

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

DECEMBER 2009

## DON'T TRANSMIT HOLINESS

In the last chapter of the book of Ezekiel we are given a vision of the restored temple. In the instruction to the priest there is a peculiar command: Chapter 44:19 reads: "And when they (the priests) go out into the outer court they shall put off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers, then they shall put on other garments that they may not transmit holiness to the people with their garments." This same instruction is stated again in chapter 46:20 when the priest are given instruction on where to bake the grain offering. These instructions are evidently based upon Exodus 29:30 and 30:26-30 where Moses is given instruction concerning the furniture of the tabernacle. Here it is stated that the furniture is "most holy" and "whatever touches it shall be holy." This reads as if holiness were a communicable disease and could be caught by touching these items. God prohibited any contact with the sanctuary, its furnishings, and objects, including the priestly garments by anyone other than the priests. Ezekiel's concern is not the potential victims, but protecting the sanctity of the sanctuary. Holiness was reserved for that which God made holy. This was so serious under the Levitical system that only those things God designated as holy were holy. Holiness was not to be transmitted to something God had not designated as being holy.

In the New Testament there are several things God has designated as being "holy": The Spirit of God is the "Holy Spirit". When the angel announced to Mary that she should conceive and bear a son he tells her "the holy seed shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35), Peter refers to Jesus as a "Holy Child" (Acts 4:27,30) and the book of Hebrews states that Christ as our High Priest is "holy" (Heb. 7:26). The Scriptures are said to be 'holy' (II Tim 3:15 Rom 1:2). The law is "holy" (Rom. 7:12). The people of God are said to be "holy" (Heb.3:10, and they are called a "holy nation" and a "holy city" (I Pet. 29; Rev. 21:2). There are many things God has designated as being "holy", such as angels, our calling and even a kiss.

The Old Testament warnings concerning transmitting holiness should be taken seriously by the church today. We are not to transmit holiness to things God has not designated as being holy, yet this is a common practice in the religious world today. Following is the many ways the religious world has transmitted holiness. Roman Catholics have transmitted holiness to the office of the papacy and the pope has been looked upon as the "Holy Father". The pope is no more holy than any average Christian and Biblically not as much. There is a great difference in transmitted holiness and being declared holy upon the basis of justification. Many times protestants transmit holiness to a minister in regarding his holiness as being something greater than their holiness. Peter states: "But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior" adding the Old Testament command: "because it is written 'You shall be holy as I am holy'" (I Pet. 1:15,16). The Apostle Paul addresses many of his epistles to Christians as the "Saints" which is the word "holy ones" and tells Corinthians: "therefore having

these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor.7:1). Many protestants have transmitted holiness to the present city of Jerusalem. The prophets referred to Jerusalem as a holy city: Daniel 9:24: ("your" holy city), Isaiah 64:10 ("their" holy city). Other references in the Old Testament cite Jerusalem as being the holy city: Isa. 48:2; 52:1 and Neh. 1:18, 11:1. Only twice is it referred to as the holy city in the New Testament: Matthew 4:5 and 27:53. In Revelation 17:18 the harlot is identified as "the great city" and verse 19 declares the "great city" is laid waste. If we let Scripture interpret Scripture the "great city" was Jerusalem: "...the great city which is mystically ("spiritually" KJV) called Sodom and Egypt, *where also their Lord was crucified*" (Rev.11:8). John identifies the holy city as the "new Jerusalem" and is "the bride of the lamb" or His Church (Rev. 21:2; 9,10). The book of Hebrews states "you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (10:23). Paul contrasts the "present Jerusalem" as being in slavery with the "Jerusalem above" which is free (Gal. 4:25 26). Witness the tour brochures and the steady streams of "pilgrims" flocking to the "Holy Land" each year. Jerusalem is still looked upon as the "Holy City" in spite of the fact that God gave it up to judgment (Mt. 21:43; 23:37-39) and established a "heavenly Jerusalem". Bible scholars who lived in the first few centuries after Christ and the Apostles, called the "Church Fathers" had much to say about the city of Jerusalem. One of the familiar ones, Origen (185-255 AD) wrote, according to David W. Bercot in *A Dictionary of Early Christians Beliefs*: "Whatever is predicted of Jerusalem, and spoken of it, we must understand the Scriptures to be speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem. We are not to take the interpretation of the promises recorded in the prophets, especially those of Isaiah, as though we were to look for their fulfillment in connection with the Jerusalem on earth. Therefore, we must say that *we* are now the temple and people to be built with the precious stones of the new Jerusalem". There is nothing holy about Palestine or Jerusalem, prophesy preachers and their Zionism hopes notwithstanding.

We have transmitted holiness to our physical church buildings (even though they have lately begun to resemble shopping malls) to the extent that we have failed to realize the truth of I Corinthians 3:17b: "...for the temple of God is holy, and that is what we are", and Ephesians 2:21,22: "...in whom (Christ) the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple of the Lord in whom you are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit". Buildings are not holy, people are. First let me say that physical buildings, regardless of their ornate structures and dedications to God, are not the "house of God". "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, *whose house we are*" (Heb. 3:6). "I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, *which is the church of the living God*, the pillar and support of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Note this Scripture once more: "Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20,22). "The God who made the world and all things in

it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, *does not dwell in temples made with hands* (Acts 17:24). When “Jesus came out from the temple and was going away his disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to him. And he answered and said to them ‘Do you not see all these things? Not one stone here shall be left upon another which will not be torn down’” (Mt. 24:1,2). Mark’s account says they referred to “what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” (Mark 13:1). This should teach us to not transmit holiness to our church buildings.

The religious world has many times transmitted holiness to certain days and seasons, notably Christmas and Easter. On the observance of special days the Apostles Paul has this to say: “One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord” (Rom. 14:5,6a). Later in discussing the failure of the Galatians to live according to the gospel, he stated: “You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain” (Gal. 4:10,11). Then he tells the Colossians: “Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16,17). The problem he is dealing with in both Galatians and Colossians seems to be that these Christians believed keeping certain days and festivals was a necessary part of the Christian life. In Romans 14 Christians were condemning each other for observing or not observing certain days. We transmit holiness to certain days when we believe that by observing these days makes us holy. In the Old Testament the Sabbath day was said to be a “holy Sabbath to the Lord” (Ex.16:23) and they were to “observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Deut. 5:12). However God later says to Israel: “...new moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them” (Isa. 1:13b-14). They were to observe the days and seasons, not to make them holy, but because they were a holy people. When we observe any day in order to become “holy” or if we think we are more “spiritual” by keeping the day as a holy day we are transmitting holiness to that day.

One problem with instituting holy days is that they are contaminated by the world and many Christians take part in this contamination as if it were the natural thing to do. Christmas is said to be a holy day to celebrate the birth of Christ (there is no Scriptural reason for celebrating his birth) but Santa Claus is more celebrated than Christ, and Christians have fallen into the trap of celebrating Christmas just as the world does. The origin of the word “Christmas” according to Merriam Webster is from the old English: “Christe Masse” literally “Christ’s Mass”. *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* states: “Christmas is celebrated throughout the Christian population but is also celebrated by many non-Christians as a secular, cultural festival. Because gift-2heightened economic activity among both Christians and non-Christians, Christmas has become a major event for many retailers.” Another day that began as a so called “holy day” is Halloween. The word is simply a contraction for “All Hallows’ Eve”. The word “hallow” means “saint” in that “hallow” is just an alternative form of the word “holy” (“hallowed be Thy

name”). Sources say that the American people spend more money on Halloween than they do on Christmas.

Perhaps the most celebrated holy day in Christendom is Easter. Quoting *Wikipedia* again, the definition is “A Christian feast commemorating the resurrection of Christ; the first Sunday following the full moon that occurs on or next after the vernal equinox” (established by the council of Nicaea in 325 AD). Further: “It is also a festival of heathenry held in honor of the goddess Eostre or Ostara and celebrated at the spring equinox or within the month of April, also known as Eostre.” Many Christians would object to equating Easter with a pagan goddess yet they spend large amounts of money on Easter clothes, the Easter Bunny, Easter baskets and Easter eggs. One positive aspect of Easter may be it is on that one day of the year when the greatest number people attend a church service, and it is possibly one Sunday when the preacher will preach on the resurrection, a subject grossly neglected in modern preaching. There is no one day that is a holy day to celebrate the resurrection; it is to be celebrated every day!

Another way we transmit holiness is making our works the standard of holiness, in order to make us righteous. The Apostle Paul said of the Jews in his day that “they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:2,3). Commenting on this statement John Stott in *Romans, God’s Good News for the World* wrote: “This ignorance of the true way, and this tragic adoption of the false way, is by no means limited to Jewish people. This is widespread among professing Christians. All human beings, who know that God is righteous and they are not, naturally look around for a righteousness which might fit them to stand in God’s presence.” When we think what we do, or personal sacrifices will placate God or make us more acceptable to Him, we are transmitting holiness to our deeds. When God demanded an animal sacrifice on Passover, He commanded they offer a blemish free sacrifice. He placed limits on the sacrifice, they were to offer only one animal. To offer two animals when God only designated one would have been transmitting holiness to something God did not accept as holy. Hebrews 10:12 states that Christ, “having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.” We can add nothing to this sacrifice that will make us anymore acceptable to God. Our works do not enhance our salvation. This is why Paul stated: “Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ...why as if you were living in the world do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch...these are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom, in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col. 2:16,17, 21-23). What then does our good works accomplish? We do not do good works in order to become or “to be more” righteous before God, we work in order to “build upon the one foundation which is laid which is Jesus Christ...each man’s work will become evident; for it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If a man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward, if any man’s work is burned up he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved...” (I Cor. 3:12-15).

