

Second Century Holiness Ideas

by J.B. Galloway

*J.B. Galloway's sermon explores the concepts of holiness and repentance as presented in early Christian writings, particularly *The Shepherd of Hermas*.*

Scripture: Psalm 24:3, Matthew 5:16, Acts 2:38, Romans 16:14, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 1:13, Philippians 2:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 John 2:20

Topics: "Early Church History", "Christian Holiness"

Description

J.B. Galloway delves into the historical context and significance of 'The Shepherd of Hermas,' a popular book in the Early Church, focusing on Hermas' journey from a slave to a free man and the lessons on repentance and holiness portrayed in the book. The sermon also explores 'The Epistle of Barnabas' and 'Theophilus of Antioch,' shedding light on their teachings on holiness and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the sermon touches on 'Aristides, The Philosopher,' highlighting his lost Apology that showcased the moral character and faith of early Christians.

Transcript

The Shepherd Of Hermas

Paul sent greetings to a Hermas at Rome (Rom. 16:14). It is uncertain whether this is the same person as the writer of the book of this discussion or not. Origen, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Eusebius, and other early writers say or seemingly imply that he was. Others place him a little later, sometime in the early part of the second century, contending that he was the brother of Pius, who was the bishop of Rome about A.D. 148.

The "Pilgrim's Progress" of the Early Church

The Shepherd of Hermas was one of the most popular books, if not the most popular, outside of the Scriptures that was read in the Early Church during the second, third, and fourth centuries. It has been compared to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Hermas had been a slave but was free in the time that he writes, according to the story. He was a married man and had children, but his domestic affairs were not the happiest. One day he met his former mistress and expressed a passing wish that he had a wife as handsome and good as she. Soon after she appeared to him again in a vision and reproached him for such evil thoughts. And other accusations were brought against him for not bringing up his children as he should, and not correcting and training them to repent. She then disappeared from the scene and an old woman symbolizing the Church appeared, and the scene shifted from Hermas and his family to the

Church in general with its laxity and worldliness. Hermas was constrained to say that there was hope and pardon for those who had sinned after they were baptized. The rest of the book centers around the question of repentance. The book consists of three parts -- four Visions, twelve Commandments, and ten Similitudes.

Hermas On Holiness

The book is somewhat curious but a story of some interest. From it we learn that the Christians of his day were thinking some on the question of holiness.

White Stones

From Book I, Vision 3, chapter 5, we read about the Church:

Hear now then concerning the stones that are in the building. The square and white stones, which agree exactly in their joints, are the apostles, and bishops and doctors, and ministers, who through the mercy of God have come in, and governed and taught, and ministered holily and modestly to the elect of God.

Holiness Required

In chapter 7 we read:

They are such as have heard the word, and were willing to be baptized in the name of the Lord, but, considering the great holiness which the truth requires, have withdrawn themselves, and walked again after their wicked lusts.

In chapter 9 we read:

Hear me, therefore, O my sons! I have bred you up in much simplicity, and innocency, and modesty, for the mercy of God, which was dripping down upon you in righteousness; that you should be sanctified.

Full of Joy

From Book II, the second command, we read:

Put on a holy constancy, in which there are no sins, but all is full of joy; and do good of thy labors.

Take Heed to Thyself

From Book III, the fifth similitude, chapter three, we read:

Take heed to thyself, and keep thyself from every wicked act, and from every filthy word, and from hurtful desire; and purify thy mind from all the vanity of this present world.

In chapter six, we read:

For every pure body shall receive its reward, that is found without spot, in which the Holy Spirit has been appointed to dwell.

In chapter seven, we read:

Thou shalt not defile thy body and spirit; for they are companions together, and the one cannot be defiled, and the other will be so too. Keep, therefore, both of them pure, and thou shalt live unto God.

From the ninth similitude, chapter thirteen, we read:

So shall a man in vain bear His name, unless he shall be endued with power.

Purify Thy House

In the tenth similitude, chapter three, the Christian virtues are likened to virgins, and we read:

Only do thou purify thy house; for they shall readily dwell in a clean house. For they are clean, and chaste, and industrious; and all of them have grace with the Lord. If therefore, thou shalt have thy house pure, they will abide with thee; but if it shall be never so little polluted, they will immediately depart from thy house; for the virgins cannot endure any manner of pollution. From this story in symbolical pictures we see what was taught and expected in the Church of the second century.

Barnabas And His Epistle

The question naturally arises, Is the author of the Epistle of Barnabas the Barnabas that we read about in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles? Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome of the early centuries say that he was. It is evident that this epistle does not belong to the inspired Scriptures even though it is written by a Christian mentioned in the New Testament There are some passages of great spiritual beauty and eloquence; yet it abounds in foolish and trivial allegories. The Epistle was written soon after the fall of Jerusalem to show the Jewish Christians that the old dispensation and worship was a shadow of the Christian. It may be that it served a temporary purpose God designed, yet is far inferior to the inspired Scriptures. Yet we cannot be sure that the Barnabas of the New Testament is its author.

The Epistle Of Barnabas On Holiness

A Perfect Temple

From section four we read:

Let us become spiritual, a perfect temple to God. As much as in us lies, let us meditate upon the fear of God; and strive, to the utmost of our power, to keep His commandments, that we may rejoice in His righteous judgments.

Milk and Honey

From section six we read:

Enter ye into the land flowing with milk and honey, and have dominion over it. Wherefore ye see how we were again formed anew; as also He speaks; by another prophet, "Behold, saith the Lord, I will take from them (that is, those whom the Spirit of the Lord foresaw) their hearts of stone, and will put in them hearts of flesh"; because He was about to be made manifest in the flesh, and to dwell in us. For, my brethren, the habitation of our heart is a holy temple unto the Lord.

Clean Hands and Pure Hearts

From section sixteen we read how to keep the Sabbath:

Thou shalt sanctify it with clean hands, and a pure heart. Therefore we are greatly deceived if we imagine that anyone can now sanctify that day which God has made holy, without having a heart pure in all things. Behold, therefore He will then truly sanctify it with blessed rest, when we having received the righteous promise, when iniquity shall be no more, all things being renewed by the Lord shall be able to sanctify it, being ourselves first made holy.

Theophilus Of Antioch

Little is known of the personal history of Theophilus of Antioch. He was born about A.D. 115, just a short time after the death of John the apostle. We would gather from his own writings that he was born a pagan and converted to Christianity by reading the Holy Scriptures. From the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius we learn that he became bishop of Antioch in A.D. 168, and that he was the sixth bishop of Antioch of Syria. He was content to be called, "Nothing but a Christian." Ancient authors say that he wrote several treatises, several of them against heresies of his day. He comes down to us as an apologist; he was severe, yet gentle in dealing with his antagonists. He is one of the earliest commentators on the Gospels, if not the first; he arranged them in the form of a harmony. But all that remains of his writings are his three books addressed to Autolycus. The occasion that brought them forth is doubtful, but it is thought that they were in answer to works written against Christianity. He is fond of fanciful interpretations of scripture, but has a profound knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. He shows the superiority of Christianity over the heathen religions, and his works would make a very favorable impression for Christianity. He died about A.D. 181.

Theophilus On Holiness

In Book I, chapter 13, of his To Autolycus, writing on the meaning of the word Christian, he says that it is derived from a word meaning to anoint.

Anointed

Thus the early believers were called Christians because they were anointed with the Spirit. He says that no ship is serviceable or seaworthy which has not been anointed, and the man that goes to the gymnasium is first anointed with oil, and therefore, "We are called Christians on account of this fact, because we are anointed with the oil of God" -- not the material oil, but the anointing of the Holy Ghost (I John 2:20). The argument of this chapter depends upon the literal meaning of the word Christos Christ, the Anointed One.

Possessed

In Book III, chapter 17, we have this sentence, "How much more, then, shall we know the truth who are instructed by the holy prophets, who were possessed by the Holy Spirit of God." Here he recognizes the fact that saints may be, and some have been, possessed by the Holy Spirit.

Aristides, The Philosopher

Church historians declare him to be the first of the lost apologists. Several of the early writers mention his work, but it has been lost until recently. He was a Christian philosopher of Athens; he is mentioned by Eusebius as a contemporary with Quadratus, who lived so near to the lifetime of Christ that he declares some who had been healed by Christ "lived on to our times." He must have been a boy when the Apostle John died. His Apology was written between A.D. 124 and 140. It is addressed to the Emperor Hadrian.

In 1889 Professor J. Rendel Harris had the honor of finding a Syrian translation of the long-lost Apology of Aristides in one of the libraries of the Convent of St Catherine, on Mount Sinai. In looking over some Greek manuscripts which were thrown indiscriminately into large chests, the librarian was interested enough to take him to another part of the convent where a door closed by a rusty padlock was thrown open and a narrow room was reached, whose walls were lined with old books in the Syriac, Arabic, and Iberian languages.

There is a Seventh century book which is claimed to be the work of John of Damascus that contains the Apology of Aristides. It was very popular and was translated into many languages. As early as 1204, the King of Norway had it translated into Icelandic. The Story is as follows:

A king of India, Abennar, was an enemy to the Christians. He had an only son Josaphat. At his birth the astrologers predicted that he would become great and embrace a new religion. His father did all he could to prevent him from doing this. But seeing the misery about him he visited a Christian hermit -- Barlaam by name -- and was converted to Christianity. To undo this, his father arranged a discussion held by one of the king's sages, Machor, who was to make a very weak statement of the Christian case. But when the day comes he begins, "like Balaam's beast spake words that he did not intend to use," and he quoted the Apology of Aristides. He converts himself, the king, and all the people.

The Apology of Aristides is a bold challenge to the heathen emperor showing the superior moral character of the Christians, the modesty of the women, their kindness to the poor, their assurance in prayer, and their joy in death.

Aristides on Holiness

In describing the Christians in the Greek manuscript, he says in chapter 15, "And they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ; for they observe His commandments without swerving, and live holy and just lives, as the Lord God enjoined upon them." The Syrian version varies a little in the statements.

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