

## WHY THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT DIED

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### 1. The neglect, even abandonment, of Reformation principles.

#### ➤ Justification by faith alone.

Rightly understood, this is, as Martin Luther termed it, the doctrine of a standing or a falling Church. Yet so many in the holiness movement today have virtually no understanding or experience of this Bible doctrine.

#### ➤ The authority of Scripture.

Our forefathers in the holiness movement were pre-eminently Bible and doctrinal preachers. Then from the 1930s the whole style shifted from a practical and doctrinal presentation to a subjective and emotional presentation. This had very little of the Holy Spirit in it and must be judged largely as a work of the flesh. The blessings of God were largely withdrawn, although the appearance of liveliness persisted in emotional altar scenes. Many of these altar scenes became a spectacle and were little better than the sordid scene at the foot of the mount, when Israel danced to their shame before the nations around.

#### ➤ The priesthood of all believers.

This principle was misapplied when believers were encouraged to dominate the meetings with what was thought to be "the freedom of the Spirit." Instead it was largely the exercise of the flesh. It was even thought to be a good service if singing and testifying and emotions so dominated that no time was left for the preaching of the Word of God. We need to relearn that the Reformation was a return to Scripture. Holiness can only have life and power when it is Scriptural Holiness.

### 2. The shift of emphasis from doctrine to experience.

The holiness movement took a nosedive in influence when, especially in the 1930s, the style and content of holiness preaching changed radically. It shifted from the earlier biblical, doctrinal, and Christ-centred emphasis to a more experiential, illustrative, and man-centred emphasis mingled with shallow emotionalism. This position still dominates and has proven to be a jugular slash to true holiness. Almost all the great founders of the holiness movement, especially those following the 1859 revival, were expositors. Today there is rarely an expositor among us.

J. A. Wood's Perfect Love is a great work. However, its monumental weakness is the almost complete lack of any Scripture. Too many meetings are on this plan - testimonies but no Scripture. Too many sermons follow the same plan - too many stories, not enough scripture.

3. The trust in feelings rather than an exercise of faith.

When the position moved from doctrine to experience it easily moved to a state where what one felt was far more satisfying than the complete trust in the reliability of the promises of God as found in His Word. Consequently the "altar" became almost a spiritual counterpart to the psychiatrist's couch. A time of crying at the altar made the "confessor" feel much better. Repeated visits to the "altar" kept the heart in a good state of feelings. So very rarely now are testimonies full of complete trust in the Word of God, apart from feelings. The older sequence was facts, faith, then feelings - when and as God gave them. Now Christian experience is almost only a matter of feelings.

4. The emphasis on entertainment rather than edification.

Nowadays, every service has to have its "special," that is, a solo or other musical performance, often followed by a round of applause, on the part of the "audience." It would surprise many to realize Wesley and Whitfield never used a soloist. All music was an act of worship and adoration addressed to God. Whole meetings are now handed over as concerts, "sacred" concerts, but concerts none the less. It is common for professional musicians to charge a thousand dollars or more for a performance. This is nothing less than a form of prostitution, a sale of the gifts God has given, which surely must result in a grieving of the Spirit.

5. We have lost the scriptural position of the primacy of preaching.

This present situation makes it difficult for those of us who hold the conviction that only a service where the Word of God is read and expounded, is a truly Christian service.

6. A negative and judgmental spirit among those professing holiness.

I live on a holiness camp ground founded by the great William McDonald of Boston. In its heyday, it is claimed that rarely less than 7000 would be found on the grounds during camp meeting. I have some 48 portraits of the past preachers who preached so effectively here. What variety of style, denominational background, and interpretations of various scriptures. There were Quakers, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists of various types, and Salvationists. Some were millennialists, others were not. What held them together in such unity? Perfect love. They shared a uniting experience of the Spirit which filled them with love and created a general tolerance over the interpretation of secondary doctrines. How different today! The aggressive and judgmental spirit that predominates today is nothing short of scandalous. Not even among us who are agreed on the need of the life of holiness can it be said, "See how these Christians love each other." Almost all separations and divisions in fellowship today are either over personalities or on the interpretation or application of a secondary truth. The famous John Newton said, "What a sad spectacle it is to see sheep biting sheep."

## 7. Substitutes for the genuine working of the Spirit.

### ➤ Legalism instead of spirituality.

When I adopt a certain standard of lifestyle, dress, or behavior, because I believe God would have me to do so, that is grace. When I inflict this upon others and require it from them, that is legalism. The first attitude is to be respected, the other is to be deprecated and rejected.

### ➤ Externalism instead of internal cleansing.

The whole emphasis of Scripture is on Heart Purity. God has many holy people across the world, yet who differ radically on the matter of standards. To judge outwardly, from externals, can lead to very false conclusions, yet it is widespread among us.

### ➤ Separation instead of evangelical unity.

I hope we are all opposed to the false ecumenical movement, but the alternative is not separation from other true Christians. We dare not rend the body of Christ. According to Romans 14-16 we can be one in spirit with all other true believers, despite differences of interpretation. There has been a neglect of the doctrine of the oneness and unity of the Church in favour of an individualistic work of the Spirit. In too many cases members of one church almost seem to believe they are the only ones who will find heaven. Many have testified how shocked and surprised they were to discover that there were Christians in other fellowships besides theirs. It seems we are afraid that if we show any love and unity for a sister church down the road that some of our people may go to them. We are afraid of a loss in numbers, so we find things to criticize and condemn. We try to discourage any of our people from attending the revival of a sister church or our young people from meeting their young people.