed, every room in the house of the life is given over to the Holy Spirit, and when this place of full surrender has been attained, the person has then been baptised with the Holy Spirit by faith.

Now, while we must thank God for every approach to holiness and holy living as with the above teaching, we can see that the good can, in fact, be the enemy of the best, for while each believer should seek to be fully surrendered to his Lord,

this in itself is not the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him, and right from the moment of conversion, when the heart and life are fully surrendered to God, such a one can be the recipient of the Holy Spirit or - if the term "baptised with the Holy Spirit" is preferred - can have this blessed experience. While on the subject of this, concerning holiness as propounded by the Keswick movement, it may be well to glance at some of the other varieties of holiness teaching.

Firstly, akin to the Keswick teaching and perhaps part of it, is the teaching known as "entire sanctification". Now sanctification is undoubtedly one of the facets of holiness, and one that should be fully understood. We need have no hesitancy in believing that it is not "a second work of grace", as some teach. To understand what is intended by sanctification, one needs to know the true meaning of the word, which is "to set apart" for some holy purpose. For instance, inanimate things such as the vessels of the Temple were "sanctified" to God's use, i.e. set apart for that holy purpose in the service of God. Now consider also, that the Lord Jesus, the spotless holy, Son of God, said "I sanctify Myself", and surely no-one would be guilty of thinking that there was anything in the nature of sin in Him which required cleansing. Obviously His words, when taken in their context (John 17:19) mean that He sets Himself apart on behalf of His disciples, even as He declares; so that they might be "set apart" also for God's purpose through them.

This then is the meaning of sanctification - God sets us apart for His divine purpose and plan the very moment we believe in the Lord Jesus. After that, it is for us to keep ourselves "set apart" for God's purpose in our lives - working out our own salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasures (Phil 2:12, 13). Obviously one does not live in fear and trembling before our loving Heavenly Father, but we are to fear and tremble lest we miss God's plan for our lives. Consequently it is for us to keep ourselves "set apart" for the fulfilment of God's plan and purpose through us. Entire sanctification for the child of God means that the whole person, comprising spirit, soul and body, should be entirely yielded to God, so that He can "set us apart" for His use as vessels unto honour, fit for the Master's use.

Then, there are those who teach concerning holiness, what is termed "the eradication of the root of evil". They speak of sin as being the root, and sins the branches. The branches, say they, are lopped off at salvation - but the root still remains, and this can be eradicated it seems, according to the teaching, if we understand it aright, through prayer and fasting. One wonders what is to happen to the unfortunate believer who has not had this teaching, and who consequently dies with the root of evil still in him. Naught that defileth can enter the Holy City - so logically speaking, such a one is lost. However, it appears that death in some mysterious way takes care of the root of evil - so we must conclude that death then has a greater effect than the blood of Christ, even though the Scripture

assures us that “the blood of Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

An extreme form of holiness teaching is that of sinless perfection - based on a misconception of the meaning of such texts as 1 John 3:9. The adherents of this teaching appear to believe that if one sins after conversion, such a one was never really saved. It is difficult to see how such a teaching could be adhered to in view of such Scriptures as 1 John 1:9-10 and 1 John 2:1-2 ... “if any man sins” ... The obvious meaning of the Scripture in 1 John 3:9 etc, is that the truly born again person is not under the bondage and thralldom of sin, even though it is possible for him, in an unguarded moment, to fall.

At the opposite extreme are those who contend that the lot of the child of God is that mentioned in Romans 7 - “the wretched man”. Those who believe in this fashion find a non-existent lurking place here, by believing that Paul is referring to himself as subject to his carnal nature - sold under sin. One wonders how the subscribers to this idea, can miss seeing that Paul is demonstrating that the person under the law, though an earnest self-respecting adherent of the law, striving to keep it, is actually under the dominion of sin, as long as he seeks to be justified by the law. One wonders how those who think that the “wretched man” represents a child of God, could overlook Romans 6:14 which says “sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law but under grace”.

Then, too, Romans 7:6 adds “but now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter (i.e. the law).

Romans 7:4 makes it clear how we become dead to that wherein we were held - “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead”. The identity of the believer with the body of Christ is brought about by the operation of the Holy Spirit at conversion, as per 1 Cor 12:13. We were baptised, i.e. placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, so that by being in Christ we become new creatures (born again) according to 2 Cor 5:17. Being in Christ caused us to be identified with Christ in His death burial and resurrection, so that all true believers can say with Paul (Gal 2:19,21) “I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain”.

It is for the child of God to understand well that then Paul is writing about “the Law”, he is not writing about what some term “ceremonial law”, for it should be obvious from Romans 7 alone, that he is speaking of the ten commandments, for he actually quotes from the commandments (verse 7). This is borne out also in

Romans 2, where Paul addresses those who rest in “the law” and where here again it is undeniable that he is referring to the ten commandments and not some supposed “ceremonial law”, for in this passage (verses 21-23) he actually quotes three more of the ten commandments, as he refers to those who “make their boast of “the law”! When this is recognised and we see that we are not under the law, but under grace, it remains for us to recognise the way to victorious living, by obeying Romans 6:11, “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord”.

Instead of expecting nothing better than to be grovelling and groaning under the bondage of sin, the true believer must seek to fulfil the Scriptures “Be ye holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16) and Matt 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”. At first glance many would consider these Scriptures impossible of fulfilment, thinking that God says “Be ye holy with the same degree of holiness as mine”. Note, however, that He says rather “be ye holy for (because) I am holy”. The same may be said about the other Scripture. The Lord Jesus is saying in similar vein “Be ye perfect because your Father in heaven is perfect”.

For a full understanding of both these Scriptures, we must now look at Philippians 3, for here we get the clear indication of what is the true Scriptural teaching of holiness. We find here what appears to be a contradiction, for in verse 12 Paul states that he is not yet perfect, while in verse 15 he includes himself with others as being perfect. “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect”

There is no contradiction here, but in these verses we have the clear indication of two perfections:

- (1) (verse 15) presents perfection in growth, and
- (2) (verse 12) the ultimate perfection towards which we must press for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us consider, first of all, perfection in growth. This is well illustrated for us in Mark 4:28, where Christ uses the simple parable of the man who casts seed into the ground, and (verse 28) “the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” then comes the harvest. Here we have the process of unconscious growth as in the Kingdom of God, “first the blade” which when it appears above the ground, is perfect as a blade. Then comes the formation of the ear, which at that stage of growth is also perfect, but the ultimate perfection only comes when the full corn appears in the ear, and the fruit is ready for the harvesting. Thus it is in each stage of the Christian life - we are born into God’s family - not fully grown - but as babes in Christ, and as the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about this birth is perfect, we have a perfect baby just born into God’s family. But now this perfection must be maintained, or else, as would happen even in an earthly family, there is the beginning of what

can be tragedy. A baby may be perfect at birth, but if it remains a helpless baby after the lapse of say a few years, then it becomes tragic for the parents. When one is born into God's family - He is concerned for the growth of His child, and His great Father heart yearns over His little ones - "like as a father pitieth his children - so the Lord"!

Now, just as in the natural earthly family, the new-born baby, if it is to grow, must have the right food at the right time. It must not be choked with strong meat straight away, until it is able to bear it - but "new-born babes are to desire the sincere milk of the Word, in order that they may grow thereby". This milk for the babes in Christ is shown in Hebrews 5:12, to be the first principles of the oracles of God, and these are enumerated for us in Hebrews 6:1-2. Having understood and imbibed this milk and assimilated it, we are not to remain here as babies, as it were, in the baby-class, but are exhorted to go on unto perfection.

We are given certain signs of babyhood in Hebrews 5:13, which states that those who are unskilful in the word of righteousness are babes. Those who can take strong meat, and who have advanced to full age, are those who have their senses exercised by reason of use (of the Word) to discern both good and evil. Babes are not to be blamed for being babes at the time of, and immediately following their birth, but that which must grieve the heart of our heavenly Father is to find those who have already been born into His family for some time, still only able to take milk, when they should have advanced to the stage where they can even teach others the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Other signs of babyhood have already been referred to, as recorded in 1 Cor 3:1-3, i.e. envying, strife and divisions, these are to be expected during babyhood, but should not be in evidence among those who claim maturity.

God's concern for growth in His children is indicated in Ephesians 4:11-16, where we find that Christ when He ascended on high, gave certain ministries for the perfecting of the saints in order that they might be trained in the work of ministering to the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to that ultimate perfection - a perfect man who has attained to the full measure of the stature of Christ.

God's plan is that His children should be conformed to the image of His own Son, and to this end he has predestined all those who would of their own volition take Christ as their Saviour. Romans 8:34-35. He wants His children to be like Jesus, and we should also earnestly desire this and not merely sing "be like Jesus, this my song, in the home and in the throng - be like Jesus all day long, I would be like Jesus". It is comparatively easy to be like Jesus in the throng, where we wish to be thought well of, but often how different it is in the home - "the place where we are loved the most, and behave the worst"!

How then are we to maintain perfection in growth? God in His Word has given us many indications as to how this is to be done. For instance to be more like Jesus,

we read in 2 Cor 3:17-18, that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty (i.e. the liberty of the sons of God, who are not under law) and all such, "with open faces beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as be the Spirit of the Lord".

Thus does Christ-likeness become more apparent on all who do this. One has only to consider any dear saint of God, possibly some elderly sister who is accustomed, as with Anna, who served God in the temple with prayers and fasting day and night, to spend much time in the Lord's presence - such a one though not endowed with much natural beauty will be seen to manifest a heavenly beauty far transcending that which is earthly.

One very practical way of maintaining spiritual growth up into Christ is to practice the threefold method indicated in Rev 12:11, where we read that believers overcame Satan by:

- (1) the blood of the Lamb,
- (2) the word of their testimony, and
- (3) they loved not their lives unto the death.

Let's consider the application of these in their order as above.

(1) The blood of the Lamb.

Thank God for the precious blood of Jesus, which can keep our hearts clean before God, so that Satan cannot get the advantage over us. The Lord Jesus, as He was going to the garden of Gethsemane, said these significant words - "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). There was nothing in Christ that would respond to the efforts of the prince of this world, Satan, to bring about failure on Christ's part. We therefore, must determine also that Satan shall find nothing in us that could bring about our downfall, and for this reason we must be sure that our hearts are clean, and kept clean before God. To this end the cleansing of Christ's precious blood is assured. Firstly, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, i.e. walk in obedience to the known will of God, we are assured of a continuous cleansing through the blood from all sin (1 John 1:7). Secondly, should we sin in an unguarded moment, we must in true repentance confess our failure, and ask forgiveness, and we are assured of complete cleansing, for 1 John 1:9 tells us that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

Do not make the mistake of thinking that this text is for the unsaved who have come for salvation. Such, certainly must confess that they are sinners, and must

trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and cleansing through His blood. This text (1 John 1:9) is expressly for believers, and it is well to note that John includes himself when he writes "if we confess our sins". It is well to note also that there is nothing in this text to suggest auricular confession as practiced by the R.C., and other churches. Confession is to be made to the Lord Himself, against whom we have sinned, and He it is who forgives. However, if we have wronged any brother or sister, we are to seek to be reconciled to such, so that we can pray together, that our prayers be not hindered.

Where someone has sinned against the Assembly, and has been disfellowshipped, such a one's restoration to fellowship should be accompanied by a general statement of having sinned, and a humble request for restoration. It is necessary to add these remarks here anent confession at a time when there are some to be found who would seek to introduce even auricular confession into Pentecostal circles.

(2) The word of our testimony

Coming now to the second point concerning overcoming Satan, we have mentioned "the word of our testimony". This means of course, that we carry the warfare right into the enemy's camp, through our testimony to the salvation which we have experienced.

The cause of the failure and downfall of many professing Christians is that they remain silent after professing salvation. The Word of God shows clearly that it is incumbent upon us to confess Christ to others. In fact our witness to Christ and His saving grace is bound up in our very salvation, for Romans 10:9-13 is very clear on this point, and Christ Himself has indicated His attitude toward those who are ashamed or afraid to confess Him (Matt 10:32, etc). It is largely through our witness and testimony that others come to salvation, and obviously if one is to testify to salvation, his life must bear scrutiny, if he is not to be labelled a hypocrite. To give a true testimony for Christ requires that our love for Christ constrains us, and thus a true relationship to Christ is maintained.

(3) Love not their lives unto the death

The third point concerning overcoming Satan, is that believers "love not their lives unto the death". This does not necessarily mean that we are to expect to be put to death for our faith, though this may at times be involved. Its full meaning of what is intended is to be found in Christ's words as recorded in such texts as Luke 9:23-26.

What is to be recognised is our identity with Christ in His death, as mentioned earlier, so that our crucifixion with Christ takes on a very definite meaning which

includes reckoning correctly our true position in Christ, the death of the “old man”, death to self, death to the world and the things of the world, death to the law also, as we have already seen. In all this “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed”, and correct reckoning will assure us of victory over Satan and his wiles. While considering Satan and his wiles, while we don't wish to magnify the power of the enemy, we would be unwise to underestimate him, and in this respect the word of God has given us many warnings such as found in 1 Peter 5:8-9. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour, whom resist steadfast in the faith”. We have to watch in all things “lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. (2 Cor 2:11). One learns from such Scriptures as this last, that we must take note of Satan's wiles and be guarded against his methods of attack.

At this juncture, lest it be overlooked, it will be well to point out just how Satan does attack, and we begin by noting from 1 Thess 5:23, that man having been created in the image and likeness of God is a triune personality, comprising spirit, soul and body. From this it can be surmised that Satan will not confine himself to launching his attack on only one part of this triune being, man. The Word of God indeed, reveals to us, three avenues of attack through which Satan launches his fiery darts (1 John 2:16). These are:-

- (1) the lust of the flesh,
- (2) the lust of the eyes, and
- (3) the pride of life.

Now, it should be obvious that through the lust of the flesh Satan attacks the body, and we need to have no hesitancy in accepting that the lust of the eyes indicates an attack on the soul, and that the pride of life is the channel through which Satan attacks the spirit. Satan as a spirit-being is well aware of the potential of this last avenue of attack, for pride was the cause of his own downfall. It should also be borne in mind that Satan has had much practice since the days of our first parents, in knowing the best how to attack each individual believer, and to what temptation the said believer would be most susceptible.

Satan's threefold plan of attack has, in fact, persisted ever since his first recorded attempt against our first parents. This form of attack involves at the same time the casting of an aspersion on the veracity of God's word “Has God said?” In other words, God doesn't really mean what He says, He is too loving, etc. etc.

Then following on this comes the attack as launched on Mother Eve. (Gen 3:6)...

- (1) "the woman saw that the tree was good for food" - the attack on the bodily appetite for food,
- (2) " and that it was pleasant to the eyes" - the lust of the eyes, and attack on the soul,
- (3) "and a tree to be desired to make one wise" - the pride of life, an attack on the spirit. Eve succumbed to the attack, and Adam followed and so sin entered into the world.

Thank God, Jesus Christ came, and He, in order that He might be seen to be the spotless one, was subjected also to the attack of Satan when He was tempted in the wilderness. Satan's method of attack follows the same plan as with Eve. In considering this we should note what we read in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus, the Son of God, "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin". This does not say that He was subjected to all our temptations in every shape and form, but that He was tempted "in all points" like as we are. Three temptations only are recorded, and these three follow the same pattern as with Eve, as we have said above.

- (1) when He was hungry, Satan said He should command the stones to be bread - an attack on the body.
- (2) Satan showed Him "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" - the attack on the soul, through the lust of the eyes, and
- (3) "if thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down" - an attack on the spirit, through the pride of life - seeking to cause Christ to do this, in order to demonstrate that He was the Son of God.

It will be noted that Satan, in this third temptation, can quote Scripture, but please note, at the same time, that he left out a vital part of the text. He also uses this method today, when even those who would like to be thought of as spiritual, can be guilty, no doubt at the instigation of Satan, of separating a text from its context, so that it becomes a pretext.

Christ's method of defeating Satan sets us an example as to how we are to "resist the devil" strong in the faith. We are to use the sword of the Spirit, as He did, having put on the whole armour of God as instructed in Ephesians 6:11. Let us remember at the same time, that no armour is provided for the back. We must always face the enemy, not in our own strength, but "strong in the Lord", while "praying always with all prayers and supplication in the Spirit"

By putting into practice these God-given methods, we shall be more than conquerors, and our growth up into Christ will go on unhindered, as we by these means maintain present perfection, until at last we reach the goal of the ultimate perfection, which is, that when we shall see Him, we shall be like Him. In the meantime, like the Psalmist David, though we feel dissatisfied with our present progress, we can say in the words of Psalm 17:15, "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."