

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

July/August 1999

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What Does It Mean to Be Holy?

When God finished the work of creation He blessed the seventh day and made it holy. When Moses saw the burning bush in the desert he found that he was standing on holy ground. God's Word tells us that we must be holy because He is holy. Is so awesome a mandate as holiness attainable for us sinners? Hear what the hymn writer T. Binney wrote:

*Oh, how shall I, whose native sphere is dark,
whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear, and on my naked spirit
bear the uncreated beam?*

Jesus, who is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3) shows us the answer to that question, and the way of obedience. He said, "Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7).

Holiness is not an impossibility for any of us. It means first of all to be set apart, as the vessels in the tabernacle were set apart (consecrated) from ordinary vessels. For us to be holy means the will to do God's will. It means sacrifice—the offering up of my own will (which sometimes seems to me an impossibility) and the acceptance of His. He asks of us nothing which He Himself was unwilling to do. "He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18).

*There is a way for man to rise to that sublime
abode;
an offering and a sacrifice, a Holy Spirit's energies,
an Advocate with God.*

That Advocate is Jesus Christ, who, "although he was a son, ... learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

*These, these prepare us for the sight of holiness
above;
the sons of ignorance and night may dwell in the
eternal Light,
through the Eternal Love.*

The Lord loves us, and "takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation" (Psalm 149:4).

There is an *active* practice of holiness as we carry out, for the glory of God, the ordinary duties of each day, faithfully fulfilling the responsibilities given us. The *passive* practice consists in loving acceptance of the unexpected, be it welcome or unwelcome, remembering that we have a wise and sovereign Lord who works in mysterious ways and is never taken by surprise. I heard a comforting word at the Urbana Missionary Convention some years ago. Eric Alexander, a dear Scottish preacher, reminded us that "God is not *worried* about *anything!*"

Which of these two requirements of holiness (active or passive) is beyond our strength? Remember the words of the apostle Paul, *and* the conditions (he was in prison) under which he wrote them: "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.... I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12,13). This is all that God demands of us in His work of sanctification. He demands it from the high and the low, from the strong and the weak; in a word, from all, always and everywhere. A promise to which I have clung for many years is the prophetic word in Isaiah 50:7, "The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded, therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."

Perfection does not consist in *understanding* God's designs but in *submitting* to them, for "we know that

in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Sometimes the explanation of his purpose (Romans 8:29) is overlooked: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” God works in the soul to make it holy—to make it, finally, like Himself. The whole essence of the spiritual life consists in recognizing the designs of God for us at the present moment.

Only God's Wounds

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm.
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us—where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy scars, we claim Thy grace.

The other gods were strong, but Thou wast weak.
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak
And not a god has wounds but Thou alone.

Edward Shillito

The Gift of Place

It is always possible to do the will of God. In every place and time it is within our power to acquiesce in the will of God. Jesus comforted His disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1-2). Who is finally responsible for our circumstances? Psalm 16:5—“Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup, and have made my lot secure.”

We have the assurance—a calming and quieting one—that God in His infinite wisdom has placed us where we are. There are perhaps some factors which we would not happily have chosen.

When Alexander Solzhenitsyn was in prison he wrote, “How simple for me to live with you, O Lord!

How easy to believe in You! When in confusion, my soul bares itself or bends, when the most wise can see no further than this night and do not know what tomorrow brings, You fill me with the clear certainty that You exist, and that You watch to see that all the paths of righteousness be not closed. From the heights of worldly glory I am astonished by the path through despair You have provided me, this path from which I have been worthy enough to reflect Your radiance to men. All that I will yet reflect You will grant me. And for that which I will not succeed in reflecting, You have appointed others.”

Let us never suppose that obedience is impossible or that holiness is meant only for a select few. Our Shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness—not for *our* name's sake but for His. He saw to it that in the midst of excruciating suffering those paths were not closed to Solzhenitsyn. They are not closed to us.

On Forgiving Oneself

“Entire industries exist specifically for the purpose of easing our guilt, of making us feel OK about ourselves. Our culture has appropriated the language of Christianity without any of its substance. Thus we forgive without ever having judged.... What we seem now to call forgiveness (as in therapy's famous ‘learning to forgive oneself’) seems rather to take away the seriousness of the offense than to encourage acknowledgment of failure that could lead to repentance, and a resolution to do better. Only in a culture therapeutically obsessed, in which self is perceived objectively, not subjectively—as something apart from what we do or are—could we speak of ‘forgiving oneself.’ Forgiveness is a gift, by definition unearned. If I cannot earn or work for forgiveness, I most assuredly cannot forgive myself. I may learn to live with my past, may understand it more fully, but I cannot forgive myself. Only God and those who love us can, through the gift of for-

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giveness, redeem the past, and *make whole again*.... Unless there is judgment, there is no need for forgiveness, and thus no possibility of starting anew. For a culture in which acceptance and tolerance are the chief virtues (indeed intolerantly demanded!) and 'judgmental' is a dirty word, there can be no true second chance, no real hope" (Karen Jenson Gold, from an article in *First Things*, Nov. 1992).

No wonder people "have a hard time" forgiving themselves! It is impossible. There is no tribunal but the heart of God, to which we may freely turn, freely pour out our sorrow for our sin, and receive the precious Blood of Christ. To refuse to accept His free forgiveness is to consign ourselves to hell. Jesus bore our sorrows, paid it all, took upon Himself all the sins that all mankind could ever commit. It meant, as F.W.H. Meyers wrote in his poem, "St. Paul": "desperate tides of a whole world's anguish forced through the channels of a single heart." Isaiah 53 tells us, "He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.... He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.... It was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer.... He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Can we add to that? Is His sacrifice not adequate? Corrie ten Boom said, "God casts all our sins into the depths of the sea, then puts up a sign: NO FISHING."

Letter From a Radio Listener

[The May/June issue was about hymns]

"Your program made me realize what an impact hymns have had in my own life. I looked through a hymnbook one evening and out of 133 hymns, there were only 15 I did not know. Singing the hymns of faith was what helped me get through my husband's leaving and his remarriage. I could not pray without weeping constantly, but I could sing through the tears—the songs just rolled out of me. When the fears and the grief and the unbelief welled up to the unbearable I sang, 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide, the darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide.' I did not grow up in a Christian home, but my parents sent us to church so I learned the hymns of faith, and just like

Scripture, they remain a vital part of me."

Several have asked me for a list of favorite hymns. Here are the first ten listed (alphabetically) in my Little Brown Notebook: All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name, And Can It Be?, Beneath the Cross of Jesus, Be Still My Soul, Crown Him with Many Crowns, Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, Eternal Light, Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken, God Moves in a Mysterious Way, Great Is Thy Faithfulness.

How to Prepare for Tomorrow

Jesus, knowing exactly what awaited Him when He went up to Jerusalem, *went*. He had set His face to go there, and He moved steadily through the days, doing His Father's work of healing and peace with the same serenity which had always characterized His ministry. He told His disciples exactly what would happen and they understood none of it. On the way there, near Jericho, Jesus healed a blind man. Then He brought salvation to the house of Zaccheus. He wept over the city of Jerusalem, entered it, threw out the merchants from the temple, and carried on His daily teaching in the temple until the Zero Hour arrived. Nothing dismayed or depressed Him enough to cause Him to quit. The prospects of torture and death in no way hindered His day-by-day work which, as always, pleased the Father. This was His preparation: the faithful doing of the Will, one day at a time. Shall we, His children, not trust Him for our future?

Voices I Hear

The voice of self beckons:

Get out there and do something important and worthwhile.

The voice of my blond-haired daughter invites me:

Mommy, let's play house. I'll be the Mommy, you be the Daddy.

The voice of self lures me:

Stand up! Be counted among the useful and make the world a better place.

The voice of my infant son cries from his crib:

I pick him up and we rock together in the silence and stillness.

The voice of self bids me:

*Work hard and seek the praise and applause of many.
The voice of my grown-up four-year-old daughter
announces proudly:*

Mommy, I colored this picture of Pooh for you.

The voice of self tempts me:

*Make sure your talent is noticed and appreciated and
bask in the spotlight.*

Three small voices plead:

*Mommy, we're thirsty, will you get us a drink of
water?*

The voice of self cries out as I wipe a little nose for the
twentieth time:

*Lord, isn't there a more glamorous job for me than
this?*

The voice of my Lord assures me:

*"If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of
these little ones ... I tell you the truth, she will cer-
tainly not lose her reward.—For the Kingdom of
Heaven belongs to these little children."*

Andrea Howard Hawthorne

My First 300 Babies

There is a change of address for this remarkable book
written by a very experienced midwife who made it a
practice to stay for several weeks with the newborn in
order to help the parents learn new responsibilities:
Hurst Publishing, 5881 Connor Lane, Goleta, CA
93117; phone price: (805)967-3744; \$11.95 e-mail:
hurstpub@silcome.com.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule July–September 1999

July 24-29 Family reunion—White Sulphur Springs,
Mont.

August 9 Wales —Geoffrey Thomas, The Manse,
Buarth Rd., Aberystwyth.

August 29 Alton Bay, N.H., Christian Conference
Center, David Northrup, (603)875-6161.

September 15 Whiting, N.J., America's Keswick,
Bill Welte, (732)350-1187.

September 18 Nashua, N.H., Grace Fellowship,
Sandy Berube, (603)883-8273, ext. 18.

A Short Note From "HIM"

I received a letter a few weeks ago addressed to HIM.
The check was also for HIM and I signed it that way.
For some of you who might have Spanish-speaking
friends or read Spanish yourself, *Passion and Purity*
and *Through Gates of Splendor* are available in that
language. Should you come across a lonesome
Norwegian, displaced or otherwise, who can still
remember his mother tongue, I also have some copies
of the Norwegian translation of *God's Guidance*. All
three are by E.E. Each book is \$10, including postage.
DO NOT ORDER FROM THE NEWSLETTER, but
from HIM, 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930.
That's it for now, folks.

Lars Gren

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