

URGENT CALL FOR HOLINESS PREACHING

Greg B. Fernandez Jr.

Introduction

Pervasive holiness preaching is in demand in today's secular age. The Body of Christ needs holiness preachers to proclaim the unchanging Word of God to this changing society without compromising its message. The preachers who reconsider preaching holiness will make difference in this present age. The following points highlight the urgency of holiness preaching.

First, the Age of a Cheap Gospel should Stirs Us to Preach Holiness More

Some gospel preachers in today's generation cognitively put up an "On Sale" billboards to attract consumers to buy a cheap grace. Metaphorically, they market the Gospel to customers at a low price. For some, preaching the Gospel is a means for material gain. Preachers preach on the street and on buses collecting offerings. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes just another business enterprise to earn money while hiding in the façade of Christian ministry. Let me remind the readers of this magazine that *Jesus did not die on the cross to give preachers career but to save the lost from eternal hell.*

I watched an evangelist told his TV audience that more than a million in a single meeting signed a decision card. In other words, he implied that more than one million got saved in just one single meeting. Great declaration, but signing a decision card or coming forward during an altar call per se does not transform anyone. Only God can change someone. Some people get the idea that coming forward save people and some get the impression that praying the sinner's prayer per se save them. Are they? May be, may be not?

The evangelistic lines, “Just relax. You don’t need to struggle just rest in Him. No price is required because Jesus paid it for you and for me.” This is a cheap gospel. While it is true that we do not need to pay the price for our salvation, there is price to pay in following Jesus Christ. “Sign a card and you will be saved.” “Come forward and be saved.” This type of appeal is not costly. It costs nothing to sign a card or to pray the sinner’s prayer. But it costs something to be transformed into the image of Christ. It costs one to follow Christ in radical discipleship. There is a price to pay if one is to be transformed. Transformation is a process and growth in grace is daily spiritual exercise. Discipleship is costly business. Going to church when it is raining very hard is costly. Giving to God’s work is costly. It costs one to serve the Lord.

Second, Pulpit Devoid of Holiness Preaching Reminds us of our Holiness Preaching Responsibility

One holiness denomination’s top leader in the Philippines told me that holiness preaching has once declined in his denomination as indicated in its monthly Workers’ Personal Report sometime in the past. The report indicates that the total holiness messages preached was only 1% out of more than four hundred pastors in his denomination throughout the Philippines. While we do not know the reason behind this figure, it does imply that those ministers, in that particular holiness denomination, devalued holiness preaching. But in fairness to the over 400 ministers, looking at the figure alone is insufficient basis to make the conclusion that those ministers have lost their vision for holiness preaching. On the other hand, the statistic deduced that holiness is a hard topic about which to preach in today’s morally decaying society.

The criticism among pastors in the Wesleyan persuasion is, “why do pastors seldom preach holiness?” This may be true and is prevalent in holiness churches today. Yet, the reason behind the fading away of holiness preaching is complex. There is no single factor for this problem. Others considered the holiness preaching as passé in today’s secular generation. Is

holiness preaching an outdated and obsolete subject? What has gone wrong? Do pastors have the theory but no experience? Do pastors have experience but lacking in external holiness or holy ethics? Perhaps, ministers have both experience and theory, but lack the power and passion to preach it. Holiness preaching is not obsolete.

Third, Our Generation of low morality Calls for a Persistent and Pervasive Holiness Preaching

Although, preachers' integrity and authority is questioned and doubted incessantly due to moral failure of some preachers, this generation of preachers must preach holiness in these times of moral degradation. True enough, our age of moral decadence calls for persistent and pervasive holiness preaching. The world needs daring and uncompromising preachers to proclaim the whole counsel of God in this challenging moment of church history. We are called to preach the Word and not adjust our sermon with the situation in society. The world is going down the hill of corruption and it's the preacher's responsibility to proclaim holiness.

Fourth, The Devaluation of Holiness Preaching Calls for Renewed Holiness Preaching

Holiness preaching is not popular these days. Some preachers intentionally shun it because holiness does not appeal to this age of moral decadence. Preaching holiness makes other uncomfortable in today's compromising society and prosperity gospel dominated preaching era. Prosperity talk about material blessings is much more appealing to preachers than addressing this sin-corrupted age. Perhaps it's one of the reasons we have such a low morality because holiness is forgotten. Despite church growth strategies, television preaching and endless preachers, our society is continually going down the hill of moral depravity. Somehow, this great theme (holiness) of the scripture is set aside in the corner of pastoral study.

A friend of mine admitted, “To preach sin concerning holiness to a poor community is unsuitable, because the people already have enough to suffer about.” The holiness message is not against the poor, or against poverty and suffering. Although, it might be difficult to preach about sin to a poverty-stricken community, how can one preach holiness without touching sin? Perhaps there is a way to preach holiness and sin without offending the poor. Perhaps there is a way to preach holiness without touching the subject of sin. But that would be another paper to write. Conceivably, we can still preach about sin and holiness to a poor community with love; it’s a matter of attitude and methodology.

Behind many pulpits today, preachers do not address sin anymore. This is not to say that a condemning-preaching style is being advocated, because holiness is a message of love and message of moral and heart purity. No daring preacher will preach holiness without touching the subject of SIN. How we view sin, affects our perception of holiness. Thus, when holiness is preached, sin is not a far behind topic.

Some say that we can preach moral and heart purity while ignoring sin. Can we? Preachers will be hard up to preach holiness ethics while condoning sin practices. To preach holiness while condoning sin is to create a gospel of tolerance. A gospel of tolerance tolerates sinful practice without teaching righteousness. Yet, this scenario depicts the state of some churches today.

If powerful and persistent holiness preaching is indeed lacking in our churches today including the so-called holiness denominations, if the pulpits of today devoid of holiness preaching emphasizing prosperity theology, and since holiness is a cardinal message of the scripture, then, now is the time renew our commitment for holiness preaching. We should get back to one the most significant themes of Holy Scripture and the most neglected message in our society—“*Holiness.*”

What do we do with it? Are we going to set aside one of the general themes of scripture? The choice is ours to make whether to set aside holiness or peach it and live it in today's decaying age. Nonetheless, I am convinced that holiness preaching remains powerful and effective, and the key depends on us preachers.

Finally, The Centrality of Holiness Doctrine in the Scripture demands us to Preach Holiness Now

The message of holiness runs like a red thread going through the sixty-six books of the Bible; from Genesis to Revelation, holiness is a central theme. A. F. Harper writes, "Christian holiness is a scriptural teaching to be understood and a relationship with God to be experienced. God is a holy God, and He asks His people to be like Him in this respect."³⁶¹ (Italics mine).

Despite the scriptural reliability of holiness, we must admit, not all genuine Christians understand biblical holiness in the same way. Yet, I like to stress the fact that holiness is not a mere theological treatise, impossible to attain, or a western concept as others think; but rather it is a spiritual reality, rooted biblically, and attainable experientially in this life.

Conclusion

Despite the plethora of existing volumes written that define and re-define the doctrine of holiness, the word holiness remains a confusing term in the entire lexicon of Christian doctrine. The term holiness carries a heavy and puzzling terminology and hermeneutical freight, which baffles the common Christians continually. Yet, regardless of the misunderstanding on the term, it is the task of the preachers to communicate it in a relevant terminology.

With the preceding premise in mind, holiness preaching needs to be reconsidered. Responding to the clarion call to preach holiness is a necessity in today's sick churches and dying world. We must seriously rethink biblical

³⁶¹ A. F. Harper, "Understanding the Great Holiness Classics," in Paul M. Bassett, ed. *Great Holiness Classics*, Vol. 1: *Holiness Teaching, New Testament Times to Wesley* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 13.

holiness in a contextual and contemporary fashion. Preachers need to rethink and revisit the content of their holiness preaching and method of communication. Is the content of our message truly Biblical? Are we communicating holiness in language our people understand or are the terms we use foreign and unfamiliar to our people? Is our methodology of presenting holiness relevant to our own culture? If we fail to communicate due to difference in language, we must stop using abstract concepts that are foreign to the mind of our people and start using the right language and terminologies they are familiar with. Fellow preachers, the challenge remains tough and the task remains formidable. We need to re-visit our methods, re-think our terminologies, and re-shape the content of our message. Reconsidering our communication approach and language skill is great step in making the holiness doctrine understandable in today's generation. I encourage preachers in the holiness tradition to spearhead the recovery of holiness preaching. If we are to raise and wave the banner of holiness preaching in the 21st century, the task must begin in us.