

century BC prophet, when confronted with a situation not unlike that of the present-day, thundered against the preposterous claim by his misguided countrymen that the Lord was somehow obligated to rescue them from a richly deserved punishment, simply because of their perfunctory preoccupation with religious ritual: *“Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?”* (Jer. 7:8-10).

Piercing The Prevailing Religious Mood

Today legions of church-members, dripping wet from an immersion in the cesspool of TV viewing, unhallowed music (rock, rap, and razzmatazz), social drinking, adultery/fornication, homosexuality, etc., will make a Sunday morning church appearance, with little, if any, intention of thoroughly amending their lives.

While they sing the latest popular lyrics, sung to the tune of some worldly sound, and sway to the rising rhythm of the beat, they mirror, even in their worship mood, the “spirit of the world” (I Cor. 2:12).

The prevailing mood in much of contemporary Christendom is quite similar to the carnal mindset of the backslidden Corinthians, who actually became proud of their broad-minded tolerance of sin, even to the point of permitting open fornication to go unchecked in their midst. Paul rebuked them sharply for this cavalier attitude toward sin:

“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you” (I Cor. 5:1,2).

When God’s people become inflated with arrogance and congratulate themselves on their “well-bred,” “sophisticated,” and tolerant attitude toward detestable sin, it is high time to penetrate the cozy religious mood with a firm determination to pass righteous judgment upon sin (Jn. 7:24)! It is not until we pierce the prevailing religious mood of a flippant attitude toward sin, that holiness will once again become a matter of vital concern.

A Paramount Concern

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers,

nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:9,10).

In order for us to pursue that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), holiness must be seen for what it is: A matter of paramount concern. In contemporary religious thought, too often holiness is viewed as an *optional matter*, the special possession of saints of a higher order. I Cor. 6:9,10, however, debunks this flimsy proposition by insisting that entrance into the coming Kingdom of God, whether in its millennial or eternal aspect, is predicated on a clean break with former sinful habits and a life lived in righteousness and true holiness (cf. also Eph. 4:22-24; 5:3-7; Gal. 5:19-21; Titus 2:11-14; Rev. 21:8). Moreover, Rom. 6:22 informs us that holiness is not a condition of the afterlife, but a sanctified state in this present life, and one that especially fits those who have been justified by grace through faith for the felicity of heavenly fellowship: *“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”* Indeed, the unholy would be most unhappy in the high and holy place of God’s heaven, where the most holy and thrice holy God is worshipped by the holy angels, whose constant cry is “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isa. 6:3).

Then, of course, there is the pious religious substitute for holiness:

“positional holiness.” This concept has blinded the minds of many who consider themselves already “holy in Christ,” and therefore conveniently excuse themselves from the admonition to pursue, in any practical sense, holiness of life (Heb. 12:14). While it is certainly true that every genuine believer is set apart, in a legal sense, as a special object of God’s particular, redemptive love, holiness of heart and life is an actual condition that must be attained by ardent pursuit, hence the injunction in Hebrews to “pursue... holiness.” This erroneous approach to the subject of Biblical holiness has resulted in the self-contradictory confession of many, who claim to be united to Christ in holiness, but remain evidently wedded and welded to the world in their affections. To all such hypocritical and half-hearted holiness, God cries *“Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (II Tim. 2:19b). Our holiness must be practical, and not merely positional, if we are to shun hell and gain heaven.

Again, there are those who hold holiness as an abstract, nebulous notion, but resent the idea that it must be a concrete reality, receiving expression in everyday forms of obedience and self-denial. These individuals would content themselves with a vague, and undefined holiness, forgetting thereby that

holiness, as it is interpreted by Scripture is a “way” or “life-course,” and, as such, is a concrete reality rather than an abstract notion: “*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there*” (Isa. 35:8,9). Although this passage refers to a millennial highway for the saints of the future, who will travel to Jerusalem, it also contains and conveys the spiritual principle that holiness is a clearly marked way, a distinctive life-course, raised above the low level of the natural man and his religion—a high-road for a happy throng of holy pilgrims en route to the highest heaven. This holy cause-way involves concrete changes in affections, aims, interests, dress, and demeanor, that set its pilgrims apart from the surrounding world.

An Urgent Pursuit

When Paul exhorts the Hebrew believers in Heb. 12:14 to “pursue” (διώκω—to chase as in a hunt, earnestly endeavor to acquire, seek after eagerly) holiness, he is provoking them to a Spirit-prompted effort without which holiness will elude their grasp. No one becomes holy by accident. It is a condition that is the result of a determined, Divinely-directed, and grace-empowered pursuit, with Hebrews the

twelfth chapter shedding light on the prerequisites of such a pursuit:

- *Heb. 12:4: “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving (ἀνταγωνίζομαι) against sin.”* Every true Christian is in a vicious struggle and contest against the sin which doth so easily beset him and constantly seeks to overpower him. To deny such a contest and its accompanying soul agony is to only disclose how far one is from the actual pursuit of holiness. Only the constantly vigilant are the conquerors in this intense conflict which Paul equates with a refusal on the part of the Christian to permit bodily lusts to gain the mastery (Rom. 6:12; cf. also I Cor. 9:27). Thus, *spiritual resistance* is essential to the pursuit of holiness.

- *Heb. 12:5: “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.”* God’s people are not made holy in a vacuum, but are subjected to the correction and rebuke of adverse circumstances and the reprimand of His Word (Rev. 3:19). Our response to each round of Divinely orchestrated suffering largely determines whether, and to what extent, we become “partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). Those that disdain and disregard God’s dealings, throw up their hands in despair, or grow discouraged (v. 12) fail to receive the benefit of Divine chastisement (Ps. 94:12), which is reserved for those who endure chastisement by patiently submitting themselves to the gracious Father who is seeking thereby to mold and shape their spirits to become sensitive and responsive to His (Heb. 12:6-10).

- *Heb. 12:15: “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God (ὕστερῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ); lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”* The believer who would pursue and partake of God’s holiness is likewise admonished to constant and careful oversight, lest he fall short of obtaining the grace of God. Esau is set forth, with his profane disregard for the religious aspect of the birthright, as one who despised his spiritual privileges only to find at a later date, when he saw the abandoned birthright as worth having, that his day of opportunity had been forever forfeited. Such language is designed to warn the believers, lest through carelessness they form an unworthy estimate of their present gospel privileges and opportunities, and thus fall from their own steadfastness, after Esau’s example of indifference.

- *Hebrews 12:25: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”* It is impossible for those who are seeking a holiness that fits them for heaven, to attain the coveted prize, if they disregard the beseeching and warning Voice of the Eternal Son of God. Contrary to the contentions of the modern schoolmen, Jesus is still speaking today from Heaven, both through the preaching of His Word (Luke 10:16), and by the Spirit who beckons to the churches (Rev. 2:7; et al). People of New Testament privileges should exercise extreme caution, lest they live heedless of His voice, and be visited with a judgment much sorer than the one which befell their Old Testament counterparts. He who would be holy, must give the more earnest heed to the Word he has heard (Heb 2:1), that he might escape the damnation of an eternal hell.

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HOLINESS OR HELL

The Choice Is Yours

KJV Hebrews 12:14: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”

ESV Hebrews 12:14: “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord”

WHILE the more part of Christendom seems adrift in an increasingly worldward direction, the Biblical warning issued to all professing disciples is abundantly clear: a life lived in moral unlikeness to God will mean a certain Hell, regardless of one’s claim to Christianity. For any thoughtful student of Scripture, this axiom should seem self-evident.

However, despite this solemn fact, untold multitudes of professing Christians consistently ignore God’s moral claim upon their lives by adopting the mindset and mores of this increasingly decadent culture. Jeremiah, the 7th