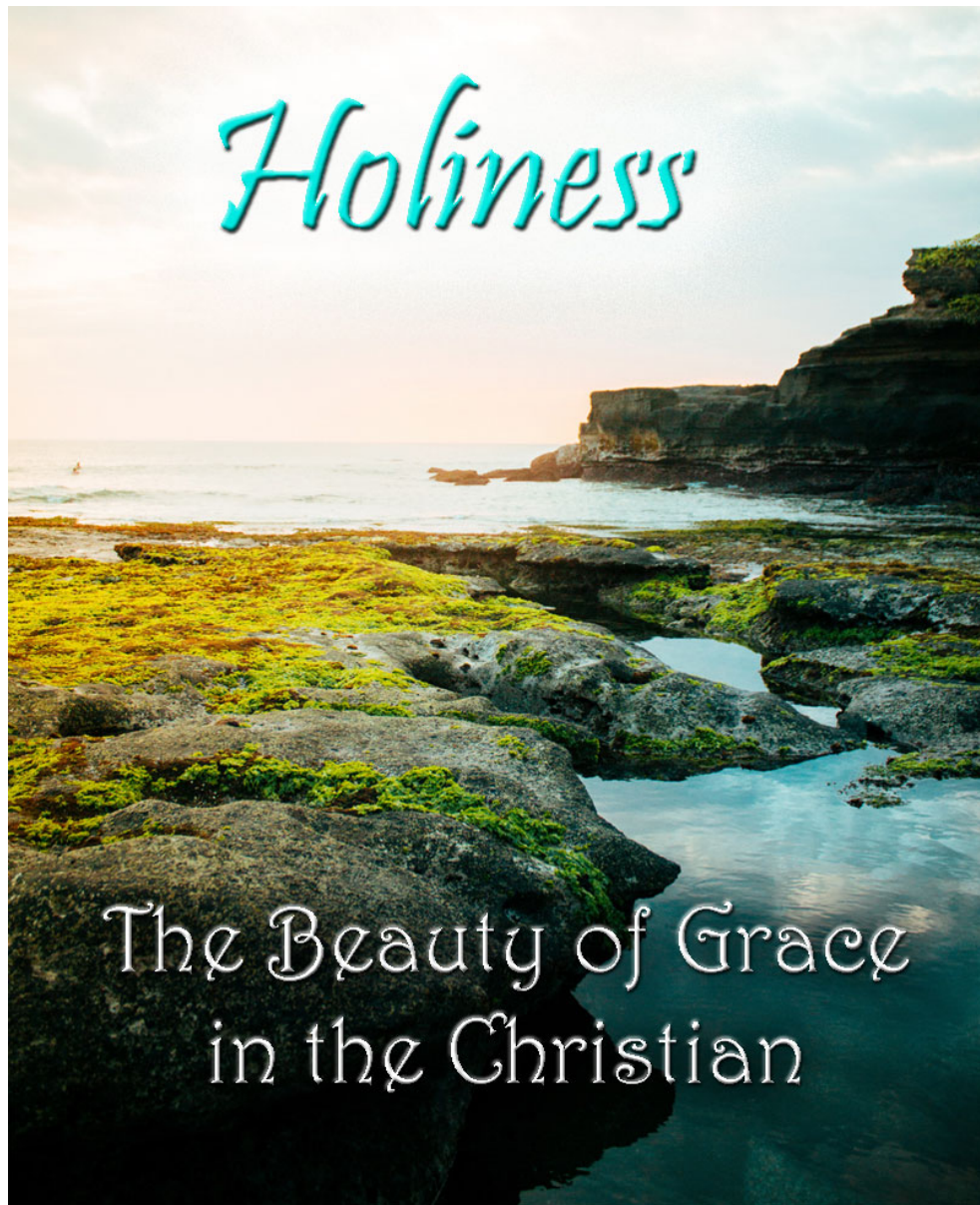


# Theology for Life

Volume 6 | Issue 3 | Fall 2019

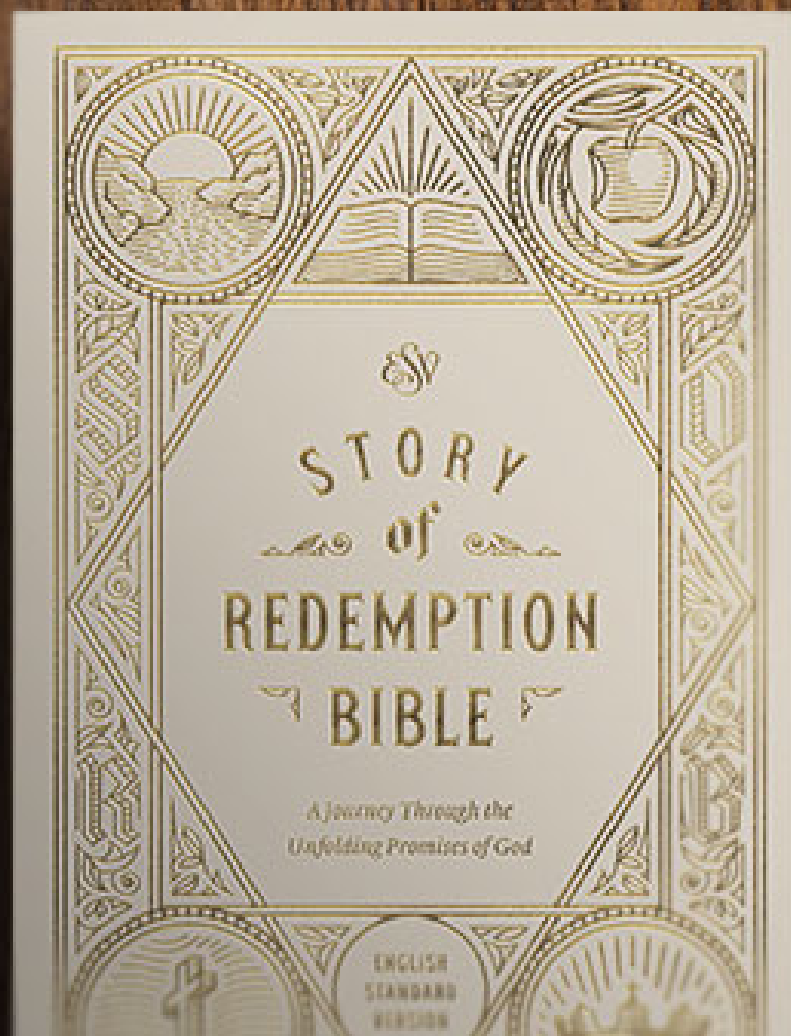


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- ***Who is J.C. Ryle?*—An Interview with Bennett Rogers**
- **Cultivating Holiness in the Christian Life**
- **Four Ways to Handle Temptation When It Comes**

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## Editor's Corner

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Holiness. The very word gives many Christians a shudder. To others, it causes them to question whether they *are* a Christian. Even more, some Christians avoid this word entirely because they think you are calling them to a life of rules and regulations that no longer applies to them. Some Christians further believe they can live however they want. So, what it is? Are either of these camps right? Should we just live however we want, or by rules and regulations, as Christians? The amazing thing is the Bible is *not silent* on this subject. When the Bible speaks, as it's been said, God speaks; and He speaks clear as day on this subject.

In Southern California, we have beautiful sunrises and sunsets. I love to go for a walk during those times of day. You can clearly see the beauty of the creation in both the sunrises and the sunsets. The holiness of God is the same way as sunrises and sunsets. Theologians call the holiness of God the controlling attribute of God. That is not to say that the other attributes of God are unimportant, nor critical because they are. With that said, for example, when reading Leviticus, a book all about holiness laws, God is showing Himself to be holy and calling His people to be holy.

Now, why is that so important? Well, consider the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah saw a vision of the glory of God and was undone in Isaiah 6. Today, Christians have the fullness of the glory of God incarnate in the person and work of Jesus Christ, recorded in the full and final revelation via the Bible. Holiness is not an option for the Christian; it is the expectation and standard.

Some people will think, "Great, now you've proven me right—that Christianity is about being required to do things and following a bunch of rules and regulations!" But those people would be wrong. Christianity is not first and foremost about what one *does*. We do not merit heaven by our efforts or ability, but only by the grace of God in Christ. Holiness is not impossible; rather, because of Christ and *His* holiness, it *is* possible. That's what so amazing about what Christ has done. The Christian is no longer enslaved to sin, but now has a new identity in Christ. They have been made holy, are continuing in that sanctification daily, and eventually will be made fully holy on the day they stand before Jesus. Holiness is not another thing we do—it is all what

Christ has *already* done. We are declared holy in Christ, not because of our own goodness, merits, behavior, or ability. We do not become holy either in the Christian life because of our effort but only through life long repentance and a recognition of the grace of God in Christ.

Additionally, we become holy only to the degree we are humbled by Christ, and awestruck by a vision of His greatness and glory like Isaiah. The more we are humbled by a vision of greater knowledge and understanding of Christ, the more we grow to be like Christ. We can only see ourselves rightly as we see ourselves in light of the revealed character of God through His Word. The more we see ourselves in light of the Word, the lower we will esteem ourselves, the humbler we will be, and the more magnified God will be through our lives.

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:13-15 tells us that Christians are to be holy because the Lord is holy. And because of the grace of God, you, dear Christian, have a new identity in Christ. So now, you can grow in grace and honor God in all of life. Holiness is not impossible for you; it is possible, the expectation, and the standard for your life in Christ.

In this issue of *Theology for Life*, we are going to look at holiness from a variety of angles to help you understand how essential this is for both a growing Christian life, and a healthy Christian ministry. Wherever you are at in your Christian walk, you need to understand this topic to grow in grace and godly behavior. So, I encourage you now to flip the page and learn about holiness in the Christian life from respected men of God who have thought long and hard on this subject.

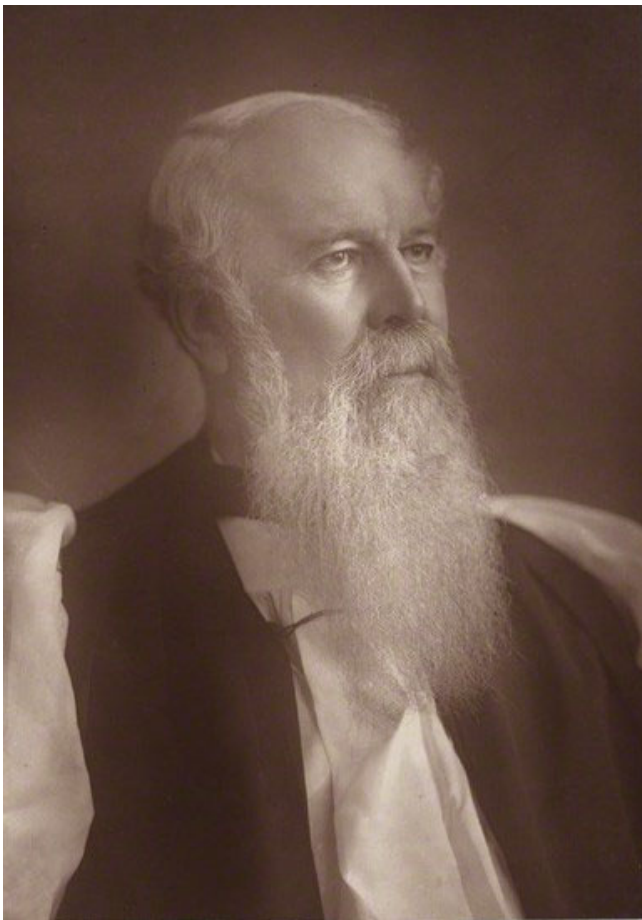
In Christ Alone,  
Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*



## ***Who is J.C. Ryle?***

### **An Interview with Bennett Rogers**

**By Dave Jenkins**



**Bennett Rogers** (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is a pastor and teacher in Mississippi. He is the author of *A Tender Lion: The Life, Ministry, and Message of J. C. Ryle* (2019) and has recently edited and introduced a new edition of Ryle's *Simplicity in Preaching: A Few Hints on a Great Subject* (2019).

**T4L:** Hello, Dr. Rogers, and welcome to *Theology for Life Magazine*. Can you tell us a bit about yourself, including the current ministries you are involved in?

**Bennett Rogers:** I am the husband of Christie, the father of Henry and Hugh, the pastor of a small church, and the Bible and Latin teacher at Christ Covenant School



in Ridgeland, Mississippi.

I published a biography of J. C. Ryle with Reformation Heritage Books entitled, *A Tender Lion: The Life, Ministry, and Message of J. C. Ryle*. And I have just edited and introduced a new edition of Ryle's *Simplicity in Preaching: A Few Hints on a Great Subject* with H&E Publishing.

**T4L:** Who is J.C. Ryle?

**Bennett Rogers:** The short and simple answer goes something like this: J. C. Ryle was the son of a wealthy Cheshire family, whose father's bankruptcy propelled him into the ministry of the Church of England, where he distinguished himself as a preacher, pastor, author, reformer, controversialist, party leader, and bishop.

Ryle was a committed Evangelical churchman, with a deep and abiding love for the English Reformers, Puritans, and leaders of the Evangelical Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as his historical and biographical writings bear witness. But above all, Ryle loved the Scriptures—"Here is rock: all else is sand." And he devoted his life to teaching, preaching, and applying the Scriptures to his parishes, diocese, and to his readers more broadly.

"Ryle's writings tend to focus almost exclusively on the essentials of the Gospels."

**T4L:** And, why does J.C. Ryle's work continue to be so influential?

**Bennett Rogers:** I think the answer is twofold. Ryle's writings tend to focus almost exclusively on the essentials of the Gospels. For example, in volume 1 of *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, Ryle explains the focus of his exposition:

*I have constantly left unsaid many things that might have been said, and have endeavored to dwell chiefly on the things needful to salvation. I have deliberately passed over many subjects of secondary importance, in order to say something that might strike and stick in consciences.*

The same focus can be found in his other writings. He rarely discusses issues that divide evangelical Protestants, and when he does he is remarkably charitable. Ryle's gospel-focus combined with his catholic (together-ness) spirit probably explain why his works have had a pan-denominational appeal.

Ryle's distinct writing style has also contributed to his staying power. Victorian preachers tended to be verbose in the extreme, as the pulpit increasingly came under the influence of the novel.

Since then, literary tastes have changed, and the long, flowing, wordy, clause-filled, prose of the Victorians has gone out of fashion, as have the works of Victorian clergymen who wrote in that style. J. C. Ryle, however, never embraced the literary conventions of his day.

Preaching to rural congregations made up almost entirely of agricultural laborers taught him "crucify" his style and aim for simplicity and directness in preaching as well as writing. Ryle's distinctive style makes his work accessible to modern readers, who may otherwise struggle with the unabridged, Latinized English of a John Owen or William Romaine. Readers may not always agree with what he says, but they know what he is saying and they feel as though they are being addressed personally.

**T4L:** Do you think we again need men like J.C. Ryle? What would that look like in terms of their character and ministry?

**Bennett Rogers:** I definitely think we need more men like Ryle in ministry. If the Lord raised up more men, they would be men who love their Bibles and their Savior. They would be convictionally and confessionally Reformed and Protestant, with a deep and abiding love for Puritan theology and spirituality. They would pray for revival, but be devoted to the ordinary means of grace, especially preaching, worship, prayer, and Bible study.

Preaching would be their top ministerial priority, and they would labor to make their sermons simple, direct, and full of Christ. They would be diligent pastors, who would make it a point to be in the homes of their flock. They would be concerned about the health of their denominational body as well as their own church. They would labor to make them more scripturally sound and pastorally effective. They would promote evangelism at home and missions abroad. And last but not least, they would be men who pursue holiness.

**T4L:** I would agree; his pursuit of holiness is something we should all strive to imitate. How did J.C. Ryle deal with controversy, and how can his example instruct Christians to handle controversy today?

**Bennett Rogers:** J. C. Ryle participated in nearly every controversy involving

evangelical churchmen from around 1860 forward. He considered the emergence of ritualism and neologianism [adopting novel views] to be the two most serious threats to Protestant and evangelical orthodoxy, but he was involved in a number of other theological skirmishes as well. *Holiness*, it should be remembered, was written in response to one of these lesser controversies—the emergence of the Keswick Movement.

In *The Tender Lion*, I tried to show that Ryle was driven by two related pastoral concerns. He wanted to do “good to souls”, which he defined as “conversion for the unconverted, decision for the wavering, and growth in grace for the believer”, and to make the Church of England more pastorally effective. When false teaching or unbiblical practices threatened to undermine these pursuits, Ryle felt compelled by his ordination vows to “drive away all strange and erroneous doctrines which are contrary to God’s word”.

I think Ryle’s discrimination as a controversialist is certainly worthy of imitation. With the advent of the internet and social media, it is easier than ever to pick a theological fight. Ryle’s example helps us discern when controversy becomes a positive necessity and when it is not.

Ryle’s integrity as a controversialist is also praiseworthy. His controversial writings always focused on ideas, not people, and he never engaged in personal attacks. In fact, I can’t think of a single instance when he spoke ill of an opponent. When he named them, which he almost never did, it was typically to compliment them. His opponents weren’t so kind. Charles Spurgeon criticized Ryle by name in *The Sword and the Trowel* on more than one occasion, and some of his ritualistic opponents stooped so low as to mock his marriages (Ryle married and buried three wives during his lifetime) in print.

**T4L:** It’s a sad thing to see Church leadership mock fellow leaders/believers in this way. Unfortunately, that type of response to controversy has only increased in our day and age. We should definitely be looking toward Ryle as an example, as you’ve mentioned. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Dr. Rogers.

## Why You Should Read the Puritans

By Joel Beeke

**The great eighteenth-century revivalist, George Whitefield, wrote:**

*The Puritans [were] burning and shining lights. When cast out by the black Bartholomew Act, and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in a special manner wrote and preached as men having authority. Though dead, by their writings they yet speak: a peculiar unction attends them to this very hour (Works, 4:306-307).*

Whitefield went on to predict that Puritan writings would continue to be resurrected until the end of time, due to their scriptural spirituality. Today, we are living in such a time. Interest in Puritan books has seldom been more intense. In the last fifty years, 150 Puritan authors and nearly 700 Puritan titles have been brought back into print.

Puritan literature has so multi-





plied that few book lovers can afford to purchase all that is being published. What books should you buy? Where can you find a brief summary of each Puritan work and a brief biography of each author so that you can have a glimpse of who is behind all these books?

These kinds of questions motivated Randall Pederson and me to write *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints*. In this book, we tell the life stories of the 150 Puritan writers who have been reprinted in the past fifty years. We have also included concise reviews of the 700 newly published Puritan titles, plus bibliographical information on each book. And we have noted the books that we consider most critical to have in a personal library.

We had four goals for writing this book: first, that these godly Puritan writers will serve as mentors for our own lives. That is why we have told the stories of the Puritans on a layperson's level and kept them short. You could read one life story each day during your devotional time.

Second, we trust that when you read these reviews of Puritan writings, you will be motivated to read a number of these books, each of which should help you grow deeper in your walk with the Lord.

Third, we hope this book will serve as a guide for you to purchase books for your families and friends, to help them grow in faith.

Finally, for those of you who are already readers of Puritan literature, this guide is designed to direct you to further study and to introduce you to lesser-known Puritans that you may be unaware of.

## Definition of Puritanism

Just who were the Puritan writers? They were not only the two thousand ministers who were ejected from the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity in 1662, but also those ministers in England and North America, from the sixteenth century through the early eighteenth century, who worked to reform and purify the church and to lead people toward godly living consistent with the Reformed doctrines of grace.

Puritanism grew out of three needs: (1) the need for biblical preaching and the teaching of sound Reformed doctrine; (2) the need for biblical, personal piety that stressed the work of the Holy Spirit in the faith and life of the believer; and (3) the need to restore biblical simplicity in liturgy, vestments, and church government, so that a well-ordered church life would promote the worship of the triune God as prescribed in His Word (*The Genius of Puritanism*, 11ff.).

Doctrinally, Puritanism was a kind of vigorous Calvinism; experientially, it was warm and contagious; evangelistically, it was aggressive, yet tender; ecclesiastically, it

was theocentric and worshipful; politically, it aimed to be scriptural, balanced, and bound by conscience before God in the relationships of king, Parliament, and subjects; culturally, it had lasting impact throughout succeeding generations and centuries until today (Durstun and Eales, eds., *The Culture of English Puritanism*, 1560-1700).

## How to Profit from Reading the Puritans

Let me offer you nine reasons why it will help you spiritually to read Puritan literature still today.

### 1. Puritan Writings Help Shape Life by Scripture

The Puritans loved, lived, and breathed Holy Scripture. They relished the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word. Their books are all Word-centered. More than 90 percent of their writings are repackaged sermons that are rich with scriptural exposition. The Puritan writers truly believed in the sufficiency of Scripture for life and godliness.

“Devotional reading should be confrontational as well as comforting.”

If you read the Puritans regularly, their Bible-centeredness will become contagious. These writings will show you how to yield wholehearted allegiance to the Bible’s message. Like the Puritans, you will become a believer of the Living Book, echoing the truth of John Flavel, who said, “The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying.”

Do you want to read books that put you into the Scriptures and keep you there, shaping your life by *sola Scriptura*? Read the Puritans. Read the *Soli Deo Gloria Puritan Pulpit Series*. As you read, enhance your understanding by looking up and studying all the referenced Scriptures.

### 2. Puritan Writings Show How to Integrate Biblical Doctrine Into Daily Life

The Puritan writings do this in three ways: first, they *address your mind*. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, the Puritans refused to set mind and heart against each other, but viewed the mind as the palace of faith. “In conversion, reason is elevated,” John Preston wrote.

The Puritans understood that a mindless Christianity fosters a spineless Christianity. An anti-intellectual gospel quickly becomes an empty, formless gospel that never gets beyond “felt needs”, which is something that is happening in many

churches today. Puritan literature is a great help for understanding the vital connection between what we believe with our minds and how that affects the way we live. Jonathan Edwards's *Justification by Faith Alone* and William Lyford's *The Instructed Christian* are particularly helpful guidance for this.

Second, Puritan writings *confront your conscience*. The Puritans are masters at convicting us about the heinous nature of our sin against an infinite God. They excel at exposing specific sins, then asking questions to press home conviction of those sins. As one Puritan wrote, "We must go with the stick of divine truth and beat every bush behind which a sinner hides, until like Adam who hid, he stands before God in his nakedness."

Devotional reading should be confrontational as well as comforting. We grow little if our consciences are not pricked daily and directed to Christ. Since we are prone to run for the bushes when we feel threatened, we need daily help to be brought before the living God "naked and opened unto the eyes of with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:12). In this, the Puritans excel. If you truly want to learn what sin is and experience how sin is worse than suffering, read Jeremiah Burroughs's *The Evils of Evils* and Thomas Shepard's *The Sincere Convert and the Sound Believer*.

Third, the Puritan writers *engage your heart*. They excel in feeding the mind with solid biblical substance and they move the heart with affectionate warmth. They write out of love for God's Word, love for the glory of God, and love for the souls of readers.

For books that beautifully balance objective truth and subjective experience in Christianity—books that combine, as J.I. Packer puts it, "clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion" (Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, x)—books that inform your mind, confront your conscience, and engage your heart, read the Puritans. Specifically, read Vincent Alsop's *Practical Godliness*.

### **3. Puritan Writings Show How to Exalt Christ and See His Beauty**

The Puritan, Thomas Adams, wrote: "Christ is the sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line, the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus." Likewise, Isaac Ambrose wrote, "Think of Christ as the very substance, marrow, soul, and scope of the whole Scriptures."

The Puritans loved Christ and exalted in His beauty. Samuel Rutherford wrote: "Put the beauty of ten thousand worlds of paradises, like the Garden of Eden in one; put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colors, all tastes, all joys, all loveliness, all

sweetness in one. O what a fair and excellent thing would that be? And yet it would be less to that fair and dearest well-beloved Christ than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes, and foundations of ten thousand earths.”

If you would know Christ better and love Him more fully, immerse yourself in Puritan literature. Read Robert Asty’s book, *Rejoicing in the Lord Jesus*.

#### **4. Puritan Writings Reveal the Trinitarian Character of Theology**

The Puritans were driven by a deep sense of the infinite glory of a Triune God. When they answered the first question of the Shorter Catechism that man’s chief end was to glorify God, they meant the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They took John Calvin’s glorious understanding of the unity of the Trinity in the Godhead, and showed how that worked itself out in electing, redeeming, and sanctifying love and grace in the lives of believers. John Owen wrote an entire book on the Christian believer’s communion with God as Father, Jesus as Savior, and the Holy Spirit as Comforter. The Puritans teach us how to remain God-centered while being vitally concerned about Christian experience, so that we don’t fall into the trap of glorifying experience for its own sake.

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“The Puritans wrote on practical subjects such as how to pray, how to develop genuine piety, how to conduct family worship...”

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If you want to appreciate each Person of the Trinity, so that you can say with Samuel Rutherford, “I don’t know which Person of the Trinity I love the most, but this I know, I love each of them, and I need them all,” read John Owen’s *Communion with God* and Jonathan Edwards’ works on the Trinity.

#### **5. Puritan Writings Show You How to Handle Trials**

Puritanism grew out of a great struggle between the truth of God’s Word and its enemies. Reformed Christianity was under attack in Great Britain, much like Reformed Christianity is under attack today. The Puritans were good soldiers in the conflict, enduring great hardships and suffering much. Their lives and their writings stand ready to arm us for our battles, and to encourage us in our suffering. The Puritans teach us how we need affliction to humble us (Deuteronomy 8:2), to teach us what sin is (Zephaniah 1:12), and how that brings us to God (Hosea 5:15). As Robert Leighton wrote, “Affliction is the diamond dust that heaven polishes its jewels with.” The Puritans show us how God’s rod of affliction is His means to write Christ’s image more fully upon us, so that we may be partakers of His righteousness and holiness (Hebrews 12:10-11).

If you would learn how to handle your trials in a truly Christ-exalting way,



read Thomas Boston's *The Crook in the Lot: The Sovereignty and Wisdom of God Displayed in the Afflictions of Men*.

## **6. Puritan Writings Explain True Spirituality**

The Puritans stress the spirituality of the law, spiritual warfare against indwelling sin, the childlike fear of God, the wonder of grace, the art of meditation, the dreadfulness of Hell, and the glories of Heaven. If you want to live deep as a Christian, read Oliver Heywood's *Heart Treasure*. Read the Puritans devotionally, and then pray to be like them, as they lived to mirror Jesus. Ask questions such as: Am I, like the Puritans, thirsting to glorify the Triune God? Am I motivated by biblical truth and biblical fire? Do I share their view of the vital necessity of conversion and of being clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Do I follow them as far as they followed Christ?

## **7. Puritan Writings Show How to Live by Holistic Faith**

The Puritans apply every subject they write about to practical "uses"—as they term it. These "uses" will propel you into passionate, effective action for Christ's kingdom. Their own daily lives integrated Christian truth with covenant vision; they knew no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Their writings can assist you immeasurably in living a life that centers on God in every area, appreciating His gifts, and declaring everything "holiness to the Lord".

The Puritans were excellent covenant theologians. They lived covenant theology, covenanting themselves, their families, their churches, and their nations to God. Yet they did not fall into the error of hyper-covenantalism, in which the covenant of grace becomes a substitute for personal conversion. They promoted a comprehensive worldview, a total Christian philosophy, a holistic approach of bringing the whole gospel to bear on all of life, striving to bring every action in conformity with Christ, so that believers would mature and grow in faith.

The Puritans wrote on practical subjects such as how to pray, how to develop genuine piety, how to conduct family worship, and how to raise children for Christ. In short, they taught how to develop a "rational, resolute, passionate piety [that is] conscientious without becoming obsessive, law-oriented without lapsing into legalism, and expressive of Christian liberty without any shameful lurches into license" (ibid. xii).

If you would grow in practical Christianity and vital piety, read the compilation of *The Puritans on Prayer*, Richard Steele's *The Character of an Upright Man*, George Hamond's *Case for Family Worship*, Cotton Mather's *Help for Distressed Parents*, and Arthur Hildersham's *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*.

## **8. Puritan Writings Teach the Importance and Primacy of Preaching**

To the Puritans, preaching was the high point of public worship. Preaching must be expository and didactic, they said; evangelistic and convicting, experiential and applicatory, powerful and “plain” in its presentation, ever respecting the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

If you would help evangelicals recover the pulpit and a high view of the ministry in our day, read Puritan sermons. Read William Perkins’s *The Art of Prophesying* and Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor*.

## **9. Puritan Writings Show How to Live in Two Worlds**

The Puritans said we should have heaven “in our eye” throughout our earthly pilgrimage. They took seriously the New Testament passages that say we must keep the “hope of glory” before our minds to guide and shape our lives here on earth. They viewed this life as “the gymnasium and dressing room where we are prepared for heaven”, teaching us that preparation for death is the first step in learning to truly live (Packer, Quest, 13).

If you would live in this world in light of the better world to come, read the Puritans. Read Richard Baxter’s *The Saint’s Everlasting Life* and Richard Alleine’s *Heaven Opened*.

## **Where to Begin**

If you are just starting to read the Puritans, begin with John Bunyan’s *The Fear of God*, John Flavel’s *Keeping the Heart*, and Thomas Watson’s *The Art of Divine Contentment*, then move on to the works of John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Jonathan Edwards.

For sources that introduce you to the Puritans and their literature, begin with *Meet the Puritans*. Then, to learn more about the lifestyle and theology of the Puritans, read Leland Ryken’s *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Peter Lewis’s *The Genius of Puritanism* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), and Erroll Hulse’s *Who Are the Puritans? And What Do They Teach?* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000). Then move on to James I. Packer’s *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990) and my book, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006).

Whitefield was right: the Puritans, though long dead, still speak through their writings. Their books still praise them in the gates. Reading the Puritans will place you, and keep you, on the right path theologically, experientially, and practically. As

Packer writes, “The Puritans were strongest just where Protestants today are weakest, and their writings can give us more real help than those of any other body of Christian teachers, past or present, since the days of the apostles” (quoted in Hulse, *Reformation & Revival*, 44).

I wholeheartedly agree. I have been reading Christian literature for more than forty years and can freely say that I know of no group of writers in Church history that can so benefit your mind and soul as the Puritans. God used their books to convert me as a teenager, and He has been using their books ever since to help me grow in understanding John the Baptists’ summary of Christian sanctification: “*Christ must increase and I must decrease.*”

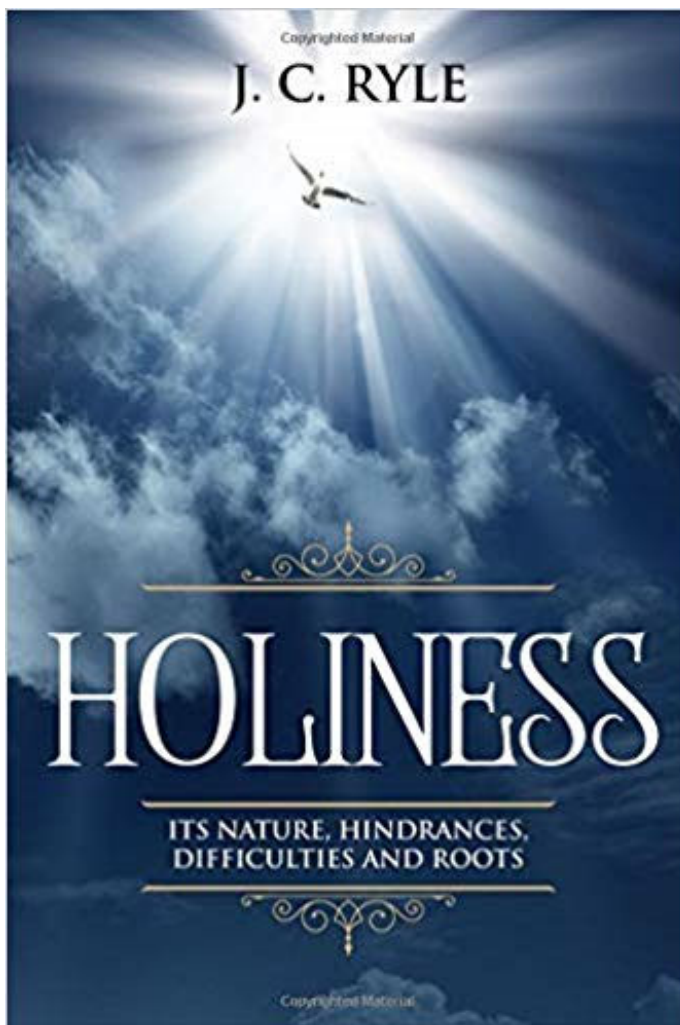
In his endorsement of *Meet the Puritans*, R.C. Sproul says, “The recent revival of interest in and commitment to the truths of Reformed theology is due in large measure to the rediscovery of Puritan literature. The Puritans of old have become the prophets for our time. This book is a treasure for the church.”

So, our prayer is that God will use *Meet the Puritans* to inspire you to read Puritan writings. With the Spirit’s blessing, they will enrich your life in many ways as they open the Scriptures to you, probe your conscience, bare yours sins, lead you to repentance, and conform your life to Christ.

**You might want to pass along *Meet the Puritans* and Puritan books to your friends as well.** There is no better gift than a good book. I sometimes wonder what would happen if Christians spent only fifteen minutes a day reading Puritan writings, along with their personal daily bible reading. Over a year that would add up to reading about twenty average-size books, and over a lifetime, about 1,500 books. Who knows how the Holy Spirit might use such a spiritual diet of reading! Would it usher in a worldwide revival? Would it fill the earth again with the knowledge of the Lord from sea to sea? That is my prayer, my vision, my dream. *Tolle lege*—take up and read! You will be glad you did.

## Why We Still Need J.C. Ryle's Teaching on Holiness Today

By Bennett Rogers



**There is a large, two-sided cart at my local library with a faded laminated sign that reads, “Books, a dollar a bag.”** I make it a point to visit that cart

every time I stop by in search of the proverbial needle in the haystack, and I am always struck by the number of religious books that are tottering on the verge of oblivion. Some of the titles deserve to be neglected or forgotten, and it would probably do the Church good for them to graduate from the cart to the dumpster. Is *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* by J. C. Ryle one of them?

Much has changed in the 140 years since the enlarged edition of *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* was first published. Has Ryle's work become outdated? Has its usefulness come to an end? Does it belong on the cart? Do we still need *Holiness*? I answer with an emphatic “yes”! Before we explore the question of relevance, let us first consider its context and content.



## Context

*Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* was originally borne out of controversy. In the latter half of the 19th century, evangelicals began embracing new views about the Christian life. Popular holiness teachers—such as William Edwin Boardman, Robert Pearsall Smith, and his wife, Hanna Whitall Smith—urged Christians to embrace a superior form of spiritual life that included a ‘second conversion experience’, ‘full salvation’, and ‘deliverance from all known sin immediately by faith alone’. A series of popular holiness meetings were held in the mid-1870s, which ultimately gave birth to the Keswick Convention.

Many evangelicals were suspicious of this new holiness teaching. To many it appeared to be the old heresy of perfectionism in new garb. At the very least, these new spiritual guides were urging evangelicals to abandon the doctrine of progressive sanctification as taught by the Reformers and Puritans. Refutations began appearing almost immediately in the evangelical press. In 1877, J. C. Ryle published the first edition of *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, which was enlarged in 1879. It proved to be one of the most extensive critiques of early Keswick spirituality and one of Ryle’s most popular and enduring works.

## Content

The enlarged edition of *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (1879) contains 20 papers, as well as an excellent introduction and a chapter with extracts from Robert Traill and Thomas Brooks. The first seven chapters are the heart of *Holiness* and form a book within a book. Here Ryle explains “the real nature of holiness, and the temptations and difficulties which all must expect who follow it.” He begins with sin and human corruption (chapter 1), which is the foundation for a proper understanding of holiness. In the next two chapters he treats holiness doctrinally (chapter 2) and practically (chapter 3). In the chapters that follow he argues that the Christian life is, at its very core, a fight (chapter 4); that the cost of following Christ must be counted (chapter 5); and that growth in grace is an essential part of true holiness (chapter 6). He concludes this section with an encouraging and pastorally sensitive treatment of the doctrine of assurance (chapter 7).

These seven chapters are Ryle at his best. He manages to be doctrinal and pastoral, convicting and encouraging, systematic but not abstract. At its core, it’s a biblical argument, but he regularly appeals to Church history (especially the English Puritans) and Church confessions (especially Anglican formularies) to strengthen his position. Above all, Ryle manages to keep the spotlight on Christ and his gospel, even as he encourages self-examination and self-exertion. It’s a phenomenal achievement.

The rest of the book consists of a series of holiness-related sermons that are

arranged thematically. The first group (chapters 8–12) is a series of character studies that serve, both positively and negatively, as examples for Christians. Perhaps the most interesting is Christ himself. Ryle explains, “He that would be conformed to Christ’s image, and become a Christ-like man, must be constantly studying Christ himself.” This is the “one secret of eminent holiness.” The Church is the subject of the second and smallest group (chapters 13–14) of sermons. At first glance, this might seem like an odd choice, but Ryle skillfully connects it back to the theme of the book. Real, practical holiness is the leading characteristic of members of the Church triumphant, and members of the Church militant are urged to make spiritual progress.

Jesus is the focal point of the third group of sermons (chapters 15–18). These chapters contain a remarkable blend of Christology, doxology, evangelism, and spiritual instruction. The next to last chapter (chapter 19) is a section unto itself. It’s a diagnostic sermon Ryle preached in 1879 in which he assesses the “wants of the times”. Though times have changed, Ryle’s analysis, for the most part, is as applicable today as it was then. The final chapter (chapter 20), “Christ is All,” concludes the work by extolling the supremacy of King Jesus. Ryle’s justification for this conclusion is worth noting:

*Christ is the mainspring both of doctrinal and practical Christianity. A right knowledge of Christ is essential to a right knowledge of sanctification as well as justification. He that follows after holiness will make no progress unless he gives to Christ his rightful place. I began the volume with a plain statement about sin. Let me end it with an equally plain statement about Christ.*

The fact that sermons make up the second half of *Holiness* doesn’t diminish their value or power in the least. The sermon on Lot’s wife, “A Woman to Be Remembered”, is one of the most powerful sermons I’ve ever read. My personal impressions aside, these sermons illustrate and expand on the truths of the previous section, and they give us insight into how Ryle brought them to bear on his congregation. Read in this light, *Holiness* instructs us in pastoral theology as well as Christian spirituality.

## Relevance

Having considered the origin and substance of the work, let’s return to the question of relevance. Why do we still need *Holiness*? I would like to suggest three reasons.

First, *Holiness* is a classic statement of Puritan and evangelical spirituality written in simple, forceful, modern English. A quick perusal of Ryle’s footnotes reveals something of his indebtedness to the English Puritans. *Holiness* is filled with

quotes from Thomas Goodwin, Samuel Rutherford, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Manton, John Flavel, William Gurnall, Thomas Watson, Thomas Brooks, Richard Baxter, and especially John Owen and John Bunyan. The substance is even more telling. The work abounds with Puritan themes, such as the sinfulness of sin and the need to mortify it, the means and marks of growth in grace, and the desirability of assurance and hindrances to its attainment to name a few. Simply put, Ryle's *Holiness* is Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in propositional form.

The spiritual vision of *Holiness* is evangelical, as well as Puritan. Biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism—the leading characteristics of evangelicalism according to David Bebbington—dominate the book as well. It is difficult to point to a chapter in which these themes don't take center stage. Ryle's activism is particularly noteworthy. For example, in chapter three, he argues that Christians must pursue holiness because "it is the most likely way to do good to others". And again in chapter seven, he argues assurance is to be desired because it makes a

Christian an active worker: "*None, generally speaking, do so much for Christ on earth as those who enjoy the fullest confidence of a free entrance into heaven, and trust not in their own works, but in the finished work of Christ.*" The introspection and navel-gazing that plagued some Puritan authors is entirely absent in this work. *Holiness* is as much a call to action as it is self-reflection.

The style of the work makes *Holiness* remarkably accessible to modern readers, who may otherwise struggle with the unabridged, Latinized-English of John Owen or William Romaine. In many respects, style is what separates *Holiness* from many of the spiritual classics of the 17th and 18th centuries. It also makes *Holiness* compelling, convicting, and encouraging. As is the case with Ryle's other works, you quickly get the impression that the author is speaking directly to you. He speaks as an "I" and directly addresses the reader as a "you". The vague and hazy "we" and "us" pronouns that characterized much Victorian preaching cannot be found in this work. If you read *Holiness*, expect to be addressed directly, repeatedly.

Second, *Holiness* is theologically rich and pastorally sensitive. The structure of the book itself bears this out. Chapters one to seven (which comprised the first edition of the work) are essentially a theological treatise on holiness. They are the

closest Ryle ever came to writing systematic theology. Chapters 8 to 21, as previously noted, consist of a series of sermons on various aspects of holiness. But don't let the structure fool you, each chapter is filled with theological precision and pastoral wisdom.

The chapters on "sin", "sanctification", and "assurance" bear this out. These chapters are undoubtedly the most theologically sophisticated of the entire book. In them Ryle defines terms, exegetes Scripture, discusses Church formularies, quotes authorities, and refutes other positions. Nevertheless, he never loses sight of the pastoral purposes of the work.

"Have we become distracted by politics, controversy, party spirit, and the world?"

The same is true of the sermons which make up the second half of the work. Because they are sermons Ryle preached to his congregation, they contain more exposition, exhortation, and practical application than the first seven chapters; however, they are by no means devoid of technical theological discussions. Ryle has no problem discussing the full divinity and humanity of Christ, or the nature of the Church, or the nature and work of the Christian ministry when the text calls for it.

In this way, *Holiness* serves as a model for pastors, teachers, and other Christian workers. Ryle demonstrates that it is possible to be theologically precise and pastorally sensitive at the same time, and he shows you how to do it. It is well worth the time of preachers and teachers to see how he takes the rich theological content that make up the first half of the work and brings it to bear on his congregation in the second.

Finally, *Holiness* challenges us not to be content with low standards of personal godliness. In his introduction to the enlarged edition of *Holiness*, Ryle makes the following observation:

*I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country. Politics, or controversy, or party spirit, or worldliness have eaten out the heart of lively piety in too many of us. The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters. The immense importance of "adorning the doctrine of God our Savior," and making it lovely and beautiful by our daily habits and tempers, has been far too much overlooked.*

*Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that "religious" persons, so-called, are not so amiable, and unselfish, and good-natured, as others who*

*make no profession of religion. Yet sanctification, in its place and proportion, is quite as important as justification. Sound Protestant and evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless: it does positive harm. It is despised by keen-sighted and shrewd men of the world, as an unreal and hollow thing, and brings religion into contempt.*

**Are we neglecting the subject of personal godliness?** Have we become distracted by politics, controversy, party spirit, and the world? Has our standard of living fallen painfully below the New Testament standard? Have we failed to beautify our profession with our daily habits and tempers? If so, then we still need J. C. Ryle's *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*.



## Distinguishing Between Sanctification and Legalism

By David Dunham



**Fear of being accused of legalism has, in some circles of Evangelicalism, led to decreasing calls for personal holiness.** This is, I believe, particularly true among younger Christians. Many of them

have grown up in a form of hyper-fundamentalism that was marked by all sorts of legalism. One can appreciate, then, and even applaud their disdain for it. Yet, I am increasingly concerned that this fear has caused many of us to be suspicious of all holiness talk. We must remind ourselves that sanctification and legalism are *not* the same thing.

### The Hole in Our Holiness

Several years ago, Pastor Kevin DeYoung wrote about the “*Hole in Holiness*”, describing a kind of Evangelicalism that is exceedingly reluctant to speak about, and fight for, personal holiness in the life of the believer. He says:

*Among conservative Christians there is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are truly gospel-centered we won't talk about rules or imperatives or moral exertion. We are so eager not to confuse indicatives (what God has done) and imperatives (what we should do) that we get leery of letting biblical commands lead uncomfortably to conviction of sin. We're scared of words like diligence, effort, and duty. Pastors don't know how to preach the good news in their sermons and still strongly exhort churchgoers to cleanse themselves from every defilement of body and spirit (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7:1). We know legalism (salvation by law keeping) and antinomianism (salvation without need for law keeping) are both wrong, but antinomianism feels like a much safer danger. (The Hole in Our Holiness, 19)*

“They asked the participants ten questions to gauge obedience in the Christian life...”

Out of fear that we will promote—or at least be accused of promoting—legalism, many Christians can no longer talk about the pursuit of godliness. Worse still, godliness itself is very poor in the church. Brad Waggoner and his team at B&H surveyed 2500 Protestants who attend church on a regular basis. Their research and the results of their surveys revealed some disappointing trends.

They asked the participants ten questions to gauge obedience in the Christian life and found that “only 2 percent of the respondents, about 50 of the 2500, gave an ideal response to all ten questions” (*The Shape of Faith to Come*, 84). So, for example, on the question/statement, “A Christian must learn to deny himself/herself in order to serve Christ”, only twenty-eight percent “agreed strongly”. On the question/statement, “When I come to realize that some aspect of my life is not right in God’s eyes, I make the necessary changes”, only twenty-three percent “agreed strongly”. Thirty-two percent of their sample pray “irregularly or seldom”. Fifty-one percent

“rarely or never” memorize Scripture, and only thirty-seven percent of their sample says that “one of the main reasons I live my life the way I do is to please and honor God”. Needless to say, pursuit of godliness is an issue in the church.

## **Distinguishing Between Legalism and Sanctification**

If godliness is poor in church pastors, leaders, and Christians in general, we must find a healthy way to talk about sanctification. We can start by distinguishing clearly between it and legalism. Several helpful steps can allow us to make this distinction clear.

First, we should clearly define legalism. Some of the confusion lies in our understanding of the terminology. Many Christians assume all forms of intentional obedience are legalism. Obedience that happens “accidentally” is acceptable. But attempts to purposefully obey God are perceived as attempts to be legalistic. Legalism, however, is specifically *self-righteousness*. It ascribes more merit to my good deeds than they are worth. It attempts to attain a high level of morality apart from God.

Not all obedience works this way. My daughter might obey me in order to make her brother look bad. She might obey me in order to try and get something from me later. But sometimes she obeys me simply because she loves me and wants to please me. Christian obedience works this way too. Not all obedience is legalism. When we clarify the terms, we can begin to see the difference.

“We have a role in our own sanctification, and yet, the Bible tells us that— ultimately— even this is God’s work.”

Second, we need to understand our role in sanctification. Salvation is all by grace through faith, and this is not of our own doing (Ephesians 2:8). There is

no denying that salvation is a monergistic act. Yet, once we become believers, empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, we are commanded to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called” (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10). The New Testament is replete with imperatives. We are commanded, as followers of Christ to do all sorts of things. Our spiritual growth involves our obedience. Christians are not free to do whatever they want; we are under the law of Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:21). Love of Jesus demands obedience to His commands (John 14:15; 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:3). When some people speak of legalism, it is evident that they do not understand our role in the process of sanctification. Teaching on this and studying this can help clarify much.

Finally, we ought to remind ourselves that even in our obedience we are dependent upon God. We have a role in our own sanctification, and yet, the Bible tells us that— ultimately— even this is God’s work. So Paul says tells the Philippians to work and that ultimately it is God who works.



Philippians 2:12-13 explains, *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

Work out your salvation “for it is God who works in you”. We work, but ultimately it is God who accomplishes the work. There are other examples, too. We are being transformed in degrees by the Spirit (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18). The Lord makes us increase in holiness (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:12-13). God is the one who sanctifies us completely (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:23). Sanctification is by the Spirit (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:13). God works in us that which is pleasing in His sight (Hebrews 13:20-21). He who began a good work will see it to completion (Philippians 1:6). Yes, we must work, we must obey, we must strive towards godliness, and yet, even this is dependent upon the Lord. It is not legalism when we depend upon God to transform us. Remembering this frees us. As we depend upon God for sanctification, we do not need to fear legalism.

**Holiness is important to the Christian and to the Church as a whole.** The threat of legalism cannot keep us from addressing the subject. Distinguishing between sanctification and legalism can help us move in the right direction.

## Crucified with Christ: How the Cross Kills Sin

By Brian Hedges

**The most graphic image that Scripture uses for the killing of sin is crucifixion.** The cross has rightly stood at the center of Christian theology throughout church history.

Crucifixion was so painful that a word was invented to describe it: *excruciating*, which literally means “out of the cross”. The Jewish historian Josephus said that to be crucified was to die a thousand deaths. The Roman historian Cicero said, “There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed” as crucifixion, and “the very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, eyes, and his ears.”[1]

With this background, we can begin to understand why it was so scandalous for Christians to serve a crucified King. But despite the scandal, Paul actually boasted in the cross and represented the life of a Christian as a crucified life, employing





this graphic image as a metaphor for the believer's relationship with sin. Paul's words to the Galatians were especially poignant:

*For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me...And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires...But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 2:19–20, 5:24, 6:14).*

What was it about crucifixion that led Paul to write this way, and what does it mean for us today?

### **The Cross and the Nature of Mortification**

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,” writes Paul in Galatians 5:24. These words depict the nature of a believer's break with sin in graphic, but insightful, terms. Sin's death is like a crucifixion: slow, gradual, painful, and eventually final.

When a condemned criminal picked up his cross to carry it to the execution site, there was no turning back, no chance for reprieve, parole, or pardon. Crucifixion was a death sentence. But the death would be gradual, often taking not only hours, but days. When first nailed to the cross, the victim would struggle for survival, crying out in agony with all his might. But as he lost blood and strength, the struggle would lessen and his cries would grow faint.

Putting sin to death is a similar experience. There is a finality to the decisive break with sin to which our Lord calls us: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Once we truly pick up our cross, having had our hearts changed by the grace of Christ to yield our lives to Him, there is no turning back. The die has been cast, the future has been determined: sin must be killed. Taking up the cross to follow Jesus means that sin has received a death sentence. But it doesn't die all at once. No, putting sin to death is a slow process.

Mortification is also a painful process, and we must never allow ourselves to think that the pain associated with sanctification is a sign that something is wrong. Crucifixion is painful, and Scripture presents mortification as a kind of crucifixion. The pain cannot be separated from the process.

At first, our sinful flesh struggles against the Spirit, screaming in agony to be spared. But mortification gradually weakens the power of sinful desires in our hearts. In the words of Octavius Winslow, “Nail after nail must pierce our corrup-

tions, until the entire body of sin, each member thus transfixed, is crucified and slain.”[2]

## **The Cross and the Power of Mortification**

The image of crucifixion provides a second and even more important insight about mortification. This truth is found in its connection to Christ’s crucifixion for us. In Galatians 2, Paul points to our crucifixion with Christ:

*“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20).

It is significant that this *precedes* Paul’s later statements in this letter about crucifying the flesh and being crucified to the world (Galatians 5:24, 6:14).

The death of sin in the death of Christ—this connection reminds us that the power of mortification comes directly from Christ crucified for us. As John Owen said, “The death of Christ is the death of sin.”[3] Only by virtue of His death to sin as our representative do we receive the power to renounce sin in our lives.

This is also the teaching of Paul in Romans 6, where he says that “our old self was crucified with [Christ]...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (v 6). This is part of Paul’s argument for why it is morally incongruous for a believer to continue to live in sin. Christ was crucified for sin (not His, but ours). In His death, “he died to sin, once for all” (v 10), meaning that He died to the judicial power and authority of sin. Since we died with Him, sin has lost its power over us. “So,” Paul says, “you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions” (vv. 11–12).

This means that the *power* we need for crucifying sin comes from the cross, where Christ was crucified. It is only through virtue of *His* death to sin that you and I can put sin to death in *our* lives. The only way you can kill sin is through the power of the Spirit applying the death of Christ to your heart and life.

### **“Let us slay sin, for Christ was slain.”**

Christ’s effectual sin-canceling work of the cross is therefore the only power that will enable us to kill sin in our own lives. And this is one of the purposes for which He died. As Peter says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

As the great nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon, in one of his characteristically Christ-centered sermons, declared:

*The best preaching is, “We preach Christ crucified.” The best living is, “We are crucified with Christ.” The best man is a crucified man...The more we live be-*

*holding our Lord's unutterable griefs, and understanding how he has fully put away our sin, the more holiness shall we produce. The more we dwell where the cries of Calvary can be heard, where we can view heaven, and earth, and hell, all moved by his wondrous passion—the more noble will our lives become. Nothing puts life into men like a dying Savior. Get you close to Christ, and carry the remembrance of him about you from day to day, and you will do right royal deeds. Come, let us slay sin, for Christ was slain. Come, let us bury all our pride, for Christ was buried. Come, let us rise to newness of life, for Christ has risen.[4]*

## The Cross and the Means of Mortification

We have been discussing the objective power of the cross of Christ to put our sins to death. This objective power is real and effectual, regardless of our feelings about it at any given point. But there is also a *subjective* element involved: we must *exercise faith in Christ and His cross* in order to enjoy the fruits of His victory over

“The great object of our faith and love is Christ, as portrayed in the gospel.”

sin in our lives. As Paul goes on to say, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

The cross not only shows us (1) the *nature* of mortification (a slow, gradual, painful death), and (2) the *power* of mortification (crucifixion with Christ). It also

shows us (3) the *means* of mortification. In order to kill sin, we must exercise both faith and love. We exercise these graces by fixing our minds on and filling our affections with the cross of Christ.

## How to Do It

But how do we *practically* set our minds on and fill our affections with the cross? How do we exercise faith and love toward Christ crucified for us? It is not done with a crucifix or some other visual aid. This is not the method proposed in Scripture. No, Paul tells us how Christ is portrayed as crucified: “It was before your eyes [that is, through preaching] that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” (Galatians 3:1b–2).

The great object of our faith and love is Christ, as portrayed in the gospel. Only as we gaze on the glory of the Lord in the gospel are we transformed by the Spirit (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18).

## We do this as we:

- Consider the purpose of Christ's death for us with an expectation of help from Him.
- Consider how our Savior died to destroy the works of the Devil, to redeem us from lawlessness, and to cleanse and sanctify us through his blood.
- Meditate on the mercy and compassion of Christ, the mighty Maker who died in your place.
- Remember that your ransom was purchased at the price of His precious blood.
- Consider the cost of the gifts you have received through the cross—wisdom, righteousness, holiness, sonship, redemption, and future resurrection to glory forever.
- Reflect on the salvation and safety that your Brother, Captain, and King has secured for you.
- Realize that God is more satisfied with Jesus' obedience than He was grieved by your sins.
- Ponder the pain and the shame of the scourging and scoffing, the spitting and mocking, the crown of thorns and the nails in His hands, and all the cruel wounds He received on your behalf.
- Understand that you are not only acquitted, but accepted as fully righteous in God's sight, *perfect* in the eyes of the law, because the full measure of divine wrath was poured out on Jesus for you, and His obedience has been counted as yours.
- Allow our hearts to be filled with the glories of His triumph over Satan, sin, and death.
- Allow our affections to be captured anew by the self-sacrificing love of the Lord and Lover of our souls; *then* we will discover that the stranglehold of sin on our hearts has grown weaker, that sin is less alluring, and that our fallen desires have been displaced by desires for God, His glory, and His grace.

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!*

*My sin, not in part but the whole,*

*Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,*

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! [5]*

When you are fighting sin, fill your mind with these truths. Say to the Lord, "Jesus, you died to free me from sin, to put my sinful passions and desires to death, to change me and restore me in Your glorious image. Thank you for Your undying

love! Now, cleanse me with Your blood. Strengthen me with Your power. Uphold me by Your grace. Help me, Lord!” This posture of dependent faith and zealous love toward the Savior, who was slain for us, is lethal to sin.

**References:**

- [1] Cicero, quoted in Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Eerdmans, 1995), 217–218.
- [2] Octavius Winslow, *No Condemnation in Christ Jesus* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 151.
- [3] John Owen, *The Holy Spirit: Abridged and Made Easy to Read by R. J. K. Law* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 175.
- [4] C. H. Spurgeon, “To Lovers of Jesus – An Example” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pilgrim Publications, 1977 reprint) Sermon #1834.
- [5] Horatio Spafford, “It Is Well with My Soul,” 1873.



# Cultivating Holiness in the Christian Life

By Dave Jenkins



**Believers are called to holy living.** In this article, we will examine seven different ways to live a holy life.

## First, Know and Love Scripture

Scripture is God's primary road to holiness and to spiritual growth—with the Spirit as Master Teacher, blessing the reading and searching of God's Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). And Peter advised, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation" (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:2).

If you wish not to remain spiritually ignorant and impoverished, read through the Bible at least annually. Even more importantly, memorize the Scriptures (Psalm 119:11), search (John 5:39) and meditate upon them (Psalm 1:2), live and love them (Psalm 19:10; Psalm 119). Consider the words of Proverbs 2:1-5:

*My son, if you receive my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you,  
making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
yes, if you call out for insight  
and raise your voice for understanding,  
if you seek it like silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasures,  
then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.*

In this passage we find the principles of serious personal Bible study: teachability (receiving God's words), obedience (storing God's commandments), discipline (applying the heart), dependence (crying for knowledge), and perseverance (searching for hidden treasure).

Do not expect growth in holiness if you spend little time alone with God and do not take His Word seriously. When you are plagued with a heart prone to be tempted away from holiness, let Scripture teach you how to live a holy life in an unholy world.

## Second, Consider Yourself Dead to Sin and Alive in Christ

If you are a Christian, you already are dead to sin and alive in Christ. Claim that. Regard yourself in this way (Romans 6:11).

"To realize this," writes Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "takes away from us that old sense of hopelessness which we have known and felt because of the terrible power of sin. I can say to myself that not only am I no longer under the dominion of sin, but I am under the dominion of another power that nothing can frustrate."

This is not implying that, because sin no longer reigns over us as believers, we have license to forgo our duty to fight against sin. Jerry Bridges admonishes us, "To

confuse the potential for resisting sin (which God provided) with the responsibility for resisting (which is ours) is to court disaster in our pursuit of holiness.”

Westminster’s Shorter Catechism balances God’s gift and our responsibility when stating, “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness.”

Seek to cultivate a growing hatred of sin as depravity, for that is the kind of hatred against sin that God possesses. Recognize that God is worthy of obedience, not only as the Judge, but especially as a loving Father. Say with Joseph in temptation, “He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). The person who considers himself or herself dead to sin also looks for heart-idols. Pray for strength to uproot them and cast them out.

### **Strive for Daily Repentance Before God**

Never rise above the publican’s petition, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Remember Luther’s advice that God would have His people exercise “lifelong repentance”. Furthermore, believe that Christ is mighty to preserve you alive by His Spirit.

You live through union with Christ, therefore live unto His righteousness. His righteousness is greater than your unrighteousness. His Saviorhood is greater than your sinfulness. His Spirit is within you.

1<sup>st</sup> John 4:4 encourages, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Do not despair. You are strong in Him, alive in Him, and victorious in Him. Satan may win many skirmishes, but the war is yours, the victory is yours (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:57; Roman 8:37). In Christ, the optimism of divine grace reigns over the pessimism of human nature.

### **Fourth, We Cultivate Holiness through Prayer and Work**

Pray and work in dependence upon God for holiness. No one but God is sufficient to bring clean out of unclean (Job 14:4). Hence, pray with David, “create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10).

And as you pray, *work*. The Heidelberg Catechism, on Question 116, points out that prayer and work belong together. They are like two oars, which when both are utilized, will keep a rowboat moving forward. If you use only one oar—if you pray

without working, or you work without praying—you will row in circles.

## **Holiness and Prayer Have Much in Common**

Holiness and prayer are both central to the Christian life and faith; they are obligatory, not optional. Both originate with God and focus upon Him. Both are activated, often simultaneously, by the Spirit of God. Neither can survive without the other. Both are learned by experience and through spiritual battles. Neither is perfected in this life, but must be cultivated lifelong. The most prayerful often feel themselves to be not prayerful enough; the most holy often regard themselves as unholy.

## **Holiness and Work Also Have Many Ties**

Holiness and work are also closely related, especially the work of nurturing and persevering in personal discipline. Discipline takes time and effort. Paul exhorted Timothy, “train yourself for godliness” (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:7).

Holiness is not achieved sloppily or instantaneously. Holiness is a call to a disciplined life; it cannot live out of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *cheap grace*—that is, grace which forgives without demanding repentance and obedience. Holiness is costly grace—grace that cost God the blood of His Son, cost the Son His own life, and costs the believer *daily* mortification of the sin-nature within (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:31).

## **When You Fail, Do Not Despair**

Gracious holiness calls for continual commitment, continual diligence, continual practice, and continual repentance. “If we sometimes through weakness fall into sin, we must not therefore despair of God’s mercy, nor continue in sin, since we have an external covenant of grace with God.” Rather, resolve with Jonathan Edwards: “Never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.”

These two things, fighting against sin and lack of success, appear contradictory, but they are not. Failing and becoming a failure are two different matters. The believer recognizes he will often fail. Luther said that the righteous man feels himself more often to be a “loser than a victor” in the struggle against sin, “for the Lord lets him be tested and assailed to his utmost limits as gold is tested in a furnace.” This, too, is an important component of discipleship. The godly man will persevere even through his failures. Failure does not make him quit; it makes him repent the more earnestly and press on in the Spirit’s strength. “For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity” (Proverbs 24:16). As John Owen wrote,

“God works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.”

Let us never forget that the God we love, loves holiness. This is why the Father offers us affectionate, chastising discipline (Hebrews 12:5-6, 10). Perhaps William Gurnall says it best: “God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures. God loves purity so well He had rather see a hole than a spot in his child’s garments.”

So, pray and work, but remember: we are utterly dependent upon *Him* in our prayers, and also in our work (Philippians 2:12-13).

### **Fifth, We Flee Worldliness**

What does it mean to *flee worldliness*? We run from it. We fight the flesh. We must strike out against the first appearance of the pride of life, the lust of the flesh and eye, and all forms of sinful worldliness as they knock on the door of our hearts and minds. If we open the door and allow them to roam about in our minds and take foothold in our lives, we are already their prey.

“If you want to cultivate a life of holiness, make sure you seek fellowship with other Jesus-followers.”

Daniel 1:8, “But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.”

The material we read, the recreation and entertainment we engage in, the music we listen to, the friendships we form, and the conversations we have all affect our minds and ought to be judged in the context of Philippians 4:8—“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

We must live apart from worldliness and not be of the world while we are in it (Romans 12:1-2). This is for the sake of our holiness and also our witness. Brothers and sisters, let’s walk in the Word and not in the world. And as such, our witness will shine before the world and we will glorify our Father in heaven.

*“Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,*



*nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night*" (Psalm 1:1-2).

Matthew 5:14-16 says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

### **Sixth, We Seek Fellowship in the Church**

If you want to cultivate a life of holiness, make sure you seek fellowship with other Jesus-followers. Associate with mentors in holiness (Ephesians 4:12-13; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:1). The church ought to be a fellowship of mutual care and a community of prayer (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:7; Acts 2:42). If you meet a fellow believer whose godly walk you find admirable, converse and pray with such people (Colossians 3:16).

Proverbs 13:20 states, "*Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.*" Association promotes assimilation. A Christian life lived in isolation from other believers will in turn be defective. We cannot have a heavenly fellowship if we promote a hindering fellowship.

Such conversations, however, ought not to exclude the reading of godly treatises of former ages, which promote holiness. Luther once quipped that some of his best friends were dead ones. For example, he questioned if anyone could possess spiritual life who did not feel kinship with David pouring out his heart in the Psalms.

Read classics that speak out vehemently against sin. Let Thomas Watson be your mentor in *The Mischief of Sin*, John Owen in *Temptation and Sin*, Jeremiah Burroughs in *The Evil of Evils*, and Ralph Venning in *the Plague of Plagues*. But also read J.C. Ryle's *Holiness*, Octavius Winslow's *Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul*, and John Flavel's *Keeping the Heart*. Let these divines of former ages become your spiritual mentors and friends. The bottom line is this: you can't cultivate holiness in Christ without the bride of Christ.

### **Finally, Commit Completely to God**

Live (present-tense) in total commitment to God. Form habits of holiness. Pursue harmony and symmetry in holy living. Root out all inconsistencies, by the grace of the spirit, and enjoy godly activities.

Don't fall prey to the "one-more-time" syndrome. Postponed obedience is *disobedience*. Tomorrow's holiness is impurity now. Tomorrow's faith is unbelief now.

Aim not to sin at all (1<sup>st</sup> John 2:1). Ask for divine strength to bring every thought into captivity to Christ (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10:5), for Scripture indicates that our "thought-lives" ultimately reflect our character: "For as he thinks in his heart, so

is he” (Proverbs 23:7). **An old proverb says it this way:** *Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.*

**Reference:**

- i. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6—The New Man* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 144.
- ii. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978), 60.
- iii. Question 35.
- iv. “Baptism Form,” in *The Psalter*, 126.
- v. For Edwards’s seventy resolutions to promote holiness made at nineteen years of age, see *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1: xx-xxii.
- vi. *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, trans. And ed. William pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 189.
- vii. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, (1851; reprint, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 6:20.
- viii. Quoted in I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 140.

## Union with Christ Drives Us to Extraordinary Prayer

By Joey Cochran



### **Many of us are dissatisfied with our prayer life.**

It could be that we never really got started on one. It may be that we are not entirely convinced of its importance. Most do not pray like Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, or George Whitfield. We don't give four hours a day to the discipline. If you're dissatisfied with your prayer life, then jump in the boat with me and learn its importance, because that's what I'm learning right now. I, too, am dissatisfied. And if you're like me, we're in good company. We're sitting in the same boat as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He confessed in *Preaching and Preachers*, "I approach the next matter with great diffidence, much hesitation, and a sense of utter unworthiness. I suppose we all fail at this next point more than anywhere else; that is in the matter of prayer."

Why do we feel this overall sense of failure with our prayer life? It could be that in spite of our best efforts, we never seem to see results. We or our friends still suffer, we are still under the same vice, that relationship does not improve, and we

can't seem to find a (better) job or favor at the job we have.

So rather than pray, we distract ourselves with new toys or projects. We turn to other relationships for help, rather than that single most important relationship

We have a word from the Lord,  
"Thus says the Lord."

with our Creator. We tell ourselves we don't have enough time. What we need to do is keep working, take control, and find our own solution. If nothing else, we insulate ourselves from all this failure. This is a result of our fallen condition. We live in a tension where we are prone to revert back to depending upon ourselves rather than God. But if we believe the gospel, we'll devote ourselves to the discipline of prayer, but not just any kind of prayer—extraordinary prayer.

### Extraordinary Prayer

Extraordinary prayer is when we pray with our brothers and sisters in Christ that prayer of most importance—to see the Kingdom explode. Jonathan Edwards discusses this in his book, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*. Sheesh, that's some title! And it says it all. Edwards looks at Zechariah 8:20-22 and discusses that the primary vehicle God uses to fuel people for Kingdom work is prayer. Here are those verses:

***"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.' Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD."***

This passage is packed with a little systematic theology. We have a word from the Lord, "Thus says the Lord." We have a word about salvation, "People will yet come." We have a word about evangelism, "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying..." We have a word about prayer, "Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord." We have a word about the Church, "Many peoples and strong nations shall come and seek the Lord." All of this is built within the context of a still future time, a time that you and I long for even now.

Imbedded in the essence of Zechariah 8:20-22 is the driver of prayer, a relationship with God, and union with the Creator. Zechariah 3:8-10 and 6:12-13 talk about a Righteous Branch, who is God's servant. All people will be united with one another under His vine. They will all be grafted together. That Branch will build the temple of God with the help of those who are far off. The days will come when there will be nothing but praise and worship, peace and joy. How will this come to God's people? Zechariah 4:6-7 answers, *"Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts...And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"* O glory! That Branch is Jesus Christ and that temple is the Church.

And in the midst of it all, God calls the His people, who are united to Christ and to one another, to the extraordinary task of prayer. We're not talking just about you praying in your closet, or you praying with a couple friends. We're talking about *all nations* coming together towards one end—to praise and pray to the Lord of all.

### **A Sobering Thought about Our Lack of Prayer**

If prayer is a symbol of our unity with Christ and one another, could our lack of enthusiasm about prayer be a symbol of a lack of unity with Christ and one another?

Now, I'm not trying to cause you to question the assurance of your salvation. And I'm not saying that struggling from time to time in our prayer life is a sign of no faith. Certainly, it is a sign of weak faith, and it is a sign of needing repentance. Therefore, we should repent and start practicing prayer.

But, my question for you is: do you desire to repent about your prayer life? If you wish to put forth no effort whatsoever to rescue a shipwrecked prayer life, you may not have ever believed the gospel. Our unity with Christ will, of necessity, produce certain fruits. Prayer is one of those fruits.

If that's you, then listen closely again. Listen to the gospel as told by Psalm 102:16-22. We are spiritually poor and destitute people. God has heard our cry. He wishes to set free we sinners who are doomed to die. He sent the Righteous Branch, Jesus Christ, to die in our place. Jesus suffered death on a cross, but rose from the grave. That death he suffered was for us sinners, and He offers eternal life to all those who repent of their sin and believe that He is Lord. If that's never clicked for you, then appropriate these truths and walk in newness of life. Believe that Jesus is God, and confess that He is Lord. And get to practicing extraordinary prayer.

### **Get Practicing**

Everything in this life is a rehearsal for eternity. That includes our prayer life now. Christians have the deep pleasure of being united with Christ. We have the



blessing of sonship. Galatians 4:6 explains, “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba Father!” That union drives us to cry out to God; it moves us to prayer. And as sons (and daughters) we are not just united to Christ in prayer, but we are united to one another in prayer. Matthew 18:19-20 exhorts: *“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

This should be stimulus enough for our prayer life. Our union with Christ makes prayer a discipline where we show utter dependence and helplessness. It is where we express deep affection for Christ and His ways. In prayer with our brothers and sisters we demonstrate union with them.

Extraordinary expressions of public prayer allow us to take responsibility for our Church family. When we pray together, we ask for protection from our dual enemies: sin and Satan. Public prayer is a visible expression of our love for one another. It is a vehicle for stimulating passion for an explosion of the Kingdom.

If you are not in the habit of a personal prayer life, I encourage you to get into practice. If your church is not in the practice of demonstrating extraordinary prayer, I encourage you to exhort the leaders of your church to put that in place.

The kind of extraordinary prayer that Jonathan Edwards encouraged may happen in small groups, Sunday school, or in corporate worship. But primarily, Edwards had in mind regular times of people from many denominations coming together for a concert of prayer. In other words, there was a coordinated prayer meeting movement. If your church has never had, or stopped having, regular or occasional prayer meetings, perhaps it is time to evaluate that decision.

**One day, we will all be praying together, regardless of our theological nuances, socio-economical distinctions, or cultural origin.** We will all seek the face of the Lord and entreat His favor. Robert Murray McCheyne said, “O believing brethren! What an instrument God hath put into your hands! Prayer moves Him who moves the universe.” May we be moved to pray extraordinarily!

## The Indicative and Imperative

By Dave Jenkins

**Running, as a constant motif through Romans 6, is the interplay between what is called the *indicative* and the *imperative*.**

In the former mode, Paul insists that God has accomplished our decisive break

with sin: “We died to sin” (Romans 6:2); “our old self was crucified with him” (Romans 6:6); we are “dead to sin but alive to God” (Romans 6:11); we “have been brought from death to life” (v.13); “sin shall not be your master” (Romans 6:14); “you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18); “you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God” (Romans 6:22).

But Paul regularly intersperses his indicatives with imperatives that make us responsible for winning the battle against sin: “Do not let sin reign” (Romans 6:12);



“do not offer the parts of your body to sin but offer yourselves to God” (Romans 6:13); “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” (Romans 6:19). The combination of these emphases presents both a theological and practical problem.

The theological problem is to combine these two so that we can achieve a coherent picture, and at the same time, do justice to Paul’s teachings on related topics. No theologian completely ignores one of these emphases or the other, but many focus on one side or the other. One popular option has been to isolate the two into separate compartments. This is the approach of the liberal theologians of the late 1800s and the early 1900s, who emphasized the ethical teaching of the Bible at the expense of its ‘religious’ teaching. What people did was severed from what they believed. At the other extreme are those who virtually subsume the imperative under the indicative. What God has done is so overwhelmingly powerful that Christian obedience becomes a kind of automatic response. It is almost as if God acts through us, removing our own responsibility for actions.

Most scholars recognize these two views as extreme and seek some way to integrate the indicative and the imperative without dismissing either one. One thing is clear in Paul’s discourse: the imperative grows out of the indicative. In Romans 6, for instance, Paul does not call on people to wage war against sin, with the hope that

“We must recognize that the grace and power of God that justified us continue to be at work to sanctify us.”

God will take their side and win the war for them. Throughout his teaching—and, indeed, throughout the Bible—God takes the initiative. In grace, He acts to help His people, and He asks them to respond. As the title of one of the most influential essays on this subject says, “being precedes act”. Or to use the phrase found throughout the literature: *Christians are called to become what they are.*

While, then, it is clear that the imperative is based on this indicative, we must be careful not to separate the two, as if our obedience is the product of our own unaided effort. Justification by faith and sanctification by struggle is the slogan that has been coined to describe this kind of view of the Christian life. We must recognize that the grace and power of God that justified us continue to be at work to sanctify us. God expects us to obey Him, but our very obedience is the product of His grace. The Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs, put it like this: “*From him Christ as from a fountain, sanctification flows into the souls of the Saints: their sanctification comes not so much from their struggling, and endeavors, and vows, and resolutions, as it comes flowing to them from their union with him.*” Or to use the imagery of theologian

Helmut Thielicke: ***“Believers are responsible to open their mouths so that they may drink from the river of sanctifying grace.”***

In the practical experience of living the Christian life, we find both extremes as well. The one extreme we call *legalism*. In its strict sense, legalism is the effort to gain salvation by our own efforts. While some religions tends toward legalism, it is seldom found, at least in its pure form, among Christians. But more common is a softer legalism—the belief, perhaps not even clearly articulated, that we can obey God by our own efforts, or through our own program. Many well-intentioned believers fall into this trap, implicitly separating the indicative of God’s grace from the moral effort of Christians, so that the two are virtually unrelated. Self-help programs are a fad these days, and believers easily bring this human-centered perspective into their life of faith.

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“They write books, preach sermons...all with the primary idea that the key to the victorious Christian life is simply letting our new redeemed natures take their course.”

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To guard against moralism, we must root all of our obedience in those disciplines of the Christian life that put us in touch with God’s own power: reading Scripture, worship, and prayer. It is through these means that God has promised to communicate His grace to us. We must always evaluate our own personal as well as the Church’s programs of Christian living against this test: *Are they effective channels of God’s grace?* No program that does not pass this test will make any real or long-lasting change in the lives of believers.

At the opposite extreme from moralism is what we might call the ‘magical’ view of the Christian life. Again, we find sincere and dedicated believers who fall into this trap. They write books, preach sermons, and present seminars, all with the primary idea that the key to the victorious Christian life is simply letting our new redeemed natures take their course. “Let go and let God” is the slogan. The indicative is given pride of place in this approach, and it is often attractively presented as an alternative to legalism or moralism. But the ‘magical’ view gives insufficient emphasis to the reality of the imperative. God commands His people to act, and the very fact that Paul’s letters are peppered with commands shows that obedience is not automatic. True, Jesus compared the believer to the tree that automatically produces good fruit. But, as one theologian has noted, people are not trees. Trees do not refuse the water that trickles down to their roots; they do not remove themselves from fertile soil to plant themselves in bad soil. People, yes even Christians, do these kinds of things.

**Thus, we need to listen to, and respond to, the commands of Scripture.** Particularly troublesome is the tendency of Christians to think that the indicative is all they need. If God has already given me “all things” in Christ (Romans 8:32), why do I need to bother to obey Him? As we have noted, Paul has already said in Romans 6:2 that no genuine Christian should ever think this way, for we no longer live in the realm of sin. But, Paul goes on to make clear that our enjoyment of eternal life is contingent on our obedience (Romans 8:12-13). Paul agrees with James: faith without works is dead; it cannot save (James 2:14-26).



# The Necessity of Spiritual Discipline for Every Christian

By Justin Huffman



**Imagine a woman named Jane (a person you've never met).**

She is a mature and growing Christian who loves Jesus, gives wise counsel, and helps others come to know more about Jesus...but she does not pray, read her Bible, or go to church. What did you think as I describe Jane to you? Does this sound strange? It should, because the Bible teaches that Jane does *not* exist. No one has ever become more godly or more Christ-like without spiritual discipline (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:24-27; James 4:2). In fact, the writer of Hebrews makes a one-to-one, absolute connection between being in the Word of God regularly and growing spiritually:

*"Everyone who lives on milk (spiritual immaturity) is unskilled in the word of righteousness...But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil"* (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Likewise, when Peter tells us in his sec-

ond epistle to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*”. This comes on the heels of his first letter, in which he has already explained the means to spiritual growth: “*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk (of God’s Word, in context), that by it you may grow up into salvation*” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:2).

### **A Connection You Cannot Miss**

The Bible teaches that no one has *ever* spiritually matured without applying themselves to the spiritual disciplines. On the other hand, the Bible promises that *everyone* who by faith applies themselves to spiritual discipline will become godlier and more Christ-like. We are grown by the Word as we hungrily devour it. We grow closer to God as we come to Him in frequent and fervent prayer, through Christ. We are honed in our spiritual lives as we worship with, and imitate, godly believers in the body of Christ.

The connection between spiritual discipline and growth is frequent and explicit in the Bible. In Luke 11:9-13, Jesus says

that the Spirit will be given to those who ask (prayer). Ephesians 4:11-16 indicates that God uses truth, and the fellowship of the saints, in order to mature and edify us. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to “*exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” The same writer encourages us to come with confidence to the throne of grace in order to receive “help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16), and explains that the accountability of the local church helps us hold fast our profession of faith (Hebrews 10:23-25). James tells us that if we want wisdom, we need only ask God for it (James 1:5); yet he also assures us that we will not receive when we do not ask (James 4:2).

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“Everyone who, by faith, applies themselves to spiritual discipline, will grow and mature in their Christian walk.”

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### **An Encouragement to Grow**

Everyone who, by faith, applies themselves to spiritual discipline, will grow and mature in their Christian walk. Although the Jane whom I described does not exist according to the Bible, many of us are trying to be Janes. We want to have a deep, fulfilling, and joyful relationship with Jesus, but we ignore the means of grace that He has given us. We want to be mature Christians, who help others, but without having to apply ourselves to Bible-reading, prayer, and the accountability of the body of Christ. It cannot be done.

What a great encouragement to know that when we *do* discipline ourselves to

seek hard after God—in His Word, through prayer, and with the encouragement of other Christians—we are assured that we will grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Savior!

## Four Ways to Handle Temptation When It Comes

By Brian Hedges



**How do you handle temptation?** I'm not talking about the fleeting, seemingly benign thought of sin that may hold initial allure, but is easily dismissed (though we should be on guard against these kinds of thoughts, too).



**No, I'm talking about that moment when you've savored the juicy morsel and like the taste.** You clamp down your jaws and suddenly feel the sharp piercing desire for more and a forceful tug towards deliberate, willful sin. You realize that you've swallowed a hook and the angler is reeling you in. Your better judgment, and God's Word, and the Holy Spirit are whispering, "No." But your appetites and emotions are screaming, "Yes!"

I have in mind those times when we are like Peter in the courtyard, our heart frenzied by fear, about to commit an act of cowardice and treachery. Or David on the rooftop, seized by lust's hot desire, teetering on the brink of adultery. Or Moses at the rock, boiling in anger, poised to open a valve that will erupt into a rebellious torrent of volcanic rage.

Can you still escape temptation when you're in *that* deep? The great 17<sup>th</sup> century pastor and theologian, John Owen, though so. In his incisive and insightful book on temptation, Owen provides both analysis and diagnosis for tempted souls, with directions for watching and praying in order to avoid temptation. But, wise-soul physician that he was, Owen also offered counsel to the person already in temptation's tenacious grip.

Suppose the soul has been surprised by temptation, and entangled at unawares, so that now it is too late to resist the first entrances of it. What shall such a soul do that it be not plunged into it, and carried away with the power thereof? He counsels four things that I find both helpful and hopeful but will phrase in mostly my own words.

### **Pray: Ask the Lord For Help**

You're about to sink under the waves. The water is to your neck. You're gasping for air, but gulping mouthfuls of water. Your breath is gone. You're about to go under. What do you do? Cry out with Peter, "Lord, save me!" Jesus will stretch out his hand and catch you (Matthew 14:30-31). This is the first and most immediate step. Pray. Stop and do it now.

### **Run to Jesus, Who has Already Conquered Temptation in Your Place**

Running to Jesus is, of course, what we do when we pray. But when you are strongly tempted, don't just turn to Jesus in general. Run to Jesus for specific, tangible help, remembering that He has already conquered temptation in your place.

*"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted...For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sym-*



*pathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-16).*

Remember this: Jesus was tempted, not first and foremost as our example, but as our Brother, Captain, and King. Adam, our first representative, was tempted in paradise and failed. Jesus, the Second Adam and our final representative, was tempted in the desert and conquered it. As our hero and champion, Christ has already defeated and beheaded Goliath. He has crushed the serpent's head. The battle is already won. So run, weary Christian. Run to your conquering King!

### **Expect the Lord to Give Deliverance**

This is His promise. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13). Expect Him to fulfill it.

And keep in mind that the Lord has many ways of delivering you. He may send an affliction or a trial that takes the edge off your appetite for sin and restores your hunger for His Word. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word" (Psalm 119:67).

He may give you sufficient grace to endure the temptation (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:8-9; James 1:12). He may rebuke the enemy, so that He flees from you (Zechariah 3:1-2; James 4:7). Or He may revive you with some refreshing comfort from His Spirit and encouragement from His Word.

But be sure of this: the Lord has more ways to deliver than Satan has ways to tempt. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:4b, KJV).

### **Repair the Breach and Get Back On the Right Path**

Finally, after you've found some immediate relief from the Lord, repair the breach and get back on the happy, narrow road of righteousness. C. S. Lewis said, "A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply *going on*. Evil can be undone, but it cannot 'develop' into good. Time does not heal it."

It is important, then, to figure out why and how we entered into temptation in

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"But be careful even in your repentance. Don't become obsessed with turning *from* temptation and sin; focus on turning *to* Christ."

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the first place. **Big sins always follow little sins.** *Sins of commission usually follow sins of neglect.* When you have found yourself unusually tempted, follow the trail back. You will probably find carelessness, prayerlessness, and neglect.

Ask the Lord to search you and know your heart, to try you and know your thoughts, to see if there is any grievous way in you and to lead you in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-34).

But be careful even in your repentance. Don't become obsessed with turning *from* temptation and sin; focus on turning *to* Christ. In the wise words of Jack Miller, "When you turn to Christ, you don't have a repentance apart from Christ you just have Christ. Therefore don't seek repentance or faith as such but seek Christ. When you have Christ you have repentance and faith. Beware of seeking an experience of repentance; just seek an experience of Christ."

Christ is the One who both preserves the tempted and restores the fallen (Luke 22:21-22; John 21). So, wherever you are in respect to temptation and sin, seek Christ.

#### References:

- i. John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, edited by Justin Taylor and Kelly Kapic (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006) p. 207.
- ii. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1946, 1973) p. viii.
- iii. John C. Miller, *The Heart of a Servant Leader: Letters from Jack Miller* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), p. 244.

## How Scripture Empowers Personal Holiness

By John MacArthur

### Godliness, Christlikeness, and Christian spirituality all describe a Christian becoming more like God.

The most powerful way to effect this change is by letting the Word of God dwell in one richly (Colossians 3:16). When one embraces Scripture without reservation, it will energetically work God's will in the believer's life (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:13). The process could be basically defined as follows:

*Christian spirituality involves growing to be like God in character and conduct by personally submitting to the transforming work of God's Word and God's Spirit.*

### Holiness Embodies the Very Essence of Christianity

Christians have been saved to be holy and to live holy lives (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:14-16). What does it mean to be holy? Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “to be holy” (which appear about two thousand



times in Scripture) basically mean “*to be set aside for something special*”. Thus, God is holy in that He sets Himself apart from creation, humanity, and all pagan gods by the fact of His deity and sinlessness. That’s why the angels sing of God, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8), and why Scripture declares Him to be holy (Psalm 99:9; Isaiah 43:15).

Thus, the idea of holiness takes on a spiritual meaning among the people of God based on the holy character of God. For instance, the high priest of God had inscribed across his headpiece “Holy to the Lord” (Exodus 39:30). The high priest was especially set apart by God to intercede on behalf of a sinful nation to a holy God for the forgiveness of their transgressions.

Holiness embodies the very essence of Christianity. The holy Savior has saved sinners to be a holy people (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:4-10). That’s why one of the most common biblical names for a believer is *saint*, which simply and wonderfully means “*saved and set apart*” (Romans 1:7; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:2).

When one considers that a holy God saves, it is no surprise to learn that He gives His Holy Spirit to every believer at salvation. A primary purpose of this gift is to equip believers with the power to live a holy life (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:7-8; 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:24; 4:13).

So, God wants Christians to share His holiness (Hebrews 12:10) and to present themselves as slaves of righteousness, which will result in holiness (Romans 6:19): “*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God*” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7:1). Thus the author of Hebrews writes, “*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*” (Hebrews 12:14). Holiness is the core of a Christian’s experience.

## **The Intersection of God's Word and Holiness**

Spiritual maturity springs out of holiness. Scottish theologian John Brown boils holiness down to a definition that we can all understand and pursue:

*Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervours, or un-commanded austerities; it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills. God’s mind and will are to be known from his word; and, so far as I really understand and believe God’s word, God’s mind becomes my mind, God’s will becomes my will, and according to the measure of my faith, I become holy.<sup>1</sup>*

### **References:**

1. John Brown, *Expository Discourses on the First Epistle of Peter* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1866), 1:117.

## Recommended Reading on Holiness in the Christian Life

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of holiness in the Christian life, and what that means for daily life and ministry. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that, hopefully, readers of this issue of *Theology for Life* will grow in their understanding of it so they can stand fast on the Word of God.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

- *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul
- *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges
- *The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges
- *Spiritual Disciplines and the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
- *The Hole in Our Holiness* by Kevin DeYoung
- *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* by J.C. Ryle
- *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen
- *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* by J.I. Packer
- *Christ Formed In You: The Power of the Gospel For Personal Change* by Brian Hedges
- *Licensed To Kill: A Field Manual for Mortifying Sin* by Brian Hedges
- *Active Spirituality: Grace and Effort in the Christian Life* by Brian Hedges
- *Holiness by Grace: Delighting in the Joy That Is Our Strength* by Bryan Chapel

I hope you find these as helpful in your Walk as I have.

In Christ Alone,  
Dave Jenkins  
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