

# Holiness: It's Conditions

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*To achieve holiness, one must first have conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and then obey that conviction through renunciation and surrender.*

**Scripture:** Leviticus 21:5, Romans 2:28, Philippians 3:3, Colossians 2:11

**Topics:** "Spiritual Circumcision", "Heart Worship"

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## Description

The preacher discusses the concept of false circumcision, highlighting how some individuals distort the true meaning of circumcision by focusing on outward rituals rather than the spiritual significance. Paul warns against those who preach a gospel of works, Jewish rituals, or traditions, emphasizing that true circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by outward practices. Believers are urged to worship God in spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and not place confidence in outward privileges or physical appearances.

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## Transcript

IN THE FIRST STUDY IN THIS SERIES ON HOLINESS I attempted to answer the inquiry, Is holiness of character possible in the present life? declaring that the New Testament affirms its possibility. We now take one step further, and consider the teaching of the New Testament concerning the conditions on which we may live the life of holiness.

We already have insisted that according to New Testament teaching holiness is a condition of character. It is not necessarily the consummation of character. In other words, holiness is perfect health of soul rather than its ultimate perfection.

Starting with the great declaration made in the prophecy of Zechariah concerning the mission of the coming Messiah, that "He shall deliver us from our enemies, that we may serve Him in holiness and righteousness," we sought to discover both the difference and the relationship between holiness and righteousness. Holiness is rectitude of character. Righteousness is rectitude of conduct. Holiness as rectitude of character is the possible present experience of the children of God because it is the will of their Father that they should be holy; because in order to make them holy Christ came; and because the object of the Spirit's work in them is the realization of that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God. At the close of last Sunday morning's service one of my deacons drew my attention to a very remarkable and beautiful definition of holiness from the pen of John Morley. I want to read it to you. It appears in the latest volume of Miscellanies:

It is not the same as duty; still less is it the same as religious belief. It is a name for an inner grace of nature, an instinct of the soul, by which, though knowing of earthly appetites and worldly passions, the spirit, purifying itself of these, and independent of all reason, argument, and the fierce struggles of the will, dwells in living, patient, and confident communion with the unseen Good.

When you have written Good you have written God: when you have written God you have written Good. Mr. Morley writes Good where we would write God. I have no desire to discuss the attitude of Mr. Morley. Such writing as that bids me forevermore suspend my judgment. I do not believe we are so far apart as some imagine. That is the finest brief exposition of what holiness is that I have ever seen. Nevertheless, what is not told me in that exposition is what I supremely want to know. Is holiness an instinct of the soul in some, and therefore forevermore impossible to others? How can I get into such "living, patient, and confident communion with the unseen Good" as to enable me in the spirit to purify myself of earthly appetites and worldly passions, and so live in the power of that unseen grace? The description is a beautiful one. It is the description of a man who has seen; but there is no explanation of how a struggling, sin-sick soul like myself can find its way into that experience. I am not criticizing Mr. Morley. He made no attempt to unlock the secret. He described the grace. It is, however, at this point that Christianity delivers its central message, and it is here that I find the supreme and lonely splendor of the Christian religion. It comes to men who are in all respects unlike that description, and declares to them that they also can be made holy, and that not by effort of the will, not by struggling as within themselves. How, then? The answer to that inquiry is the theme of this meditation.

"Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This verse stands as the first of the seventh chapter in our Bible; but it ought not to be the first verse of a new chapter; it is the completion of the previous chapter. Its central injunction is "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit"; the basis of the apostolic appeal is, "Having therefore these promises"; the issue of the cleansing enjoined is, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Let us turn to the basis of appeal. It is that because by it we are driven to inquiry concerning the promises to which the writer makes reference.

"Having therefore these promises." What promises? We turn to the words at the close of the previous chapter. I take out quite bluntly and somewhat awkwardly the actual promises to which the apostle is making reference. "I will dwell in them. . . . I will walk in them. . . . I will be their God. . . . I will receive you . . . I will be to you a Father. . . . you shall be to Me sons and daughters." "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves." These promises fall into two series. The first series reveals the secrets of strength. "I will dwell in them"; God's promise to be resident in His people. "I will walk in them"; the symbolic language that tells that the resident God is also active in His people. "I will be their God"; the final word in the first movement in the series of promises indicating that the God resident and active is governing as Sovereign, as absolute Lord. These are the promises. "I will dwell in them I will walk in them . . . I will be their God." Then the second series in the group indicates the method by which we enter into this experience, "I will receive you I will be to you a Father." Remember that promise of Fatherhood is not a promise of philanthropy in our sense of the word merely. It is not a promise that God will open an orphanage and act as though He were our Father. That promise has in it all the deep, mysterious, fundamental values of evangelical Christianity. The word of the ancient economy was gracious and beautiful, "Like as a Father pitieth." But this is not that. This is more than that, "I will be a Father." I will give you of My very nature. You shall partake of it, be related to Me by that intimate bond which is the result of regeneration. And "you shall be to Me sons and daughters." "Having therefore these promises, beloved,

let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

I am very conscious of how hurried and fragmentary a method that is in dealing with the promises. I have gone back to them only that we may remember them. I may summarize them, and make this declaration. In order to perfect holiness by fulfilling the personal responsibility of putting away all defilement of flesh and spirit, there must first be the immanent and indwelling God. Where that is so human responsibility begins in the matter of holiness. In other words, I have no right to speak to a man whose whole life is being lived away from, apart from, in rebellion against, God, and charge him to be holy. He has no responsibility concerning holiness. He cannot be holy. To the children of God the appeal may be made. To those who have been received, to those to whom He has become in the new and mystic and gracious and spacious sense of the New Testament a Father, to those who are in very deed His sons and daughters, partakers of His life, sharers of His nature, heirs of all that He is, to those there is responsibility--we must begin there. It seems to me that such a declaration is at once a word full of comfort, and a word that burns and searches and scorches like a fire. Have we struggled along after this ideal of holiness--whether we call it by that name or not matters very little? Have we seen something of the fair vision described in the paragraph I read to you from the pen of a man who honestly, Sincerely, is not sure of the things which we do most surely believe? Have we seen the vision, have we struggled after it, but never attained to it? Then let us earnestly inquire whether we have ever begun at the right point by the reception of the life of God. On the other hand, are we indeed struggling after the ideal, knowing that we are children of God? Then let us take heart, "Having therefore these promises." Yet we must not forget that there is the process, "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The first great necessity is personal, actual, definite relationship with God. The indwelling God is the secret of holiness in human character, and consequently also the energy of righteousness in human conduct.

These things being granted, let us now consider this injunction, "let us cleanse ourselves." What are the conditions upon which we may do this. They have often been enumerated. I do not propose to do any other than to take certain old words of which we have all made use for very many years. These are the conditions. Conviction, renunciation, surrender, and faith. The first is the reason of the rest. The last is the power in which the others are carried out.

Let us leave the central two, and take the first and last, conviction and faith. In certain senses they are identical. Still, the two words do indicate two phases of the one tremendous fact. Conviction is the first thing, and conviction is faith. Yet there may be conviction without that activity of faith which brings us into the realization of all that which our heart is seeking. Faith is conviction, but it is conviction active. The faith that saves, faith in the initial stages, of the Christian life and all the process of discipline of Christian life is not conviction merely; but yielding to, obedience to, abandonment to conviction. Where conviction is answered by active obedience, there you have faith that brings into living contact with all the resources of power. There are certain things that one is compelled to repeat again and again in very many connections. The faith that saves is not faith about, but faith into. Those familiar with the Greek New Testament will remember how perpetually we have the use of the preposition *eis* with the accusative, which indicates motion into. Belief into is more than belief about. Belief about is conviction. Belief into is conviction compelling activity. Belief about is conviction of the light. Belief into is walking in the light. There must first be conviction if there is to be holiness. There must also be faith, that is, obedience to conviction.

Now the two words, "renunciation" and "surrender," are valuable because they indicate the activity of faith following upon conviction. Conviction is God's gift. It comes like a flash of lightning to the soul of man, unsought, unexpected, uncompelled by mental activity. The great conviction comes in the midst of a

service, comes in the silence of our own home, comes when and where we least expect it. I recently had a conversation with one who told me she had been brought up in another faith, in a home that knows nothing of Christ and will not have anything to do with Him. She read, *The Wide, Wide World*, years ago, and there was born in her heart the conviction that it was desirable to be as good as Ellen. It was forbidden her to read or know anything about Christ, but some years after she read Emerson's essays. Again she saw this selfsame Christ, saw Him portrayed as perfect Man. Then said she, "I will read my New Testament on that basis. I will not think of Him as Christ but as a great man." So she read the New Testament. When she put it down she said, "He is not merely a man, but my Lord and my God." Conviction came when she read *The Wide, Wide World*. It was a strange way. I am not advising anyone to look for conviction in fiction. But God does avail Himself of many ways. Through that book there came the conviction of the beauty of holiness to this girl. That is the first thing. It comes in many ways, but it must come.

It is important that we should know what this conviction really means, and therefore we recall the words of Jesus. Speaking of the Spirit of Truth, He said, "He, when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold Me no more: of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged." Mark in the briefest way the meaning of that great declaration. This is the threefold conviction that always precedes holiness. The conviction of sin is conviction as to what it really is, rejection of God. The conviction of righteousness is conviction of its possibility because the Man Jesus has overcome all enemies, and passed triumphantly to the presence of God. The conviction of judgment is conviction of victory. The prince of this world is judged, and therefore all our enemies are defeated. This is the preliminary conviction. I repeat that we cannot compel it. It comes in the darkness of some lonely night, in the midst of the great multitude, by the silent voice, of Nature, in the thunder or in the lightning. Until there is that conviction there can be no holiness. I am bound once again to repeat that we cannot compel it. It is the gift of God. I pause resolutely, carefully at this point, for someone will say, For that conviction I am waiting! Are you quite sure? Will you be perfectly honest? Has it not already come? The moment we recognize that this conviction is the gift of God we are in danger of making that fact the way of escape from responsibility. We are in danger of saying that we cannot be holy because we have never had that conviction.

Let us be honest and sincere. In the hidden secret shrine of our inner spiritual life have we not already seen the sinfulness of sin? Has no profound conviction ever come to us of the exceeding beauty of holiness? It may be that as I read that brief extract from John Morley we said, Yes, in the deepest of our souls. If so, that was the hour of conviction, if it had never come before.

That conviction having come, there must be obedience to it. That is faith. Faith, in the presence of sin, expresses itself in renunciation and by surrender. We have read the great promises.

Side by side with the promises, there are injunctions and conditions. These injunctions and conditions teach what is meant by renunciation:

Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore:

Come ye out from among them, and be ye  
separate, saith the Lord,  
And touch no unclean thing;  
And I will receive you,  
And I will be to you a Father,  
And ye shall be to me sons and daughters.

This is not my imagination. This is the word of inspiration.

It is an explanation of the meaning of renunciation, and is closely connected with the great promises. It is a call to renunciation of all known wrong. "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate," that is, separate from sinning men and women; "touch no unclean thing," that is, renunciation of all known sin. If we would perfect holiness in the fear of God we are called to immediate and irrevocable renunciation of all that we know to be out of harmony with the mind and will of our Lord. Do not let us misplace the emphasis of this word of the apostle, for I think that by so doing we rob it of its strength. He does not say, If you will have no fellowship with evil things you shall become a temple of the living God. His declaration is rather, Have no fellowship with them, because you are the temple of the living God. To me the difference is almost overwhelming in intensity of appeal. If I am told that I am to perfect holiness, that I am to have no fellowship with sin and evil things, in order to become the temple of God, I am filled with fear because I am so weak and frail. That, however, is not the apostolic method. He reminds me, first, of the strength which is mine, and then urges me to Holiness. Because we are temples of God, we are not to desecrate the temple. God is in us. We are not to insult the Indweller by the retention of things that are unlike Him. This is the groundwork of appeal.

Because of these facts we are called on to put away all the things we know to be wrong, in our friendships, in our habits, in our inner thinking. These things must be put away or there can be no perfecting holiness. The threefold definition of sin is very familiar. Sin is transgression of the law. Sin is neglect to do right. The questionable thing is sin whether it have the appearance of good or evil. We are to decide by that threefold definition of sin what things need to be put away. The things we know to be wrong. The things we have neglected to do which are right. The things about which we are doubtful.

Of all these there must be renunciation. "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate; and touch no unclean thing." There must be no excuse, no compromise, no delay. When we deal with sins God will deal with sin. When we resolutely determine to put away the things we know to be sinful He will purify the center and create in us that grace of holiness which expresses itself in graciousness and rectitude of character.

How are we to know the things that are to be put away? "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee." This is the testing promise. If we desire to know we must awake from our lethargy, sleep, carelessness; awake from the influence of opiates that have made us lack sensitiveness to the will of our God, awake and put ourselves honestly confronting Christ, and He will shine upon us, and in the shining luster of His glory we shall discover the things that are unlike Him, and those are the things that are to be put away.

No man imagines it is possible to live the holy life if he is resolutely keeping sin in his life, something in his habits, his home, or his business. We know that these things grieve the Lord. We excuse them, and holiness is never perfected, and we lack the grace and loveliness of character which ought to be the testimony to the power of our Lord because we have not yet begun to be determined to renounce the hidden things of darkness and to put out of our lives the things that are unlike our Master.

Beyond renunciation, there must be surrender. By that I mean the yielding of ourselves up to God. In the first letter to these Corinthian Christians the apostle uses these words, "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body." In the letter to the Romans he says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." I deliberately adopt the marginal reading there. That is a wonderful verse. Study its psychology. "I beseech you . . . to present your bodies." Your body is not you. The apostle is not dealing with the body, he is dealing with the essential man. Or in the Corinthian epistle, "your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you . . . glorify God therefore in your body." You glorify God in it: you are not it: you indwell it. The body is the tabernacle, the tent of the man, not the man. I pray you mark the significance of this, and see the reason for laying emphasis on these two passages. What is surrender? To give myself over to the Lord. That is, all my spiritual life. How am I to do that, or demonstrate that I have done it? By presenting the body in which I dwell. That is spiritual worship. We thought spiritual worship consisted in singing hymns and praying. All these things are spiritual, or should be, but spiritual worship is the body dedicated to the Lord.

Take my hands, and let them move

At the impulse of Thy love;

Take my feet and let them be

Swift and beautiful for Thee.

That is surrender. That is not merely that my hands and feet are at His disposal, but that I am His, and that I indicate to Him and to the world my abandonment by putting the members of my body at His disposal and refusing to allow brain, or heart, or head, or hands, or feet to act save under His command and in His sacred service. The intellect, emotion, will surrendered, and consequently the whole body acting under His direction.

The putting away of the evil thing and surrender to the Lord of the body are the only conditions. Wherever these conditions are fulfilled the promises are fulfilled. "Having therefore these promises"- "I will dwell in them . . . I will walk in them . . . I will be their God . . . I will receive you . . . I will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to Me sons and daughters." Where the evil thing condemned is put away and the whole life is surrendered, God has His chance. That is what He wants.

Heart of mine, this is the trouble with thee, thou hast not given thy Master His chance. I have locked up some chamber in the temple. I have barred Him from entering into some activity of the mind. I have retained some place in my emotional nature for other than Himself. I have not given Him his chance.

Do we desire the holy life? Here are the conditions. Conviction He gives. That we are to respond to by the faith that renounces evil, puts away sin, abandons the life to Him. Holiness is not realized by my endeavor,

but by His working in me, when I have given Him His chance.

May God lead every one of us not merely to conviction, but to the faith that renounces the things He disapproves, and surrenders to Him all that is His by the indwelling of His Spirit.

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