

The Way of Holiness

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Isaiah 35:8



By Jonathan Edwards

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This Book of Isaiah speaks so much of Christ, gives such a particular account of the birth, life, miracles and passion, and of the gospel state, that it has been called a fifth Gospel. In this chapter is contained a glorious prophecy of the evangelical state:

1. We have a description of the flourishing state of Christ's kingdom in the two first verses, in the conversion and enlightening of the heathen, here compared to a wilderness, and a desert, solitary place:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

2. The great privileges and precious advantages of the gospel, in the five following verses wherein the strength, the courage, the reward, the salvation, the light and understanding, comforts and joys, that are conferred thereby, are very aptly described and set forth:

Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert, And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

3. The nature of the gospel, and way of salvation therein brought to light. First, the holy nature of it, in the eighth and ninth verses:

- A. And an highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there.

- B. The joyful nature of it, "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" [v.10].

Observations

1. Observe in our text the subject spoken, that is, the way to salvation: "An highway shall be there, and a way." This highway is the common and only way to heaven, for the way to heaven is but one. There is none ever get to heaven except they walk in this way some men don't get to heaven one way and others another, but it is one highway that is always traveled by those that obtain heaven.

It is the same narrow way that Christ tells us of. Some don't go to heaven in a broad way, and others in a narrow; some in an easy and others in a difficult way; some in a way of self-denial and mortification, and others in a way of enjoyment of their lusts and sinful pleasures; some up hill and others down: but the way to heaven is the same, and it is the highway here spoken of. There is only one highway or common road, and no by-paths that some few go to heaven in, as exceptions from the rest.

If we seek never so diligently, we shall never find out an easier way, to heaven than that which Christ has revealed to us. We cannot find a broader way, but if we go to heaven, the way is so narrow that we must rub hard to get along and press forward. The kingdom of heaven must suffer violence; it must be taken by force, or else it never will be taken at all. If we don't go by the footsteps of the flock, we shall never find the place where Christ feeds, and where he makes his flock to rest at noon.

It appears that the way here spoken of is the way of salvation, by the last verse of the chapter. When speaking of this way, it is said, "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion," etc. "Zion" is the common appellation by which, in the Old Testament, the church both militant and triumphant is signified.

2. In the words observe the holy nature of this way described: first, by the name by which it is called, "the way of holiness"; "and it shall be called the way of holiness." Secondly, the holiness of those that travel in it, and its purity from those that are unclean, or unholy; "the unclean shall not pass over it." No wicked person shall ever travel in this way of holiness. To the same purpose is the next verse, "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there." That is, none of the wicked men of this world, which are like lions or ravenous beasts more than like men: in their eager raging and lustful appetites and evil affections, or by their insatiable covetousness, are like hungry wolves, are violently set upon the world and will have it, whether by right or by wrong. Or make themselves like ravenous beasts by their proud, invidious, malicious dispositions, which is directly contrary to a Christian spirit and temper. They are more like wild beasts than Christians, that are wrongful and injurious, are all for themselves and the satisfying their own appetites, and care nothing for the welfare of others, their fellowmen that are of the same blood, make a god of their bellies, and therein resemble tigers and wolves.

"Now," says the Prophet, "none such shall go upon this highway to Zion; such unclean and ravenous beasts shall not be found there. No, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion." This way is a way of holiness and not to be defiled by wicked persons. That in Rev. 21:27 will serve well for an explication of these words: "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

DOCTRINE

Those only that are holy are in the way to heaven.

Many are not sensible enough of the necessity of holiness in order to salvation. Everyone hopes for heaven, but if everyone that hoped for heaven ever got there, heaven by this time would have been full of murderers, adulterers, common swearers, drunkards, thieves, robbers,, and licentious debauchers. It would have been full of all manner of wickedness and wicked men, such as the earth abounds with at this day. There would have been those there that are no better than wild beasts, howling wolves, and poisonous serpents; yea, devils incarnate, as Judas was.

What a wretched place would the highest heavens have been by this time if it were so: that pure, undefiled, light and glorious place, the heavenly temple, would be as the temple of Jerusalem was in Christ's time, a den of thieves; and the royal palace of the Most High the holy metropolis of the creation, would be turned into a mere hell. There would be no happiness there for those that are holy. What a horrible, dreadful confusion would there be if the glorious presence of God the Father; the glorified Lamb of God; and the Heavenly Dove, spirit of all grace and original of all holiness; the spotless, glorified saints; the holy angels; and wicked men, beasts and devils were all mixed up together!

Therefore, it behooves us all to be sensible of the necessity of holiness in order to salvation; of the necessity of real, hearty and sincere inward and spiritual holiness, such as will stand by us forever and will not leave us at death, that sinners may not be so foolish as to entertain hopes of heaven, except they intend forthwith to set about repentance and reformation of heart and life. Wherefore, this is what we are now upon: to show the necessity of holiness, and this we shall do in these three things.

- I. Show what holiness is.
 - II. That those that have it not are not in the way to heaven.
 - III. The reasons why it must needs be so.
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I. What is holiness? I shall answer to this question in three things which fully comprehend the nature of holiness, which are not in themselves distinct as so many parts of holiness, but the same thing in three different lights, to give us the fuller understanding of it.

1. Holiness is a conformity of the heart and the life unto God. Whatever outward appearance men may make by their external actions, as if they were holy, yet if it proceeds not from a most inward hearty and sincere holiness within, it is nothing. Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart all that he did was not acceptable to God, who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

And whatever holiness they may pretend to have in their hearts, whatever hypocritical pangs of affection they may have had, it is all to no purpose except it manifest itself in the holiness of their lives and conversations: Jas. 1: 2627, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." And in the second chapter, eighteenth verse: "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." And in the nineteenth and twentieth verses, "Thou

believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" So that there must be a conformity of both heart and life to God, in order to true holiness.

Holiness is the image of God, his likeness, in him that is holy. By being conformed unto God is not meant a conformity to him in his eternity, or infinity, or infinite power. These are God's inimitable and incommunicable attributes; but a conformity to his will, whereby he wills things that are just, right, and truly excellent and lovely; whereby he wills real perfection, and goodness; and perfectly abhors everything that is really evil, unjust, and unreasonable. And it is not only a willing as God wills, but also a doing as he doeth: in acting holily and justly and wisely and mercifully, like him. It must become natural thus to be, and thus to act; it must be the constant inclination and new nature of the soul, and then the man is holy, and not before.

2. It is a conformity to Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus is perfectly conformed unto God, for he is God. He is his express image. Now Christ is nearer to us in some respects than God the Father, for he is our Mediator and is more immediately conversant with us; John 1:18, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Jesus Christ, he has been with us in the flesh and as one of us he appeared in the form of a servant, and we have seen his holiness brightly shining forth in all his actions. We have seen his holy life; we have a copy drawn, and an example set for us.

Now holiness is a conformity unto this copy: he that copies after Jesus Christ, after that copy which he has set us and which is delivered to us by the evangelists, is holy. He that diligently observes the life of Christ in the New Testament need not be at a loss to know what holiness is. Christ commands us to follow his example: Matt. 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Have you ever read the four Gospels, and did you not observe in the life of Christ wonderful instances of humility, love to God, love to religion; wonderful instances of zeal for God's glory, steadfastness in resisting temptations, entire trust and reliance on God, strict adherence to all his commands; astonishing instances of condescension, humility, meekness,

lowliness, love to men, love to his enemies, charity and patience? Why, this is holiness. When we imitate Christ in these things, then are we holy, and not till then.

3. Holiness is a conformity to God's laws and commands. When all God's laws without exception are written in our hearts, then are we holy. If you can go along with David in Psalm 119, where he speaks of his love and delight in God's law, in your own experience; when a man feels in some good measure what David declares concerning himself towards the law of God, then may God's law be said to be written in his heart. By God's law I mean all his precepts and commands, especially as they are delivered to us in the gospel, which is the fulfillment of the law of God. If you feel Christ's Sermon upon the Mount engraver on the fleshly tables of your hearts, you are truly sanctified.

The new covenant is written in the hearts of those that are sanctified, of which the prophet Jeremiah speaks, 31:31,33, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. This shall be my covenant, that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

The commands and precepts which God has given us are all pure, perfect, and holy. They are the holiness of God in writing, and, when the soul is conformed to them, they have holiness of God upon their hearts; 11 Cor. 3:3, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart." When the soul is molded and fashioned according to the image of God, the example of Christ and the rules . gospel, then it is holy, and not else.

- II. Those that have not this holiness are not in the way to heaven. Those that are not thus conformed to God, to Christ, and God's commands, are not in the way to heaven and happiness; they are not traveling that road; the road they are in will never bring them there. Whatever hopes and expectations they may have, they will never reach heaven to eternity except they alter their course, turn about, and steer [towards] another point; for the way is a way of holiness, and

the unclean shall not pass over it. Christ said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into heaven, but yet he left it absolutely possible with God that it might be; but he said positively and without exception that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. None but those that are holy are in the way to heaven, whatever profession they may make, whatever church they may be in: for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Whatever external acts of religion they may perform, however they may be constant attendants on the public or family worship, and live outwardly moral lives; yea, what is more, if they speak with the tongues of men and angels, though they could prophesy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though they have faith that they can remove mountains; though they bestow all their goods to feed the poor, and though they give their very bodies to be burnt: yet if they have not charity or holiness which is the same thing, for by charity is intended love to God as well as man though they have and do all those things, yet they are nothing; they are as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal (see I Cor. 13). It is good that we should be thoroughly convinced of the most absolute and indispensable necessity of a real, spiritual, active and vital yea, immortal holiness.

- III. We shall now, in the third place, give the reasons why none that are not holy can be in the way to heaven, and why those who never are so can never obtain the happiness thereof.

- IV. 'Tis contrary to God's justice, to make a wicked man eternally happy. God is a God of infinite justice, and his justice (to speak after the manner of men) "obliges" him to punish sin eternally; sin must be punished, the sins of all men must be punished. If the sinner retains his sin, and it is not washed off by the blood of Christ, and he purified and sanctified and made holy, it must be punished upon him. If he is sanctified, his sin has been already punished in the passion of Christ, but if not, it still remains to be punished in his eternal ruin and misery; for God has said that he is a holy and jealous God, and will by no means clear the guilty. It is reckoned amongst the rest of God's attributes which he proclaims in Ex. 34:7 and Num. 14 18.

- V. 'Tis impossible by reason of God's holiness, that anything should be united to God and brought to the enjoyment of him which is not holy. Now is it possible that a God of infinite holiness, that is perfect and hates sin with perfect hatred, that is infinitely lovely and excellent, should embrace in his arms a filthy, abominable creature, a hideous, detestable monster, more hateful than a toad and more poisonous than a viper? But so hateful, base, and abominable is every unsanctified man, even the best hypocrite and most painted sepulchers of them all.

How impossible is it that this should be, that such loathsome beings, the picture of the devil, should be united to God: should be a member of Christ, a child of God, be made happy in the enjoyment of his love and the smiles of his countenance, should be in God and God in them? It is therefore as impossible for an unholy thing to be admitted unto the happiness of heaven as it is for God not to be, or be turned to nothing. For it is as impossible that God should love sin as it is for him to cease to be, and it is as impossible for him to love a wicked man that has not his sin purified, and it is as impossible for him to enjoy the happiness of heaven except God love him, for the happiness of heaven consists in the enjoyment of God's love.

- VI. It would defile heaven and interrupt the happiness of the saints and angels. It would defile that holy place, the Holy of Holies, and would fright and terrify the sanctified spirits, and obstruct them in their delightful ecstasies of devotion, and his praise would quite confound the heavenly society. How would one unsanctified person interrupt their happiness, and fill those regions all over with the loathsome stench of his sin and filthiness!

- VII. The nature of sin necessarily implies, misery. That soul that remains sinful must of a necessity of nature remain miserable, for it is impossible there should be any happiness where such a hateful thing as sin reigns and bears rule. Sin is the most cruel tyrant that ever ruled, seeks nothing but the misery of his subjects; as in the very keeping of God's commands there is great reward, so in the very breaking of them there is great punishment.

Sin is a woeful confusion and dreadful disorder in the soul, whereby everything is put out of place, reason trampled under foot and passion advanced in the room of it, conscience dethroned and abominable lusts reigning. As long as it is so, there will unavoidably be a dreadful confusion and perturbation in the mind;

the soul will be full of worry, perplexities, uneasinesses, storms and frights, and thus it must necessarily be to all eternity, except the Spirit of God puts all to rights. So that if it were possible that God should desire to make a wicked man happy while he is wicked, the nature of the thing would not allow of it, but it would be simply and absolutely impossible.

Thus I have given some reasons of the doctrine, why it must needs be that those that are not holy cannot be in the way to heaven. Many more reasons might be offered, which the time will not allow to take notice of at this time; but these alone would have been enough to certify us that none but those who are holy ever attain to a crown of glory, if God had not expressly said that without holiness no man should see the Lord.

APPLICATION

We shall apply this doctrine in three uses:

- I. of inference;
- II. of trial or selfexamination;
- III. of exhortation.

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- I. Use of Inf. If it be so that none but those that are holy are in the way to heaven, how many poor creatures are there that think they are in the way to heaven who are not? There are many that think that they are undoubtedly in the way to heaven, and without question shall enter there at last, that have not the least

grain of true holiness, that manifest none in their lives and conversations, of whom we may be certain that either they have no holiness at all, or that which they have is a dormant, inactive sort which is in effect to be certain that there is none. There are a great many others that are not so distinctly and plainly perceived, that have nothing but what is external, the shell without the kernel. Vast multitudes are of these two kinds.

What a pitiable, miserable condition are they in: to step out of this world into an uncertain eternity, with an expectation of finding themselves exceeding happy and blessed in the highest heaven, and all at once find themselves deceived, and are undeceived, finding themselves sinking in the bottomless pit!

II. Use of Trial. If none are in the way to heaven but those that are holy, let us try and examine ourselves by this doctrine to see whereabouts we are, and see whether or no we are in the way to heaven. To know which way we are going, whether towards Canaan or Egypt, whether towards heaven or hell; for if we think ourselves in the road to heaven, and are going to the place of torment all the while, and continue deceived, without doubt fire and brimstone will undeceive us. If we find ourselves in the broad way to destruction, how dare we stir a step further? If we would know whether we are holy or no, let us try ourselves by these five following things:

1. Meditate on the holiness of God, and see if you cannot see a conformity, a *likeness* in your mind. There is no likeness or comparison in degree—we speak not of that—but yet there is a likeness in *nature* between God and the soul of the believer. The holy soul, when it thinks and meditates upon God's nature, finds a pleasure and delight, because there is an agreeableness in his new nature to the divine perfections. If those that think themselves in the way to heaven, that are unholy in the meantime in their hearts, would compare themselves and their nature to the holy nature of God, such a glorious light as the holiness of God would quickly discover their rottenness and unsoundness.

2. See if you can see any resemblance in your life to the life of Christ. It is not supposed that ever any copy comes near to this original, nor ever will; but yet they may perceive whether the same spirit, the same temper

and disposition, in a lesser degree be in them, that was manifested by the life and conversation of Jesus Christ.

3. Is there an agreeableness between your souls and the Word of God? The Bible is the epistle of Christ that he has written to us now, if the same epistle is also written in our hearts that is written in the Scriptures, it may be found out by comparing. Have you love to all God's commands and a respect to them in your actions? Is it your delight to obey and hearken to the will of God? Do you obey them of choice? Is it what you would choose to do if God had not threatened to punish the breach of them?
4. Do you find by a comparison a likeness and agreeableness between your hearts and lives, and the hearts and lives of those holy men that we are assured were such by the Word of God? Do you walk with God as Enoch did, or distinguish yourselves by your piety in the midst of wicked examples as Noah did? And when you read the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets, wherein holiness is drawn to the life, you may viewing so exact a picture discover whether you have not the root of the matter in you, though it be much obscurer in you than in them. When we read the Psalms of David, we may clearly see what David's holiness was by that spirit that is breathed there; when we read the Epistles of the apostles, we may know what is a truly evangelical spirit, and whether such a spirit reigns in our souls.
5. Do you in a measure imitate the saints and angels in heaven? They spend their duration to the glory of God; they love him above all things, are delighted with the beauties of Jesus Christ, entirely love one another, and hate sin. And those that are holy on earth have also a resemblance and imitation of them: they are of an heavenly temper, of heavenly lives and conversations.

III. Use of I Exhortation. Exhort all to holiness. You have heard what holiness is and of the necessity of it, the absolute necessity in order to escaping hell; what we must have or die forever, must be forever forsaken Now, nothing is so

necessary to us as holiness; other things may be necessary to discover this life, and things that are necessary men will strive for with all their might, if there is a probability of obtaining of them. How much more is that to be sought after, without which we shall fare infinitely worse than die ten thousand deaths!

This is motive enough without any other; for what can be a greater motive than necessity? But besides that, if it were not necessary, the amiable and excellent nature of it is enough to make it worthy the most earnest seeking after.

Holiness is a most beautiful, lovely thing. Men are apt to drink in strange notions of holiness from their childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour, and unpleasant thing; but there is nothing in it but what is sweet and ravishingly lovely. 'Tis the highest beauty and amiableness, vastly above all other beauties; 'tis a divine beauty, makes the soul heavenly and far purer than anything here on earth-this world is like mire and filth and defilement [compared] to that soul which is sanctified-'tis of a sweet, lovely, delightful, serene, calm, and still nature. 'Tis almost too high a beauty for any creature to be adorned with; it makes the soul a little, amiable, and delightful image of the blessed Jehovah. How may angels stand with pleased, delighted, and charmed eyes, and look and look with smiles of pleasure upon that soul that is holy!

Christian holiness is above all the heathen virtue, of a more bright and pure nature, more serene, calm, peaceful, and delightsome. What a sweet calmness, what a calm ecstasy, cloth it bring to the soul! Of what a meek and humble nature is true holiness; how peaceful and quiet. How cloth it change the soul, and make it more pure, more bright, and more excellent than other beings.