

# EXCELSIOR NEWSLETTER

Excelsior Classical Covenantal Community

January 2010

[www.excelsiorclassical.org](http://www.excelsiorclassical.org)

## “Holiness” by Keith Mathison

In the early centuries of the church’s existence, Christian apologists would sometimes appeal to the distinctively holy lives of Christians as evidence for the truth of Christianity. Would such an appeal be of any use today? According to numerous surveys, the behavior of professing Christians is not discernibly different from the behavior of those who profess other religions or no religion at all. The phrase one often hears on the lips of pagans who observe contemporary Christian behavior is: “The church is full of hypocrites.” This should not be. We worship a holy God who calls His people to be holy and who has provided the means by which they may be holy.

The problem of lax and hypocritical Christianity is not a new one, and one of the best treatments of the entire subject is a classic written by J.C. Ryle (1816–1900), who served as the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool for twenty years. Ryle was a deeply committed and non-compromising evangelical Christian. In fact, Charles Spurgeon referred to him as an “evangelical champion.” His book *Holiness* has been reprinted numerous times since its original publication in 1879. It is deservedly considered a Christian classic on the subject of sanctification. It ranks up there with the work of John Owen on the mortification of sin.

I first read Bishop Ryle’s *Holiness* some twenty years ago. The book was deeply convicting and made a lasting impact on my thinking. Ryle’s work is convicting because he does not appeal to silly gimmicks and other manmade answers to the problem of sin. He appeals over and over to Scripture, to the Word of the living God, and he drives the Word of God home through careful and direct application. If you are complacent in your sin and do not want to be disturbed in your enjoyment of it, do not read Ryle. This is a book about the necessity of sanctification, the necessity of

### Reminder:

We will be switching from Civics to Apologetics this semester.

### Moms’ Night Out

Monday, January 25th 7 pm Las Margaritas by the mall

### TeenPact Mississippi

February 22-25

TeenPact Mississippi is designed for homeschoolers ages 13-18. If you are interested in having your children learn civics hands-on instead of from a textbook, you must attend this meeting. TeenPact teaches the foundations of government with the legislative branch, beginning with a four-day session at the capitol.

The civics course offer an incredible platform for rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and current events, and is sufficient for a 1/3 high school Carnegie credit.

Spiritually, TeenPact teaches Biblical principles of government and family, going hand-in-hand with the values of families who participate.

The cost for the week is \$220 for first-time students, \$180 for returning students. Housing will be provided free of charge for the first 47 registrants at Camp Garaywa in Clinton, MS. We hope to defray the expense with our fundraisers. Anyone interested in these funds should contact Shelley Crampton.

For more information see [www.teenpact.com](http://www.teenpact.com) or contact Shelley Crampton at 840-1923; [scrampton@afo.net](mailto:scrampton@afo.net).

holiness. It deals with weighty subjects, the weightiest in fact: God, sin, Jesus Christ, the gospel, the Holy Spirit, justification, sanctification, heaven, and hell. It is a book for those who want to move beyond milk and get to the meat of the Word.

Frankly, some older Christian books are difficult to read because of the style of writing that was common in previous ages. To contemporary readers, many of these works seem dry and wordy, tedious and dull. I have run across many such books myself. Ryle does not fall into that category. Ryle's writing is more comparable to that of someone like Charles Spurgeon. He writes with such an intensity and passion that the reader cannot easily become bored.

The book itself contains twenty chapters dealing with various issues related to holiness and one chapter containing quotations on the subject by older Christian writers. In the main section of the book, Ryle devotes entire chapters to subjects such as sin, sanctification, the nature of Christianity as a fight, counting the cost, growth in grace, assurance, the church, and love of Christ. The introductory chapter on sin is perhaps the most important chapter in the entire book because wrong views of salvation and of holiness are inevitably based on wrong views of sin. As Ryle explains, "If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul's disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies."

One of the most prevalent errors made when discussing holiness is to slide into the view that we are somehow justified before God by our holiness. Ryle is careful to observe throughout this book the distinction between sanctification and justification. Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. But those who have been justified bear the fruit of the Spirit and grow in holiness. In other words, they are sanctified by God. They are now to love Christ and the things He loves. This is very easy to forget in our day and age when walking an aisle is equated with conversion and walking in the light is considered optional.

Whether you have been a Christian for ten months or ten years, I encourage you to read Ryle's Holiness. His words will exhort you, convict you, encourage you, and challenge you. His chapters will drive you to dig into the Scriptures, and there you will see that holiness is not optional for the Christian. We are to strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). We are to walk by the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). We are to love the Lord because He first loved us (1 John 4:19) and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39).

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## Preparing for January...

### January Headmasters

January 8th - Steve Crampton

January 15th - John Snyder

January 22nd - John Snyder

January 29th - Robert Green

### Lunch:

January 8th - **Little Caesar**

January 15th - **Taco Bell**

January 22nd - **Pepper's**

January 29th - **Abner's**