

1 Thessalonians 4:3

Holiness: How?

Introduction

The whole subject of how to live a godly life has many ramifications. It really needs to be integrated into a whole series of talks about the Holy Spirit. Andrew Murray claimed that the minister's second duty was to lead those who were awakened and brought to Christ to a full knowledge of the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The new life we received on becoming a Christian is a reality. We know we are being changed. It is evident to all. We have victory over sin, and there is growth in grace and holiness. "By the grace of God, things are happening." Bishop Henry Moule said, "Because God is undertaking for us, it is possible to walk with God all day long, love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves, to cast every care on Him daily, to be at peace amidst pressure, and by unreserved rest to divine power under divine conditions to become strongest through and through at our weakest point" [Some of this writing unclear].

The question in practical terms is "how?" The answer is God's work, and our work. Not each making a contribution, but one hundred per cent of God and one hundred per cent of me.

God's work in sanctification

God who gave His Son to save through His atonement has given His Holy Spirit to sanctify us. Through the Holy Spirit, the risen Lord Jesus lives His life in us. **Christ in you** (Colossians 1:27). **Christ, who is your life** (Colossians 3:4). **Christ Jesus, who has become for us.. holiness** (1 Corinthians 1:30). **Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit** (1 Peter 1:2). **By the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body** (Romans 8:13). Christian virtues are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). **We are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which come from the Lord, who is the Spirit** (2 Corinthians 3:18). And through Him, **Christ lives in me** (Galatians 2:20). He is the vine, and the life of the vine has to flow into the branches if they are to bear fruit (John 15:1-8). **His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness** (2 Peter 1:3). **Whoever believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him** (John 7:38). Need to be continually filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), **filled to the measure of all the fullness of God** (Ephesians 3:19).

So He who gave us new life at new birth causes that new life to grow and develop. We go from Christian babyhood to Christian adulthood. Notice – new ways of looking at things, new motives, new habits, deeper desire for spiritual things, deepening relationship with God, increasing capacity to love and live for God. We learn more and more about ourselves – flaws and faults that have to be put right. The work goes on in the whole of our personality – heart, soul and mind. Like a tree made

good (Matthew 12:33). He teaches us by His Word, fills us with power, aids us in our prayer, chastens and disciplines us to keep us close to Himself. The result is growth, victory, maturity, progress.

Our part in sanctification

We must work out what He works in. **Work out your salvation ... for it is God who works in you** (Philippians 2:12,13). Ask God to show us our real condition before Him. If we would build high, we must dig deep. So easy to go to sleep in the Christian life. Saved, at church, not doing anything very wrong, honest and moral, helpful and generous, so this teaching about the Holy Spirit goes over our heads. Then God opens our eyes, and we see how much self controls life, how questionable our motives are, how many compromises we make with sin, our inward life does not bear close inspection. Not just the things we do – but the things we ought to do.

“Self”, or the “sinful nature” still has a hold on us as Christians. It can take away our hunger and enthusiasm. People converted from paganism in middle years quickly outstrip people who have been Christians for years in zeal and enthusiasm, Bible knowledge, service for the Lord and spiritual discernment. The reason is hunger – so often lacking in established Christians.

Then this problem has to be dealt with. The Spirit is grieved when the flesh is in charge. **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself** (Mark 8:34). **Keep in step with the Spirit** (Galatians 5:25). Yield to God unreservedly. This can lead to great conflict and battle. F.B.Meyer admitted that his ministry was powerless and ineffective till he faced up to the one thing in his life which he had not handed over to God's control. The clay has got to be in the potter's hand before He can make something of it. C.T.Studd said, “God will not deal with you till you are wholly given up to Him, and then He will tell you what to do.”

There needs to be personal conviction about consecration. S.P.Smith (C.T.Studd's friend) urged on non-Christians Christ's salvation, and on Christians he urged the need for entire consecration. He assured both that Christ was all-sufficient.

Need to ask daily that He will fill us and take control of us by His Spirit. You possess the Holy Spirit, but does He possess you? And then keep in touch with the Lord. Through the Bible God speaks to us, and we speak to Him in prayer. They are not ends in themselves, but the means of being in touch with the Lord.

*“Take time to be holy,
Speak oft with thy Lord”*

Keep short accounts with God. Unconfessed and unforsaken sin will rob us of the sense of God's blessing and presence. Walk in God's will day by day, in total dependence on His power and in obedience to His will.

R.M.McCheyne wrote, “I ought to pray and labour for the deepest sense of utter weakness and helplessness. My only safety is to know and feel my helplessness that I may hang on the arm of omnipotence.”

As we respond to the Spirit's teaching and correction and make adjustments, so we grow.

Does holiness require a second blessing?

Many evangelical Christians teach the need for a second experience of God's grace, e.g. Charismatics, for gifts; Calvinists (some Puritans, and Martin Lloyd Jones), teach of a second experience which is the sealing and baptism of the Spirit; some non-Calvinists (John Wesley, early Methodists, Salvation Army, Faith Mission) of a second experience for holiness, variously called "entire sanctification", "perfect love", "second blessing", "higher life".

There is no doubt that some Christians have had a second life-changing experience after which their Christian life really took off. It would not do to say they were not really converted in the first place.

F.R.Havergal, who gave us such hymns as "Take my life", "Who is on the Lord's side?", "Like a river glorious", was converted at fifteen, and was involved in many Christian activities. But she felt for years there was something missing in her life, that she was not fully enjoying all God had for her. Then someone gave her a book entitled "All for Jesus". On Advent Sunday, 2nd December 1873, six years before her death, she received a second blessing. "I first saw the blessedness of true consecration, like a flash of electric light. There must be full surrender before full blessedness. God admits you by one to the other."

But the personal experiences of some, need not be doctrine for all. Personal conviction - we have everything at new birth, in embryo form. **Blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ** (Ephesians 1:3). **Complete in him** (1 John 2:5). But we do not necessarily enjoy all we have. We do not possess all our possessions. We do not do so because we are not always taught about the work of the Holy Spirit and what He can do in our life. We can spend years doing our best, unaware of what the Holy Spirit can do in our lives. Our experience, though real, is shallow, we are not aware of our state of life and our need. Sometimes we drift away from original commitment. When converted, we were also consecrated (Christ is Lord as well as Saviour from the word go, if we are truly Christian), though little idea of all that is involved. But then we backslide and drift and become half-hearted. Finally we return to the Lord and yield selves afresh. The effect and change can be dramatic. Really returning to former stage of consecration and going forward, because blockage has been removed.

But because that is our experience, cannot say it must be everyone's experience, nor that it is required by Scripture. Must begin with Scripture, and not our experience, in our understanding of doctrine. Some also have other crisis experiences when they discover new truth or receive special guidance.

But to return to the main point, there can be no real growth unless there is total consecration to the Lord repeatedly and constantly. The Irishman's definition of consecration is helpful here – an act committed once for all and repeated daily and ever after.

Conclusion

Press on with the Lord. Be alarmed if there is no urgency or hunger in the life. Seek the Lord, and not experiences. You can trust God, He will not play mean trick. He will not blight or spoil your life. He wants your best. Why can we trust for the past and for the future – but find it so hard to trust for the present?