**Holiness** dkm Feb 2021

Have you heard the word ‘holy’ in the media of late? If some Christmas carols slipped into the news you may have heard mention of the ‘holy child of Bethlehem’. Do you know what this word means? If you open your Bible you will find this word on at least every second page; sometimes it is repeated as ‘holy, holy, holy’, as in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8. In fact my Bible is called ‘Holy Bible’.

As a Christian it is hard to avoid the word ’holy’ but many do; they have no idea what this word means, let alone its importance in the Christian life. For some it is connected with things like stained glass windows, robes and relics located in the church building. Worship is about these holy things, but holiness is first and foremost a feature of God; God himself defines holiness.

Holiness means to be separate or apart from everything else. The creator God is separate from his creation. When man who is part of creation sinned, God was not part of this fall. In fact sin was, and is, disregard and disobedience with respect to the word of God. Sin is the failure to reverence and obey the holy God, the great and awesome God of the holy Bible.

When God created the heavens and the earth he rested on the seventh day and declared it holy. The Israelites and early Christians kept this day as a holy day, but even Christians no longer keep a holy day. The word ‘holy’ is not found again until we come to the burning bush in Exodus 3. God came down to speak with Moses on Mt Sinai and declared the ground around the bush as ‘holy ground’; it was holy because of God’s presence. When Moses came back to this mountain with the redeemed children of Israel he declared the whole mountain holy; no man or beast was to touch the mountain even though God declared these people he had saved to be a ‘holy nation’ (Exodus 19:6).

God is holy and he calls his people to be holy (Leviticus 12:44); this was under the old covenant and it is the same under the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ (1Peter 1:15, 16). Believers are made holy in Jesus Christ; they are given the Holy Spirit. ‘Without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). If you want to go to heaven you must know about holiness!

Believers are made holy but also pursue holiness as it is found in Jesus Christ. ‘God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy’ (Ephesians 1:4). To become holy we must separate ourselves from unholy things, things of this sinful world. One aspect of holiness under both covenants is marriage ‘only in the Lord’ (1Corinthians 7:39). Holiness means separation from all forms of sin, from idolatry, from sexual immorality, from drunkenness and dishonesty; things that the media likes to highlight.

On the positive side, holiness means to pursue peace, love, righteousness and truth, and to be mindful of the needs of others; think of Jesus and the holy life he lived. Christian life and worship is not all about me, about what suits me and makes me happy. Isaiah the prophet condemned people who ‘worship me with their lips but their hearts are far from me’ (Isaiah 29:13). Today even lip service is denied the holy God of the Bible as men and women go about doing their own thing.

The word ‘holy’ is no longer heard or spoken. What we hear is the word ‘hate’ and ‘hate-speech’- our parents and grandparents never heard such a word. So many are getting hurt by hate speech that laws are being drafted to try and curb this epidemic, indeed pandemic. More and more laws, but hate speech continues to increase. Multibillionaires who own tech companies are stepping in to regulate this scourge because governments are failing to do so.

We will see more and more laws, and we will see these laws extend even to the banning of ‘holiness speech’ because those making these laws are ignorant of holiness and themselves guilty of hate speech! The ‘moral police’ overseeing hate-speech will soon make it illegal to call anyone a sinner.

Is there no hope? Hope will come when we focus on holiness rather than hate. Social media will continue to be a platform for hate-speech. The Bible is where we find hope, hope in the holiness of Jesus Christ the Son of God. God is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). He who dwells in the high and holy place also dwells with you who are contrite and humble in heart. He will come and revive the heart of such a person. Are you such a person?