

Holiness

The thinking of a Puritan runs like this. He, or she, recognizes God has given to him his Son, Jesus Christ, to be his Master and Lord. As a result he knows his heart turned toward holiness.

What is holiness?

The noun *holiness* is linked to the adjective *holy*. Unlike Hebrew and Greek, we do not have a verb that looks like those two words. Instead we use the word *sanctify*. It means to make holy.

We are to live holy lives. That is the reason for our creation. This Christ Jesus recreates us to do.

Puritans have a bad name. They do so for two reasons. First, they were seen to be the bad folk in the days of Elizabeth I and the Stuart kings. Their desire was to see the church purified of all unbiblical and unnecessary ritual. Secondly, Puritans are thought of as being strict - even over strict - when it comes to living a moral life.

Now it is true that one can be over strict in matters of behaviour or over zealous for the reform of the church. But we should not muddle a right concern for these things with that which is excessive. Sadly that happens too often. The result is that a good term has got a bad name.

To be concerned to see our life and the church pure in the sight of God is good. It is commendable and excellent. But we must be ruled by Scripture. It alone, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit of God, is to fashion and rule our lives.

So what is holiness? And how concerned are we to be about this vital topic?

Much may be written on the subject. We can find excellent books; for example *Holiness* by J C Ryle, and *A Passion for Holiness* by J I Packer.

We shall limit ourselves to two themes. Holiness is about *living* and *likeness*. If we keep these two

words in our mind we will travel long the right track.

Holiness is about living for God. We are called to be devoted to him. It is the sum of the commands he has given. They teach us to love him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We therefore note that holiness is not an optional extra. Nor is it something for extra-special people (no matter who we imagine them to be). Every follower of Jesus Christ is a saint. And he or she is called to live as God wants us to live.

Holiness is also about being like Jesus Christ. We now build upon the first point. The two are very closely linked.

Our goal is to imitate and grow more like the God and Saviour we serve. Jesus consecrated himself totally to God: so must we. He did what pleases God: so must we. He rejoiced in doing God's will: so must we. He was prepared to be despised and suffer: so must we. He looked forward to the final state of things: so must we. And so we could go on.

How should respond to this high calling to be holy? We can do nothing better than start on our knees. Why? Because only our holy God can empower us to be holy.

We can learn from the example of John Calvin. This is how he prayed after delivering a lecture on verses in Jeremiah 31 and 32:

Grant, Almighty God, since we do not cease to provoke your wrath against us each day, that we may be warned by your word and repent; may we humble ourselves before you, anticipating the rigour of your judgment; may we not become hardened when chastened by you, but be submissive and teachable; and may we so profit under your discipline that, being at length wholly devoted to you, we may have no other object than to glorify your holy name until we partake of that glory which your only-begotten Son has obtained for us. Amen.