

HOW CAN I LIVE A HOLY LIFE?

Something happened at Pentecost. For over a thousand years, God required the Jewish faithful to gather at Jerusalem once a year in honor of this feast. But why? *And then, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, God fulfilled the feast by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus. The Holy Spirit no longer dwelt with men; He now dwelt in man* (John 14:17)! It was an important event to God and man.

On the cross, Jesus provided the true and living way of cleansing from sin for the repentant (those who had a change of mind about their sin). Then, He ascended to the Father to advocate when His disciples fell short of His will. Now, because of the work of Christ at Calvary and His intercession, those who loved Him (James 1:12, 2:5) could be holy, as white as snow, and our God, our holy God, could dwell in us! No longer did He dwell in the Holy of Holies in the temple purified by carnal ritual. He could now dwell in the cleansed temple of those who had been purified by the precious blood of Christ. The ruptured relationship in the garden was healed, and man was restored to God! For, if the Spirit of him that raised Jesus from the dead dwelt in you, he that raised Christ from the dead would also "make alive our mortal bodies" (bodily resurrection and rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) by his Spirit that dwelt in you. (Romans 8:11) Holy Spirit empowerment of bodily resurrection to immortality was now possible because an immortal God was dwelling in mortal man! Hallelujah!!! Pentecost was fulfilled. Now, an immortal God could dwell in a mortal man, and he could experience the resurrection of his body to eternal life. What a most favorable new breakthrough for those seeking after God!

How can I live a holy life? Are repentance, Pentecost, and "Holy Spirit empowerment" the key, or do I need to repent and "determine to do better?" The Bible doesn't use either of those phrases, so let's root around and see what we can find. What do we mean by the term "Holy Spirit empowerment"? We know the Holy Spirit has been actively working in man since the creation of the world to bring us to God. This is manifested in His striving with men (Gen 6:3), convicting men and speaking to his conscience (Psa 32 1-5), guiding (Psa 32:8), protecting (Isa 59:19) and instructing them (Neh 9:20), and being present with them (Psa 139:1,7). We don't typically think of these activities in the Old Testament as Holy Spirit empowerment, but they are powerful and important factors in us living a holy life as He *strengthens us with might by His Spirit in the inner man* (Eph 3:16). Holy Spirit empowerment is usually understood to be giving New Testament believers a strength to overcome living in sin; a power which Old Testament saints didn't have. This empowerment is nowhere explained in the New Testament, and I believe it is in error to accept it as part of our doctrinal foundation. God has always been strengthening His people. As Isaiah said, *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength*. David so clearly said, (Psa 138:3) *In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul*.

Being made righteous (justification) is the mighty work of God. We can't experience justification on our own merit. We can't "try harder" to come into a state of justification before God and achieve that goal. Only God can take away our sins. Only God, in His mercy, can make us white as snow. No amount of "determining to do better" will bring us to be "just as though we have never sinned." *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* (Eph 2:8,9) We repent, and it is by the power of God through the work of Christ and the renewal by the Holy Ghost that righteousness is imputed unto us. Justification is the miracle of the mighty power of God. Justification sets us free from sin. It is an amazing new birth into the family of God. Sin no longer condemns us and holds us separated from God.

"Determining to do better" is being diligent about holy living. It is the active use of our will in denying ourselves and exercising self-control in living a holy life. God, in harmony with the Holy Spirit, takes care of your justification, prodding us to do better and guiding our lives. We are responsible for our choices and putting those choices into action. Notice that I essentially define "determining to do better" or "trying harder" as denying myself and diligence, which I believe are keys to living a holy life. Self-control (temperance) is a fruit of the Spirit. Do we gain self-control by Holy Spirit empowerment or through the exercise of the will? There is no question Paul taught that *I keep under my body and bring it into subjection* (1Co 9:27). Jesus taught, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me* (Matt 16:24). Both these verses put the onus on us to deny ourselves. I need to deny myself. I need to keep under my body. You could hardly call it self-control if we can't control ourselves, and the Holy Spirit control is what is required to deny ourselves. We **yield** our members servants to righteousness unto holiness (Rom 6:19), **bring into captivity** every thought (2Co 9:26,27), and **bridle our tongue** (Jas 1:26, Psa 39:1, Pro 10:19). It is our responsibility to **resist** the Devil (Jas 4:7). We set our affections on things above (Col 3:2). We **put off and mortify** the things of the flesh and the world (Col 3:5,8,9), and we **abstain** from fleshly lusts (1Pe 2:11). We **put on** the Christian graces (Col 3:12-14) and flee youthful lusts (2Ti 2:22). It is very clear that contentment is learned, not imputed (Php 4:11), and that the grace of God **teaches us** (not empowers) to deny worldly lusts (Tit 2:12). God does not infuse self-denial and humility into us; they are things we learn. We

need to *give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall* (2Pe 1:10). So then, it is with the mind that we serve the law of God (Rom 7:25).

"Trying harder" might not always be enough. I suggest that sometimes we need to reach out beyond ourselves to others to experience victory over sin. This could include accountability with a brother, restrictions on our phones, not being around certain people, or staying away from certain locations. We need to learn to *not make provision for the flesh* (Rom 13:14). If our hand causes us to offend, a drastic response on our part, like cutting it off, is in order (Mark 9:43). We follow the Spirit as He leads us through the conscience and the Word (Romans 8:14). He shines a light on our pathway, convicts us, and points us in the way to live a holy life. He strengthens us in many ways (Php 4:13).

It is, of course, right to ask God to help us gain Christian victory, and we also need to strengthen ourselves through the reading of the Word and Christian fellowship. God doesn't promise to give "special" New Testament Holy Spirit power to overcome sin, but He does promise He will *not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it* (1Co 10:13). He promises to limit our temptations to what we can bear. God's nature is to constantly watch over us and be kind to us. His divine nature in love gives us His constant protection and nurture day by day. As recipients of His divine nature, we stand in awe of His virtue and the fullness of His life; amazed that we can by His mercy escape from the destruction and ruin that is in the world through lusts (2Pe 1:4).

Something happened at Pentecost. With Christ in us, we have the hope of glory (Col 1:27). Now we can be resurrected to immortality and eternal life (Rom 8:11). Praise the Lord!! Because of Calvary, we can stand justified before God, and our sin problem is taken care of. There is no sin on our record. God, like He in love, has been doing down through all the ages and limits our temptation to what we can bear. God is faithful to do His part. And we need to do our part. So, giving all diligence (earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything. Thayers) add to your faith, yield your members servants to righteousness, and put on the new man (Eph 4:24) and the whole armor of God. Put off the works of darkness and let God teach us how to deny ourselves. *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers* (1Pe 3:10-12, Psa 34:12-15).

Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong (1Co16:13).

~Vernon Martin