

Holiness for Dummies pt 2

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Date: 20 June 2010

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everybody. I was just sitting back for the introduction when I realized that the introduction was already over.

And this is the moment at which I should begin. So I will. I would like us to begin with prayer. And the prayer that I'm going to use is one that will be familiar to all of us, but which I've come to realize fits wonderfully well with what I'm going to say.

So may we together, with the thought of exploring holiness in our mind, come before the throne and pray.

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Well, you did recognize those words, didn't you? That's the opening prayer, opening collect, which we say together, at the communion service.

[1 : 51] And straight away, it tells us three things about the Christian life. One is that it's God-centered and God-focused.

First to last, the burden of the prayer is that we may perfectly love God and worthily magnify his holy name. Second thing is that it starts, that is to say, the Christian life starts, in hearts.

It isn't a life that one learns simply by routine. It begins, as I said, in the heart.

And so the prayer, which opens our communion service, begins with the heart. Cleanse our hearts, we say, by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.

There, incidentally, is another truth about the Christian life, that it is lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and can't be lived without the power of the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 06] The word heart, actually, is almost a drumbeat emphasis through the communion service, although it's an emphasis that is not emphasized, if I may put it that way, so that you don't notice it until you are told to look for it.

But when you're told to look for it, then you find it in quite a number of places. Have mercy on us, and write both these laws in our hearts.

Have you ever focused on the word hearts at that point? Well, those are the words that Cranmer gave us. And in the confession, we all say together that we are heartily sorry for our misdoings.

And heartily means not in a vague and unfocused way, enthusiastically or emphatically.

It does mean, quite precisely, in our hearts, as distinct from just looking as if we were sorry, because we are kneeling before God and using words that express sorrow.

[4 : 30] No, real godliness starts with hearts. And that leads to the third truth. The Christian life is lived from the inside out.

As distinct from what people often suppose, actually, being lived from the outside in. That is to say, some people suppose that if you go through the proper motions of public worship, corporate godliness, whatever, well, that is your worship.

And that's all that God looks for. And that, I urge right from the start, is actually, Phariseeism come back to haunt us.

This is exactly what was wrong with the Pharisees. They thought that godliness started on the outside. And if you had the outside right, well, you need not bother about the inside at all, because that would be right too.

And you may remember how violently Jesus challenged the Pharisees because of that attitude. Well, as I said, the opening collect at our communion service confronts us with all those points straight away.

[6 : 03] And they lead us straight into what I have to say in this morning's talk. It's been announced, as you heard, as a second bite of the cherry.

The cherry encased in the phrase that Bill gave me many weeks ago. Holiness for dummies.

When I spoke to this subject for the first time, I said, what I now repeat, that the word dummies grabbed me when I was asked to speak to this title.

It grabbed me because I suspect that all of us, more or less, are spiritually stupid.

You understand the word stupid. We're spiritually stupid to an extent that we don't realize. That is, we are superficial.

[7 : 10] We rush from one thing to another before we've properly understood it. We do live on the surface with the surface.

Sorry, did that sound right? With smatterings of information rather than deep understanding of anything. And so, we get a number of spiritual issues wrong, including the issue of holiness.

Because we do lapse into the mistake of thinking that if the outside is all right, well, the inside is bound to be. And, as I've already said, it isn't so.

And again, when I spoke first time round on this subject, I made a point of saying that holiness is a matter of prime importance that appears from the fact that this is what we are called to.

Scripture says that explicitly. And pleasing God is a phrase that the New Testament uses over and over to describe what the Christian life is all about.

[8 : 28] Well, we please God by taking his calling seriously and putting first things first in our lives. And my fear is that because of so many distractions surrounding us, this is something that in the matter of holiness we simply don't do.

Now, I must say, before I go any further, that when I spoke to you last time, I was experiencing something which John Bunyan described in what seems to me to be a masterly phrase.

He said on one occasion, I preached feeling as if my head were in a bag. Just think of that.

Feeling as though my head were in a bag. Well, that's pretty much how I felt, I'll tell you honestly. when I spoke on this subject before. So, what I said may have been very earthbound and sounded perhaps more tentative than it was meant to be.

I don't know. But anyway, looking back, I remember the experience. I hope it will not be repeated today. It hasn't been so far. I've got through my first four minutes, you see, fairly well.

[9 : 57] I don't feel at all that my head is in a bag. No, don't worry about that. And that was, well, part of the reality of the situation.

I remember that I began by talking about the holiness of God, focusing on that word holiness and the adjective holy, making the point that God uses this word in Scripture to signify in the broadest sense what I call his own God-ness.

That is, whenever you hear of God as holy, the word is pointing to all the God is that we aren't. It points to his greatness as contrasted with our smallness, and it points to his purity as contrasted with the, how can I say, the morally muddled quality which appears in so much of our lives.

And I took you, I seem to remember, to Leviticus 11.44, echoed then by Peter in his first letter, 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 14 through 16, where God says to his people, you shall be holy, for I am holy.

And there, as you can see, and perhaps as you remember, we were confronted with the fact that God wants us to be like him.

[11 : 53] And since the word holy points to all these ways in which we start being unlike God, you may wonder for a moment what it means.

Well, a formula which will carry us through to the middle of my presentation is the formula that in our Lord Jesus, in his earthly life, God is presented and so you have to speak of the Lord Jesus as the holy one.

But then Jesus lives a life of, well, as I'm going to say in a moment, a life of goodness and love such as the world has never seen before, and this is what it's like to be God.

And so I'm jumping straight to the preliminary conclusion that being holy, for you and me, is a matter of taking seriously those two great commandments which are brought before us at the start of each communion service, that with the command, namely, that we should love the Lord our God with heart and mind and soul and strength, and that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, this is the substance and the content and the reality of holiness, and everything that I say this morning is pointing, really, at least it's intended to be pointing in that direction, in the way that a compass needle points towards the magnetic north.

well, there you have, what shall I say, a launch pad for thinking about holiness, and standing on that launch pad, before we launch off it, straight away we can dismiss two mistakes that are regularly made about holiness.

[14 : 18] Mistake number one I've already referred to, namely, that holiness is legalistic performance in the way that the Pharisees thought it was.

That is, that you please God by correct externals, never mind the state of your heart and your thoughts. Again, think back to that initial collect in the communion service.

God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, is asked to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts.

Start inside. But the Pharisees thought that externals would do, and they compounded that error by the further error of supposing that external correctness would commend them to God, which, as you can see, was a lapse into a point of view for which they hadn't got a name, but which comes spontaneously out of the fallen human heart.

it's the point of view, or the position, that we now label justification by works, that is to say, God accepting you for what you are and what you've done.

[15 : 48] You merit or earn your way into his favor. and surely you don't need me to dwell at length on the wrongness of that notion, which the Apostle Paul spends so much time explicitly hammering, remember, both in Romans and in Galatians, and it's a point of view which we shall all of us naturally slip into if we don't watch it, but the Pharisees, who had slipped into it, were rebuked so often by the Lord Jesus that, really, we ought to learn the lesson, this is not the truth about a relation of acceptance with God, and God forbid that we should ever entertain it in any shape or form.

And we can say positively at this point, Christian holiness proceeds from life rather than being practiced for life.

You see the difference? Pharisees thought that they were practicing holiness, detailed obedience to the Old Testament law for life.

That's what they were after. God's faith in God's God. But Jesus, as I say, contradicted them, hammered them, condemned them for this view, and again and again celebrated in the teaching he gave to his apostles and to the crowds the fact that our holy God is a God who loves sinners, forgives sin, renews hearts, that renewal of heart which we call regeneration comes along with the blessing of justification, faith leads us into both together and then as those whose hearts have been renewed so that we have desires inside us that we never had before, actual desires to please God, actual desires to magnify him, actual desires to glorify his name, the world knows nothing of such ideas, and how can I say it, formal religion knows nothing of such ideas either, but they're there in the

Christian heart and holiness as we said at the beginning comes out of precisely those thoughts and those desires, and so we have to start there.

[18 : 40] well, that's where real holiness comes from, as I said, from life, as an expression of life, rather than coming out of an aspiration for fellowship with God which one hasn't begun to find fulfilled as yet, because one isn't living by real faith in the real Christ, well, that's one mistake that, having looked at, we can now dismiss and even say any more again.

Christian holiness is not legalistic performance, as with the Pharisees. And second mistake, Christian holiness is not any sort of experience in the sense of feeling, certainly not a graded experience in the sense of feeling.

You say, what are you talking about? Well, actually, I'm talking about what I have to call a mistake that John Wesley bequeathed to the world.

the mistake was to suppose that after the initial encounter with Christ, exercise of faith, entry into new life, real Christian beginning, then, through earnest prayer, seeking this blessing, you could hope for a second blessing, a blessing which he called perfect love, a blessing whereby God rooted sin, that is, the urge to sin, the self-centered, self-gratifying urge, which dominates unregenerate people.

Wesley thought that that urge would be rooted out of the heart in the second blessing, the blessing of perfect love, so that there would be nothing motivationally left in our hearts except love to God and love to neighbor.

[21 : 20] Desires to sin simply wouldn't be there anymore. well, with all due respect to John Wesley, a man whose boots I would not be worthy to clean, I think he was wrong on that one.

But his idea has had long innings amongst evangelical people in various forms doctrines and the various doctrines of baptism in the Holy Spirit after conversion and the formula that the converted need a second crisis of consecration and faith to bring them into the fullness of Christian life.

these ideas they do stem from John Wesley, they do involve, as you can see, well, from my standpoint anyway, they do involve a diminishing of what's given to us in the first blessing, the blessing of sins forgiven in justification, regeneration in the heart, and something that I needed to add and will add now, the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell us and sanctify us from that moment on, all of that actually begins as a single complex event at the start of the real Christian life.

life. And it's not divided, as it were, into two experiences or two stages. No, it all comes together.

And the notion that one needs a second experience of some kind in order to enter into that fullness of new life, that really is, I believe, a mistake.

[23 : 33] So let's put that idea out of our minds also. Now, in light of what we've said already, it's possible, I think, for us to focus directly on Christian holiness.

And there are four things that I want to say about it. I want first to identify it, second to characterize it, third to analyze it, well, yes, this is sharpening the focus, you see, step by step, and fourthly, to speak of recognizing it, take those four concerns in order.

There are four steps, I think, up a single ladder of understanding. First of all, identify Christian holiness.

Again, I ask the question, what is it? And I reply, in a phrase that Christians have been using for centuries, I reply, it is imitation of Christ.

Christ. You probably know the famous book that Thomas Akempis, I think, a 14th century, perhaps a 15th century monk, wrote that carries that title, The Imitation of Christ as the Essence of the Christian Life.

[25 : 13] Well, yes, that's how you identify holiness, and, again, picking up what I said at the beginning. You recognize that the heart of Christ's perfect human life was his fulfillment of the two great commandments that he gave us, the commandment to love God and love our neighbor.

And, at this point, we should get clear, you love God by obeying his commands, and thereby seeking to magnify him.

Again, I'm echoing the prayer that begins our communion service, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name.

That's what we pray. Well, you magnify God's holy name by honoring him, and you honor him by seeking him to do his will.

This is what the Lord Jesus was doing from beginning to end of his earthly life. And when it comes to love of neighbor, well, the question was asked of the Lord Jesus, who is my neighbor?

[26 : 40] To which Jesus' answer, we'll come back to it in a moment, but it could be expressed by saying that Jesus' response was, who isn't?

Who isn't my neighbor? Everybody is my neighbor. And this is developed along two lines in the New Testament, taking the New Testament as a whole.

Jesus focuses on service, loving service, rendered to anyone and everyone whom you encounter, who's in need of the help that you can give.

And of course you know what I'm talking about. This is the burden and the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan. And then within this universal summons to treat the people that we run across as our neighbor and to go through life looking to see who's in need and whom we can help.

There's the specific obligation, which is highlighted, for instance, in the letters of John, the specific obligation to see our fellow believers as sisters and brothers in the Lord.

[28 : 07] We're all members of the same family. family and we love our sisters and brothers the way that within the family, siblings ought to love.

1 John particularly is the document in the New Testament that hammers away at that. Well, all right, we must take that point.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, all our fellow Christians are our neighbors in Christ, our siblings in Christ.

The sibling idea, incidentally, carries through a thought which is part of the account of the initial gift of salvation.

I didn't mention it, I suppose I should have done. When we believe and our sins are forgiven, when we are renewed inside by the gift of the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit comes to stay in our hearts, well, then, in addition, we are adopted into the family of God and thereafter are his children, sons and heirs, according to the New Testament.

[29 : 28] It had to be put that way in the New Testament. because in the culture of the first century, women were not inheritors.

All the inheritance went to men, so all believers, for this purpose, have to be spoken of as if we were all male, sons and heirs of God.

Do you get it? It doesn't mean that when an individual woman is being talked about, she's spoken of as if she were a son, no, she's spoken of then as a sister in Christ.

But when the thought is of the inheritance that awaits those who are children of God, well, it's always put in the masculine, that we might receive the adoption and the inheritance of sons.

Christ. Well, that leaves us with a life's calling of loving and serving, specifically our brothers and sisters in Christ and generally anyone and everyone we meet whom we are able to help.

[30 : 47] That's the formula for imitation of Christ. And this is the concept in terms of which holiness is identified.

On from that now, second rung of the ladder, holiness characterized. All through the New Testament again, holiness is characterized in two ways that keep recurring.

Holiness is obedience to the truth, that's one aspect, and holiness is life in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, that's the other aspect.

I need not dwell, I think, on the thought of obedience to God's revealed truth. The meaning of that phrase is clear enough, but I would like to say just a little about life in the Spirit, because Paul describes that life, characterizes it in some detail in Galatians chapter 5, in verses that are very well known to all of us, I'm sure.

He speaks of the fruit of the Spirit. Remember the passage? and he says, the fruit of the Spirit, just for the moment, the image you see is a fruit growing on a tree, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[32 : 38] And if you stand back and look at those nine qualities, you'll realize, hey, this is neither more nor less than the character profile of the Lord Jesus reproduced in us, his disciples.

Yes, if you think of these qualities as reactions to situations and the people in those situations, you'll see, I think, straight away what I mean.

Love is the purpose of making the loved one great. You magnify God by honoring him and obeying him, and you show love to your Christian brother and sister, and more generally to your human neighbor, by seeking to give them, bring to them, what they particularly need from you, that will help them as a step on the road to becoming great in the sight of God.

Supremely, people need Christ, and so we must be seeking every opportunity God gives us of sharing Christ with them, but remember again, the Good Samaritan parable, people have material needs as well, human needs as we might say, and we bless them, enrich them, and so help them to become great by doing what we can to meet these needs.

That's love. Joy, joy is the rejoicing of the heart which continues even when circumstances are not stimulating joy at all.

[34 : 56] that is, it continues whether things are going right or whether things are going wrong. It continues whether circumstances are gratifying or whether they discourage, whether they're trying your patience or whether they're bringing you satisfaction of heart.

the Christian keeps rejoicing, rejoice ever more, rejoice all the time, says Paul in Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5, spelling it out.

Well, Jesus actually rejoiced in spirit and spoke, you remember, in that last discourse before his passion, the discourse recorded in John 14 through 16, he spoke of his joy and he said, said to his disciples, I am leaving my joy with you.

I want you to share it and when the Holy Spirit comes into your life in power, you'll find that you are sharing it. Joy, unconquerable joy.

I wish I could say more about that, but the clock's beating me so I can't. I want though to emphasize that the Christian does rejoice, that is to say, does have joy ever more.

[36 : 30] And the way in, by the way, if at any moment of your life you realize, eh, where's my joy gone? The way in or the way back in is to start thinking about the love of the Lord to you and the greatness of the gifts that he's given to you.

And that will, so to speak, prime the pump of your heart and you'll find that you're rejoicing again and the joy is flowing. Well, that's part of the image of Christ in us, his disciples.

And after love and joy comes peace, the peace of heart which keeps you together, integrates you and keeps you integrated, even when circumstances seem to want to tear you apart.

Jesus knew all about that peace and he said in that same discourse before his passion, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

I sometimes say, you know I think that I have a mind that enjoys doing things with words. The Lord's peace keeps you all of a peace and the second peace is spelt P-I-E-C-E.

[38 : 04] You don't come apart of the scenes. At heart you may be perplexed, but you still have peace. Perhaps I should have said there, in your head you may be perplexed, but in your heart you still have peace.

Why? Because you know that your relation to the Father and to the Son and to the Spirit, all of that is firm and fixed and doesn't change. So you have peace about that.

there are certain things that banish anxiety rather than generating it, and the peace of the Lord is one of them.

And then after peace in Paul's list, there comes patience, endurance. Well, times can call for the gift of endurance very loud and very stridently, and some people find it hard to sustain patience, patient endurance, either with difficult people or with difficult situations.

then we blow our top. Well, all right, if we blow our top, we should repent because we didn't need to do that.

[39 : 32] Jesus exhibits sometimes controlled anger at outrageous things, things that are outrageous from God's point of view, but he never blew his top in the sense of losing it.

You know what we mean when we talk about losing it. That wasn't Jesus. And it shouldn't be us either. And we ask the Lord to keep us steady, give us patience, and one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is that he does.

Then comes kindness and goodness and faithfulness. Again, I don't think those qualities require any detailed comment from me.

gentleness and self-control are the two items that finish the list. And again, I think the meaning of both words is obvious.

This is the image of our Lord Jesus Christ analyzed, or rather characterized anyway. And that leads us on to the third rung of our letter.

[40 : 46] Christian holiness analyzed. Well, yes, because I'm now going to offer you some phrases which I think, well, which I hope, shall I say, will bring you precision of insight into some of these qualities that I've spoken of already.

I can only say they bring me insight into these qualities and that's why I venture to pass them on. Four qualities, sorry, three qualities I want to pinpoint here.

Quality number one, holiness is loving simplicity with transparency in the Holy Spirit.

A quality of relational openness which the world ling ordinarily doesn't have.

It's the quality of relational openness that enables you to say when you meet the Holy Person, this is someone I can trust because I can see into this person's heart.

[42 : 21] This person is saying things and telling me things which I can see are meant. this person is really opening his or her heart to me.

Thank God for someone I can trust. And then the response will ordinarily be that the person who perceives the Holy Soul in this way will open up to them just because they see here is someone I can trust.

Someone into whose heart I can see because of the way that they talk and behave. I discern that this person is loving, straightforward, and is being transparent with me.

Then second, this is in my analysis, my attempt to get things all spread out on the table.

Oh, by the way, I was going to give you an illustration of loving simplicity with transparency in the Holy Spirit. This was a mark of Jesus, I meant to say, and this was something, which the Roman centurion, of whom we read in Matthew chapter 8, had picked up.

[43 : 57] You remember, he sent a message to Jesus, my servant's sick, please come and heal him. Jesus says, I will come and heal him. Centurion's response is to say, you don't need to come, I know you don't, because I can see you're a person under authority, just as I'm a person under authority, authority, and persons under authority only need to speak the word, and it will be done.

And Jesus celebrated this as great faith. Well, at the very least, it's evidence that the centurion had picked up Jesus' loving simplicity with transparency.

he discerned that Jesus was a man under authority, carrying authority just because he was under authority, that is, under the authority of God the Father.

Well, hopefully, a holy person will be discerned by those to whom he or she relates as someone under authority, and that's why you can trust them, and why you can rely on them, and why it's worth your while to pour out your heart to them, and enlist their help.

Second thing, holiness is, it analyzes as loving service with imagination in the Holy Spirit.

[45 : 45] Here, I would simply say, for the model, just look at the three-year ministry of the Lord Jesus to his disciples.

You may or may not know that the film star David Niven said of the film star Errol Flynn, well, you knew where you were with Errol, he always let you down.

And what I'm doing is drawing a contrast here. the disciples also let Jesus down over and over again.

Not always, but a number of times. And it didn't affect his attitude towards them in the least. He was rendering them loving service with imagination by training them to become the apostles that in due course they did become.

the imagination factor comes in because the Lord Jesus actually had in mind quite clearly the sort of persons that apostles would have to be.

[47 : 15] I mean, apostles out on their own pioneering evangelistic preaching and church founding and all that went with the apostolic ministry.

Well, that thought means a lot to me and I hope it means something to you. The reflection here perhaps, I mean, the simpler homely reflection of all of this is in the way that good parents try imaginatively to serve and so train up their children.

The imagination comes in in all sorts of ways, as every parent knows. You try to keep in mind what you discern that the child is thinking.

You plan treats which you know the child is going to enjoy. You spend time thinking out patterns for parties and gifts for birthdays and Christmas and one of the measures of our parenthood is the amount of imagination that we are able to put into this exercise.

Well, I have to leave the point there but I hope that rings some sort of bell and I'm sure it does actually for all of us one way or another.

[48 : 52] And then thirdly, loving steadiness with adoration in the Holy Spirit, adoration of course of the Father and steadiness and obedience to the Father, faithfulness to the Father God's glory and steadiness when the roof seems to be falling in.

Think of Job whose steadiness and faithfulness God was allowing Satan to test for God's glory and actually for Job's blessing at the end of the day.

Though God never explained to Job what he'd been up to and so Job had to live with that as the mystery of those dreadful months when everything seemed to have been taken away from him and his friends could only say things to him that hurt, couldn't say anything that helped.

Well, God does sometimes exercise us in this way and a modern example of that I believe is Mother Teresa who very remarkably enjoyed 20 years of warm-hearted fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

She testified to it as a nun and then was made leader as you know of the mission to the outcasts of Calcutta which she founded and led for the next 50 years and from the time that she took that position the warm sense of fellowship with God was taken from her so that she felt that she was living spiritually in semi-darkness the whole time.

[51 : 14] A book containing letters to clergy that she trusted and her confessors was published fairly recently which demonstrated this and well I've put it in pretty stark terms and I kid you not that's the way that she put it.

those who knew her and those who have reviewed her life and ministry since it ended are in no doubt that in fact God took her through this bleak experience this time of what felt like darkness in order to generate within her this empathy sympathy and warmth of heart to minister to these people who were dying in the streets in Calcutta and frankly looking over the fence I as a Protestant looking at this very remarkable Catholic lady I'm sure they were right and that that was God's purpose but Teresa though she accepted it showed by her letters that she never really understood it because it was so different in the bleakness and the darkness you see from the way it had been before she became the leader of the mission well again

I quote this just as I quoted Job as an example of loving steadiness with adoration in the Holy Spirit all of those positive qualities were there as part of Teresa's life and nobody knew actually until after her death at least apart from these clergy whom she confesses and so on whom she trusted to keep the secret nobody knew that this had been the quality of her inner life and nobody knew that it was out of this experience of darkness that she had spoken all the encouraging words that she did speak both to her own nuns and to the rest of the Christian world remarkable lady in the spirit by the grace of God well that I see as holiness you get it

I've analyzed holiness as loving simplicity and transparency I've analyzed it as loving service with imagination and I've analyzed it as loving steadiness with adoration and now I come to the close of what I have to share which is simply a sort of postscript point on the recognition of holiness by the grace of God and perhaps bearing in mind some of these points that I've made we shall for our encouragement discern holiness in others in saintly believers in fellow members of the body of Christ and the discernment will encourage us and encourage us greatly but I don't think we shall ever be able to discern holiness in ourselves because holiness starts in the heart as I said right at the beginning and in the heart there's always an element of sin trying to regain control so that it's a fight it's a battle and we don't always have complete victory in the battle and we labour to do right despite what's going on inside us so the

Christian life from the inside will be a life of ongoing repentance but yet from the outside by God's grace it may be recognised as a life of holiness kind saints who recognise this quality in others won't tell them because it doesn't help you to be told that you're holy when you know inwardly in your heart you're not but that is something to remember look for it in others friends and take courage from the grace of God that you see in them and ask the Lord to keep you travelling along the path of holiness as long as this life lasts talk over thank you for listening now I've been very forthright in saying some of the things that I have said and maybe

[56 : 55] I've provoked thoughts that I may now ask you to share for the benefit of us all so please into dialogue tell me how all this strikes you Bill the darkness that Anna Teresa experienced isn't that a contradiction to the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is joy that she wasn't experiencing joy so are we to be encouraged by her experience or are we to be inquisitive about that's a sharp question Bill and thank you for asking it my response such as it is is as follows the

Christian heart is bigger than the heart of an unregenerate person Paul says of himself sorrowful yet always rejoicing two things can be going on in the Christian heart thinking of the grace of God which brings joy alongside thinking of the immediate circumstances which generates sorrow sorrow I have taught this and it's rather bold I think to teach it but I have taught this in relation to mourning at a bereavement You mourn for your own loss of the person who's been taken, and so you should, but yet at the same time you are able to keep rejoicing in the Lord.

It's a question of what you are thinking about at a particular moment. In cases such as I'm describing, the mind moves from one focus to the other.

You think about the loss you've suffered, you think perhaps about the pain and the grief that you're going through, and those thoughts let sorrow loose in your soul, and there's nothing wrong with that.

We were made creatures capable of feeling pain, grief, and sorrow. But when one moves one's mind, and this is a matter of deliberately saying to yourself, I'm not going to go on brooding about that.

[60 : 00] I am going to think about my God and my Saviour and the Gospel and the love to which I've been introduced through my faith, and so on and so forth.

So if one wrenches one's mind back into Christian thoughts along those lines, joy will begin to flow alongside the grief, sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

And I think that this was surely the truth about Mother Teresa viewed from inside, rather than to say she had no joy at all.

What she wrote about and testified to her confessors and so on, was the distress and the lack of the warm feelings that she'd had during the years before she began the mission.

And that's matter of fact. But she doesn't deal with the question of whether she was able to keep rejoicing in her sorrow because of the grace of God, which she knew so well and was trusting so wholeheartedly.

[61 : 24] She was, you know. And that's my hypothesis about Teresa and her joy.

I'm sure, in fact, that there was continuing joy there because I'm sure, in fact, that the knowledge of the grace of God towards herself, a sinner, and towards other people too, Christians who worked with her, and would it have been sometimes Christians that she found in the gutter whom nobody was looking after?

I expect so. Those thoughts would have generated joy, which is, in any case, less a feeling, in the first instance, than it is a habit of mind, where you keep thinking over how God has loved you.

And you get thrilled by that. But it isn't always a feeling. It certainly isn't a feeling when you're suffering toothache or something of that sort.

At the feeling level, it's the toothache that occupies attention. But when you think of the grace of God, you can keep rejoicing even in the sorrow of the toothache.

[62 : 55] It can be done. And the saints have done it. And Paul was doing it. So that's my hypothesis about Mother Teresa.

Estimate it as you think fit. Is there a danger that concentration on our own holiness could become another form of self-obsession?

Yes. Or put it another way, should holiness involve some degree of self-forgetfulness? I believe that holiness should involve a lot of self-forgetfulness.

I hope that this was at least implicit in what I was saying to you.

And certainly, in positive terms, I would urge something I said at the beginning. Pleasing God is the name of the game, if I may put it that way, once you're a Christian.

[64 : 09] This is supremely what you want to do. You magnify God. You exalt God. You show how you appreciate God by pleasing Him.

And when you're concentrating on pleasing, trying to please God, then you're not focusing on yourself.

I'm glad you brought the point up, though, Phil. Because our hearts are so deceptive, and sin in our system is so cunning.

I think that's the only word I can use. That again and again, at least if you're anything like me, you find that you've been self-absorbed when you ought to have been God-absorbed.

And you're being self-centered when you should have been God-focused, and so on and so forth. And the realization comes with something of a jolt, and you have to repent of it.

[65 : 11] I imagine that everybody in this room, without exception, knows what I'm talking about here. Well, it goes on, so the Bible teaches, and so I increasingly suspect, as I get older and older, it goes on for the whole of one's life.

And that's the point I was trying to make right at the end, when I said, don't try to discern holiness in yourself.

What you'll discern is, let me say it a different way, your reach exceeding your grasp. In other words, you'll discern yourself aiming at holiness and not fully getting there.

So that there has to be more endeavor, more concentration on pleasing God, and more repentance of the particular ways in which, even though one didn't intend to fall short, one actually did.

That's how I see it. Again, let everybody be fully persuaded in their own mind. I'm doing the best I can.

[66 : 32] Oh. Yes, Jim. I wonder, who do you recommend that we should be reading on this topic? I'm constantly going back to Bishop Ryle's book on holiness, which is a wonderful book, but it's sort of dated language, in many ways.

Can you recommend for us the contemporary literature on holiness? Well, the moment you said, what do you recommend, it leaped into my heart.

Well, I'll recommend Bishop Ryle, and then you've already recommended Bishop Ryle, so I don't need to do that. And I would add that Bishop Ryle's style is most certainly dated, but it carries you along with it in the way that King James English can carry you along once you've got into it.

As you read lots and lots of the Bible, I mean, we have our revisions of Scripture, and that's perfectly right and proper, and at some points necessary.

But there are narrative sections of the Bible story where the King James tells it so well, and carries one along so smoothly, that you don't really feel that any revision or change is necessary.

[67 : 57] Does anybody want to challenge that? I think everybody who knows the King James Bible would agree with it. But I'm prepared to be challenged if anyone feels they should.

And as I say, Bishop Ryle is dated too. Modern writings, now there's a chap, oh goodness, name, a man who publishes with Nav Press.

Can anybody help me on this? He's published books with the title of, oh, let me see, The Pursuit of Holiness.

A.W. Tozer. Pardon? Tozer? No, it isn't Tozer. It's a man who's still going strong, actually. Tozer's worth a mention. Tozer had his eye on the reality of holy living all the way through, I mean, all the way through his ministry, and he wrote lots of stuff, which is still in print.

But this, no, this guy, and none of you can help me, well, sorry about that. Oh, perhaps I should bring the recommendation next week. I have reached an age at which every now and then the name that you know perfectly well and need goes out of your mind and you can't think of it.

[69 : 28] And that's what's happened to me this very moment. I know the guy, he's a personal friend. He once shared with me how he learned to control his passion for ice cream.

What could be more friendly than that? But, I'm sorry, this is, I'm reducing it to silliness. I cannot remember the guy's name.

But he's written a number of books. Do we meet again next week, Bill? Or is this the last session? Yeah, we meet next week. We think we've finished off next week.

Well, in one sense, perhaps so. Not in every sense, I hope. Well, the best I can promise is that next week I'll bring you this information which at the moment I cannot call to mind.

Sorry about that. This is a wonderful moment to call a whole for the questions. Oh, I'd like to recommend a book on holiness which Dr. Packham has written.

[70 : 34] Oh, okay. It's a very good book. Very good. And has a picture of a light bulb on the cover. Well, yes it does. Yes it does. This is obviously a planted question.

Well, if I said no you wouldn't believe me so I'm not going to say anything. Well, let me just say that for 30 years Dr. Packham has had a vision for this Learners Exchange.

He has been the source of the quality of this event. And I think now that the last presentation this particular year that we should together thank him for all this consistent and magnificent contribution to our life as a community.

Thank you very much. Thank you. Just carry on.

Thank you.