

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

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JESUS CHRIST

Is the Source of True Holiness



I have found great revelation in the pages of Isaiah, who saw the holiness of God in the coming Messiah.



BY DOUG BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries. You can follow Bishop Beacham on [Facebook](#) or Twitter [@DougBeacham](#).

One of my favorite journals is [Touchstone Magazine](#). It challenges my thinking and addresses contemporary issues and theology from a framework of C.S. Lewis and historic Christian reflection. One of the senior editors is Patrick Henry Reardon, pastor of All Saints' Orthodox Church in Chicago.

Recently I began reading Reardon's study titled *The Incarnation*. It is the first volume of three, with the overarching title *Reclaiming the Atonement: An Orthodox Theology of Redemption*.

No, it is not boring. And no, it is not irrelevant! In fact, this type of serious Christian theological reflection may be more significant than ever.

The world is a noisy place these days. Global economic issues, racial and migration issues, environmental concerns and shifting political and religious borders are just a few of our current debates. And in the United States, our quadrennial Presidential election cycle is as turbulent as the unnerving rumblings we in Oklahoma associate with earthquakes and tornadoes. We desperately need the clear sounds of heaven in this season, so we can declare God's love, holiness, and truth to this world through Jesus Christ.

This brings me back to the IPHC's 2016 focus on holiness. Which brings me to some insights about Isaiah that I gleaned from Reardon's book. I had not given serious thought to this until Reardon discussed it more fully.

Take a moment to open your Bible to John 12:37-41 (NASB). It says:

"But though [Jesus] had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him. *This was* to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the

arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them." These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him."

Verse 38 is a reference to Isaiah 53:1 and verse 40 quotes Isaiah 6:10. John's primary point here is about unbelief, but what is particularly significant is the gospel writer's insight from the Holy Spirit that Isaiah said these things "when he saw His glory and spoke of Him," referring to Jesus (v. 41).

We know from Isaiah 6:1 that the prophet, in a time of leadership loss and uncertainty in the nation, "saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." He heard the sound of heaven declaring, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (6:3). Who did Isaiah see in this revelatory vision? He saw the Messiah of Israel, the One who would come as "Emmanuel, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).

While Isaiah did not know the name "Jesus" given by revelation to Joseph and Mary some 700 years later (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31), Isaiah did associate the One revealed as the One who would come as the Incarnate Son of God, the One who would suffer and die for our sins, and the One who would be raised in glory to effect the redemption of this cosmos.

Reardon calls Isaiah "the prophet

of the divine holiness" and he notes that the motif of holiness "unites all three large sections of this prophetic book." This claim is validated by the use of language. The phrase, "the Holy One of Israel" is found 26 times throughout the book but is only used 6 other times in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible. Reardon notes that the adjective "holy" is used 33 times in Isaiah and 26 times in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible.

It seems to me that this connection of holiness with God's redemptive plan through Jesus Christ is an important theme for us as we witness to the confusing sounds of our generation. Since January, our focus each month has been on the Source of Holiness. Last month I wrote to you about Jesus as the manifestation of that Source, and I find myself again drawn back to Jesus.

One of the appealing aspects of Orthodox theology is the emphasis on the purpose of God in restoring humanity's glory. That is why Orthodox theology puts so much emphasis on the Incarnation, and on Jesus as the revealer of what humanity is meant to be.

This is a needed part of our holiness theological tradition. Our tradition has tended to focus on the "sin" dimension of Jesus' work related to holiness. Obviously that is true and proper. We desperately need forgiveness of our sins; we need to be cleansed from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9). The work of Jesus on the Cross is essential, and in no way am I minimizing that emphasis.

Yet perhaps it's time for us to

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A place of hope. A people of promise.

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also emphasize what we are meant to be, in this life and in the life to come. In the life to come we rightfully focus on glorification. But we need to also affirm the power of the Spirit of God to enable us to live fruitfully and abundantly within the limitations of human existence "east of Eden" (John 10:10; 15:16).

If we can shine as light in the darkness on this side of heaven, the glory of the Lord will be manifested above the dark confusion of our world. Remember what Isaiah heard from heaven? The worship sound of "holy, holy, holy" was followed with this proclamation: "The whole earth is full of His glory!"

Notice that the prophet did not say the earth "*might* be full," "*will* be full" or "*should* be full" of His glory. It says the earth "*is* full of His glory." I sense that "*is*" is about us, the redeemed daughters and sons of God living holy in this world. There's no question what this "*is*" means! It means that God's "*is*" is greater than the power of sin that seeks to manifest itself through us! □



THE YOUNGER GENERATION TODAY WANTS HOLINESS, TOO

God has used my parents, my youth leaders and my church to give me a passion for personal purity.



BY DREAMA BRYANT

DREAMA BRYANT graduated from the IPHC's Southwestern Christian University in Oklahoma City, where she obtained a bachelor's degree in Intercultural Studies. She felt a call to missions at an early age and she currently serves World Missions Ministries as coordinator of logistics for The Awakening. She enjoys reading, traveling and supporting the Oklahoma City Thunder.

Growing up in a minister's home was a very positive experience for me. At a very young age I was taught right from wrong and came to understand the importance of truth and living my life in a way that pleases God. Attending church was one of the most important aspects of my family's life.

Also, it was a huge factor in my Christian character development. In our home, church attendance was not optional! For that I remain very grateful.

Being involved in the youth ministry at my church played a major role in my passion for Jesus. My peers in the youth group and my youth leaders consistently challenged me in my journey of faith and in my desire to live for and be like Christ.

I have fond memories of many youth nights where we spent hours praying and worshipping Jesus. I am convinced that occasions like this helped strengthen and solidify my heart for God and my pursuit of Him.

A significant occasion that established the importance of purity in my life was my participation in the "True Love Waits" project. True Love Waits is a ministry that promotes purity so that teens will abstain from sex until they get married.

As a thirteen-year-old, I made a commitment—along with others in my youth group—to remain pure until marriage. This pledge was to God, my family, my future spouse, my future children and myself. In the True Love Waits ceremony, I received a ring from my parents as a sign of my covenant to remain pure.

Another factor that encouraged purity was my involvement in church camp during the summer. Attending church camp was something I looked forward to with much excitement and anticipation. The camp services and ministry teams affected me so deeply. I continue to remember conversations about the Lord that I had with my counselors and camp staff that helped and encouraged me as a young, impressionable girl.

I fully believe that much of my spiritual growth occurred because of those passionate and praying leaders. Without question, those annual camps were defining moments that brought me closer to Jesus and contributed to the foundation of my faith and the way I live my life.

Each of the factors mentioned above helped in my personal decision to live a life of purity and to pursue holiness regardless of the challenges and distractions the world offers. As I have grown in my faith, I have learned that the pursuit of purity and a life of holiness flows from one's relationship with the Lord and obedience to His Word.

The Bible teaches us that Christ is our righteousness. Living our life according to His truth sets us apart. I Corinthians 1:30 says: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption"

I always try to remember that my actions and lifestyle matters. As a follower of Jesus Christ, I am to live a pure life according to the standards

"As a thirteen-year-old, I made a commitment—along with others in my youth group—to remain pure until marriage. This pledge was to God, my family, my future spouse, my future children and myself."

that *He* has set in place. This gives me the wonderful privilege and opportunity to be a reflection of His character to those who do not know Him yet need Him. As I live a holy life, I am provided an opportunity to be attractive to the world by displaying the beauty of His holiness to others.

I am so thankful that I have discovered that holiness is something to be pursued, enjoyed and one of God's greatest gifts to us. In this present season of my life, I am privileged to work with high school and college-age students. As a part

of my ministry, I make it a point to encourage and provoke them to seek Christ and to live lives pursuing purity and based on biblical holiness.

I take seriously any opportunity to provide encouragement to the young women that may be reading this. A life of purity is possible by God's grace. I encourage those in my generation to engage God's Word, seek His heart and stay strongly committed to His plan and purpose. Also, I always remind them to properly guard their hearts and be careful about the influences they allow into their lives.

With God's help you can live a life that is honorable to Him and that provides the example so many need in our world today.

We all know that holiness is not an option. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says: "But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'" But we cannot become holy in our own strength, or just by following a list of dos and don'ts. True holiness is a work of the Holy Spirit inside of us.

Hebrews 12:14 challenges all of us to invite the fire of God's holiness into our lives so that we can be changed. This verse says: "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Today, God is raising up a young generation that is seeking Him with all their hearts. We want everything He has for us! We want to see Him!

I am grateful to have had the influences I have had in my life that have brought me to the understanding of the importance and treasure of holiness and purity. My prayer will be that you understand, pursue and enjoy the same. □

Do You Want Fake Church ... Or Real Relationships?



The church really can't expect to encourage sexual purity if we don't encourage genuine friendships.



BY KEVIN
SNEED

KEVIN SNEED serves along with his wife, Summer, as an IPHC missionary and director of East Africa Bible College in Eldoret, Kenya. Kevin is a 2005 graduate of Emmanuel College. They have two children, Abigail and Nathaniel.

If your church is anything like the ones I've attended, there are probably a few fake plants and a couple of fake trees decorating the stage. This greenery may be beautiful, but it's not real. Unfortunately, this is emblematic of what sometimes happens in the church.

What we see looks wonderful, but is not always real. The truth is that fake trees look great but they produce no fruit. In terms of confronting sin and building healthy relationships, the church is often presenting fake trees when it should be bearing lasting fruit.

For young Christians who are striving to live in purity, the church must provide an environment where authentic relationships can grow and purity can be produced.

The struggle among young believers to live a pure life is probably more difficult today than it has been for any generation in recent history. The availability of sexually explicit media and the cultural acceptance for sexually impure activity seems to be much more now than when I was a teenager just 13 years ago.

While sexual immorality is certainly not a new phenomenon, the present need for the church to rise up and speak to this issue is urgent. The voice of our society is continuously screaming about this issue. The voice of the church cannot afford to be timid or inconsistent.

Indeed, we have all felt this aversion to purity. Paul declares in Romans 1 that humanity, apart from God, is inclined to make poor decisions in terms of moral purity. As Robert Mounce writes in his commentary on Romans: "God's wrath mentioned in Romans 1 is not an active outpouring of divine displeasure but the removal of restraint that allows sinners to reap the just fruits of their rebellion."

We all face temptation because we are children of sinful Adam and Eve. Paul describes this in Romans 1:24: "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their

hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another” (NIV). Left on our own, overcome by the effects and result of original sin, we almost instinctively choose what is impure and displeasing to God.

Thankfully this is not the end of the story. Paul declares in Romans 5:6 that “at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (NIV). As a result, when we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are no longer slaves to sin. The powerless become powerful in the face of temptation. The unrestrained become steadfast because we count ourselves “dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11 NIV).

The problem is that this spiritual reality is scarcely nurtured among the young men and women in our churches. We are consistently told what not to do but rarely informed of or trained in the enabling power available to the believer to abstain from sin and live in purity.

Yes, Paul proclaimed that the work of Jesus frees us from our bondage to sin, but he also offered to his spiritual son Timothy “training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). This is a neglected ministry. Young people know they are called to righteousness, yet they also feel that inclination to make bad decisions when temptations arise.

The lack of restraint that leads to bad behavior is still a strong force in young believers. It is the default mode for many people. Salvation does not simply impart restraint into the life of the believer. It provides access to a power greater than that of our old nature. This is why Paul emphasized being trained in righteousness.

The best training the church can provide to young believers striving towards purity is authentic relationships. A class or curriculum dealing with purity will be of little effect unless those instructions are designed to supplement already significant relationships where people feel comfortable and safe discussing the reality in which they live.

Paul was able to speak with authority and relevance to Timothy because he had developed a deep relationship with him through years of co-working through struggles and victories. Many of Paul’s instructions concerning purity and righteousness are given in the context of community life, not individual achievement.

Unfortunately many churches fail to facilitate the formation of genuine friendships. Such a church is more a crowd than a community. It is a place where instructions are given, but it is divorced from the relationships we need to carry out this instruction.

Many young believers do not have authentic friendships. Sure, they can point to thousands of Facebook friends. They can even identify many real world friendships that develop as a result of work, school or hobbies. The problem is that within such friendships conversations dry up after the work, the class or the fun is over.

The reality is many young believers want deeper relationships but they are not able to find them online or in their usual

“The church must become a more genuine place. Churches must seek ways not only to create wonderful worship experiences but also facilitate the formation of authentic friendships.”

hangouts. The church should be the place where such friendships are formed. Working on our own, we can do little better at overcoming sin than our first ancestors, Adam and Eve. However, when we work together in genuine and empowering relationships with one another, we can live the life we are called to live in Scripture.

I do not blame the church for moral failure among young believers. I do, however, believe that the church should be more intentional about enabling purity through authentic, organic relationships.

Some communities have tried various methods including the “accountability partner” program. Unfortunately, relationships created in such programs often lack the authenticity required to be effective. Ultimately, if the church is truly concerned about the purity of the body, fundamental changes need to be made to address the issue.

The church must become a more genuine place. Churches must seek ways not only to create wonderful worship experiences but also facilitate the formation of authentic friendships. It is from within these relationships that the power of God can be demonstrated and practiced to a greater degree.

These relationships cannot be formed over one weekend. There is no prepackaged program you can buy to make it happen. It will require a Spirit-led transformation of the crowd into a community.

It’s time to let the inauthenticity of the church end with the fake plants on the platform. As individual believers, let us begin looking for ways to start the meaningful relationships we need for training in righteousness. As ministry leaders, let us look for ways to facilitate these friendships and deepen the level of authentic community in our local churches. □

Caitlyn Jenner, the Bible and the TRANSGENDER Debate

We must offer the hope of healing through Christ to anyone who struggles with gender confusion.



ThinkStock Images / Telegraph / CNN

Olympic track and field star Bruce Jenner was named Male Athlete of the Year in 1976, and soon he appeared on the front of the Wheaties cereal box. He was the poster boy for American masculinity. The 6-foot-2-inch-tall decathlon champion, who played football in college, was even considered for the title role in the 1978 Superman movie because of his muscles and agility.

But last year Jenner dropped the proverbial bomb when he admitted to a huge TV audience that he is on a transgender journey. In his interview with ABC's Diane Sawyer, he said he had experimented with cross-dressing as a child—and later when he was married to his three wives. Sometimes referring to himself as “he,” and sometimes “her,” the 66-year-old Jenner said he finally realized he has “the soul of a female.”

“My brain is much more female than it is male,” said Jenner, who has six children. “It’s hard for people to understand that, but that’s what my soul is.”

Tabloid publications speculated about Jenner’s struggle for years, since he began starring in the reality show *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. In July of last year he announced that he was changing his name to Caitlyn, and now he stars in his own TV program, *I Am Cait*, which focuses on his/her transgender journey. The show was so popular it was renewed for a second season.

Jenner has taken hormone injections and has had breast enhancement surgery, but he has not had a full sex-change operation. Yet *Glamour* magazine named him one of its “Glamour Women of the Year” in 2015.

Public reaction to Jenner’s

sex change has been mixed. Just hours after his interview with ABC aired, an Australian radio station started the #PaintYourNailsForBruce hashtag—urging both men and women to get colorful manicures to show their support for Jenner. The message was clear: Don't judge Bruce Jenner. Accept his choices. Be tolerant.

Meanwhile, a large segment of the American public is baffled by all the fuss over a man who appears to be emotionally or psychologically disturbed. Parents are worried that our culture will start encouraging the transgender movement in schools. Some public school teachers are already suggesting that it's wrong to "push" children to accept their biological gender.

I would never bash Jenner or any other person who wrestles with their gender identity. Every human being deserves love and respect, and Christians—of all people—should be ready to offer support for anybody who struggles with emotional problems. But because I am a Christian, I can't just accept someone's behavior if it is destructive or unhealthy for them. To affirm a person's wrong choices just to make them feel accepted is not love.

Part of personal holiness involves embracing the gender God gave us. To reject our gender is to question God's loving plans for us; to change to another gender is to rebel against God. If a person with gender confusion came to me for help, I would have to point out these important truths:

1. GENDER IS PART OF GOD'S SACRED CREATION.

Gender is God's idea. Genesis 1:27 says: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." My gender is part of my

created identity; it is God's plan for my life. It is not fluid or changeable. It is fixed. Just as a dog cannot be changed into a cat or a fish into a bird, a man cannot be changed into a woman, or vice versa, because gender is a fundamental aspect of creation.

2. SATAN IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER CONFUSION.

Because of the entrance of sin into the world, human beings struggle with all kinds of mental, emotional, physical and sexual brokenness. The world is full of abuse, violence, fear, ignorance, sickness, poverty and addiction—and all of this is fueled by the devil, whom Jesus called "a liar and

the father of lies" (John 8:44). Sin began when the devil went to Eve and questioned God's truth (see Gen. 3:1). Satan even questioned Jesus' identity as God's Son (Matt. 4:1-11).

As long as we are under the influence of sin, our minds are "darkened" (Eph. 4:18). Paul went so far as to say that the devil "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2

Cor. 4:4). A person who is apart from Christ can be tormented by all kinds of evil, degrading thoughts. The devil does this because he hates people—because we are made in God's image.

3. SEX CHANGE SURGERY (OR HORMONE THERAPY) DOES NOT FIX A PERSON'S GENDER CONFUSION.

Author Walt Heyer had a sex

change operation in the 1980s and lived as a woman for eight years, but he later realized that he had made a mistake. He now has a website, sexchangeregret.com, where he writes: "Eventually, I gathered the courage to admit that the surgery had fixed nothing—it only masked and exacerbated deeper psychological problems." Heyer points out that studies performed on 500 transsexuals proved that surgeries and hormone therapy did not cure these people of their confusion.

4. CHRIST OFFERS HEALING FROM GENDER CONFUSION.

When the apostle Paul went to the Greek city of Corinth he preached to people from all kinds of sinful backgrounds, and many of them embraced faith in Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul mentions fornicators (unmarried people having sex with each other), adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals and "effeminate" men—that is, men who dressed as women to engage in prostitution. Yet Paul says these people were set free from these sinful lifestyles after they believed in Christ.

Paul did not promote tolerance or acceptance of gender confusion; instead he offered the hope of healing through Christ. Isn't that a better expression of love? We must continue to preach compassionate holiness as the transgender movement advances in our culture. While today's culture pretends to care about people like Caitlyn Jenner by putting a sympathetic Band-Aid on this problem, Jesus can go to the root and totally heal it. □

To reject our gender is to question God's loving plans for us; to change to another gender is to rebel against God.



BY J. LEE GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who serves as contributing editor of *Charisma* magazine and editor of *Encourage*. He also directs The Mordecai Project, an international missions organization based in Florida. He is a member of the IPHC's Sunshine Conference. You can follow him on Twitter at [@leegrady](https://twitter.com/leegrady) or visit his ministry website at themordecaiproject.org.

True Holiness Is NOT LEGALISM

How do we pursue holiness without bondage to rules? I am learning the answer after 38 years.

My family tree includes ministers and bishops in the IPHC. My grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins have attended either Holmes Bible College or Emmanuel College. The IPHC is still an important part of the life of my family. I care about our church. Yet I grew up on the edges of the IPHC community.

As a military child I experienced many different communities. I was always intrigued by our denomination's General Conference every four years. Everyone knew who I was, but I often didn't have a clue who they were! I heard many times, "You're Louie Shirey's boy!" or "You're Erv's grandson!" or "Your grandparents can cook!"

Now that I am an adult, I value that people love my family. But when I was a child I didn't know what to make of it, really.

I didn't know what it was like to grow up in a PH church. In my 38 years, I have only attended an IPHC church for seven of them. My church community growing up was usually the main chapel on the military installation to which my father was posted.

After meeting Jesus when I was 17, I went to Emmanuel College the next year. At Emmanuel I encountered life in the Holy Spirit like I had never known. My first 5 semesters there still remain some of the most intensely spiritual years I have ever experienced.

I watched people literally crawl, sobbing, to the front of the church to receive Jesus. I learned what it was to worship with all I had in Wednesday night chapels. I went on ministry trips with classmates where God moved in amazing ways! Emmanuel was a time of growth and blessing for me. I bear no scars or wounds from my time there. I learned that life in the Holy Spirit is truly miraculous!



BY
**JONATHAN
SHIREY**

JONATHAN SHIREY and his wife, Corrie, direct Discipleship Beyond, an intensive discipleship program for the IPHC. He and his family have worked overseas for most of the last decade. Jonathan graduated from Emmanuel College in 1999 and went on to get a graduate degree at Wheaton College in 2003.

Like most Christian schools, Emmanuel had rules governing behavior and culture. The rules weren't a problem for me because I had already embraced them for myself. When I met Jesus, I had to flee from the drugs, alcohol, tobacco and others things that had defined my life up to that point.

On the edges of my experiences in the IPHC has always been the idea of holiness. In our past, we defined sanctification by the excesses of the community around us. The big five rules that I can remember were: (1) no smoking, (2) no drinking alcohol whatsoever, (3) no card playing, (4) no dancing, and (5) no activity on Sunday. Yet only the Sabbath rest actually has a foundation in Scripture.

Over the years I have attended different churches in eight countries: IPHC, Assemblies of God, Episcopalian, Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Presbyterian. Those communities all had their standards, but they varied some according to nation and community. Some expressions of holiness are culturally formed.

In the best cases, these rules are formed from love for Jesus, zeal for His reputation and a desire to reach those around us. For example, my grandfather would take off his shorts and put on his jeans to take the trash out in South Carolina because he was careful of his witness to his neighbors! I wouldn't really do that in the United States today.

But now that I live in the Muslim world, I take off my shorts and put on pants before I go to the store. To Muslims, the way you dress bears upon your credibility. I know long pants don't make us righteous, but we make choices like these for the sake of those around us and for the reputation of Jesus.

In the worst cases, rules regarding behavior can lead to legalism. Insistence upon outward forms of piety is precisely the sin of the

Pharisees. Their identity was wrapped up in their rules. Among the many laws they followed was a prohibition about making clay on the Sabbath. It was interpreted so strictly that one couldn't spit on the ground because that would, in effect, make clay.

Was there any group more opposed to Jesus than the Pharisees? They did not understand Him at all. He taught in their synagogues and then ate with sinners. Jesus was not righteous in their eyes because he didn't keep the oral traditions of rabbinical Judaism.

Isn't it amazing that when Jesus healed a man born blind (see John 9), He spat and made clay with his hands? The Pharisees were incensed that He healed this man on the Sabbath. The Lord had just moved in their midst, and they missed it because of their strict rules. Jesus rebuked the idea that holiness was gained through the traditions of men.

The IPHC has experienced legalism. I remember a Sunday school class where a young mother shared that holiness was a condition of heart defined by grace, dedication to Jesus and tenderness towards God. She said holiness was not about wearing certain clothes, make-up or not going to the movies.

Yet this woman was stridently interrupted by someone in the class who said: "Oh no, sister! That's exactly what holiness is!"

My grandparents and parents have known the shadow of legalism. As a fourth generation Christian in the IPHC, I live mostly free from its influence. The strictness of my early years in the Lord has loosened. Freedom now defines my walk with the Lord.

Recently, however, I've found myself asking questions in moments

of uncertainty. Just what is holiness anyway? If it's not legalism, what is it? How do we pursue holiness without bondage to form and rules? Even in the fourth generation, I find a little voice of condemnation skewering me with the standards of my forefathers.

Holiness is not a gray concept. God isn't a holier God than other gods; He is the only holy God. Holiness is an attribute, not an achievement. There are really only three categories in scripture: (1) holy, as God is holy; (2) wicked; and (3) washed by the blood of the Lamb. Holiness is imparted to us by Jesus' redeeming work, not earned by our efforts to live righteously.

When we prioritize conformity of behavior above the pursuit of Jesus and life in the Holy Spirit, we can expect to fall into legalism. The horror of it all is that we will drag our children and grandchildren into it as well. How many generations must pass before we can remove this stain?

We must learn that holiness is Christlikeness. There is life, joy and

peace to be found in pursuing Jesus. Holiness is the fruit, not the root, of a consistent, obedient, determined pursuit of Jesus.

The sins and virtues listed throughout the New Testament are descriptions not prescriptions of the holy work of God in us. When we seek Jesus passionately, deceit, sensuality, and pride will be

removed by the Holy Spirit! Fervency of spirit, steadfastness in goodness, and joy in hope will be the evidence of our love and obedience to Christ Jesus. That defines holiness in the believer's life, not adherence to rules! □

"When we prioritize conformity of behavior above the pursuit of Jesus and life in the Holy Spirit, we can expect to fall into legalism."