

KNOWING & DOING

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What is True Practical Holiness?

by J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)
First Bishop of Liverpool

This is an excerpt from chapter 3, “Holiness,” of J.C. Ryle’s classic book Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots, published 1877; enlarged edition 1879.

What then is true practical holiness? It is a hard question to answer. I do not mean that there is any want of Scriptural matter on the subject. But I fear lest I should give a defective view of holiness, and not say all that ought to be said; or lest I should say things about it that ought not to be said, and so do harm. Let me, however, try to draw a picture of holiness, that we may see it clearly before the eyes of our minds. Only let it never be forgotten, when I have said all, that my account is but a poor imperfect outline at the best.

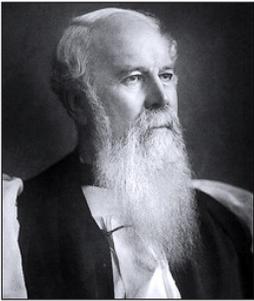
- (a) Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God’s judgment – hating what He hates – loving what He loves – and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word...
- (b) A holy man will endeavour to shun every known sin, and to keep every known commandment. He will have a decided bent of mind toward God, a hearty desire to do His will – a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a love to all His ways. He will feel what Paul felt when he said, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22)...
- (c) A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. He will not only live the life of faith in Him, and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength, but he will also labour to have the mind that was in Him, and to be “conformed to His image” (Rom. 8:29). It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us – to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself – to walk in love, even as Christ loved us – to be lowly-minded and humble... He will remember that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth – that He came not to do His own will – that it was His meat and drink to do His Father’s will... He will lay to heart the saying of John, “He that saith he abideth in [Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6)...
- (d) A holy man will follow after meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, kind tempers, government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights...
- (e) A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. He will labour to mortify the desires of his body – to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts – to curb his passions – to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose... [See Luke 21:34 and 1 Cor. 9:27.]
- (f) A holy man will follow after charity and brotherly kindness. He will endeavour to observe the golden rule of doing as he would have men do to him, and speaking as he would have men speak to him... He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least things...
- (g) A holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others. He will not stand all the day idle. He will not be content with doing no harm – he will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day and generation, and to lessen the spiritual wants and misery around him, as far as he can. Such was Dorcas, “full of good works and almsdeeds, which she did,” – not merely purposed and talked about, but did... (Acts 9:36)...

- (h) A holy man will follow after purity of heart. He will dread all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit, and seek to avoid all things that might draw him into it. He knows his own heart is like tinder, and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation...
- (i) A holy man will follow after the fear of God. I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because he is afraid of punishment, and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father's face, because he loves him...
- (j) A holy man will follow after humility. He will desire, in lowliness of mind, to esteem all others better than himself. He will see more evil in his own heart than in any other in the world...
- (k) A holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life. He will try, not merely to fill his place as well as others who take no thought for their souls, but even better, because he has higher motives, and more help than they. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten, "Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord" ... (Col. 3:23). Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill if they can help it... They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbours, good friends, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good by their firesides... The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, "What do ye more than others?" (Matt. 5:47).
- (l) Last, but not least, a holy man will follow after spiritual mindedness. He will endeavour to set his affections entirely on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the life that now is; but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim travelling to his home. To commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people – these things will be the holy man's chiefest enjoyments. He will value every thing and place and company, just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God... ❖



How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing ... it is irresistible. If even 10% of the world's population had it, would not the whole world be converted and happy before a year's end?

C.S. Lewis

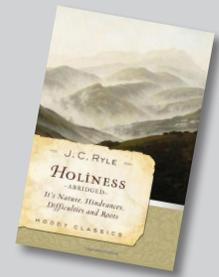


J.C. Ryle (May 10, 1816 - June 10, 1900) was a prominent evangelical Anglican clergyman, and the first Bishop of Liverpool. A prolific writer, Ryle continues to be influential today. His best known book is *Holiness*. J.I. Packer describes Ryle as “a single-minded Christian communicator of profound biblical, theological, and pastoral wisdom, a man and minister of giant personal stature and electric force of utterance that sympathetic readers still feel (‘unction’ was the old name for it).”

RECOMMENDED READING

J. C. Ryle, *Holiness (abridged edition): Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, Foreword by John F. MacArthur, Jr. (Moody Classics, 2010)

J.C. Ryle’s *Holiness* has imparted a standing challenge to Christians for 130 years. This new, slimmed-down series of excerpts from Ryle’s masterwork aims to present his original message to a whole new generation. Holiness, Ryle argued, was not simply a matter of believing and feeling, but of *doing*.



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