

EMBASSY

COLLEGE



TEXTBOOK (ACADEMIC VERSION)

THE FINGER OF GOD

COURSE: CHRISTIAN ETHICS (BT755)

Dr. Mark Rutland



© Copyright 2019

This specially formatted textbook, the Academic Version, is designed for exclusive use by students enrolled in Embassy College. Please do not distribute the PDF file of this book to others. This text is intended as a complement to the course syllabus with the recommendation that the student print this textbook in a two-sided format (duplex) and with a three-hole punch for binding with the syllabus in a notebook folder.

THE FINGER OF GOD

Copyright 1988 by Mark Rutland

Published by Bristol Books

First Edition, July 1988

Second Printing, October 1991

Third Printing, February 1993

Fourth Printing, June 1994

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews, no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified Phillips are from *The New Testament in Modern English*, Revised Edition by J.B. Phillips © 1958, 1960, 1972 by J.B. Phillips. Reprinted with permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Library of Congress Card Number: 88-71098

ISBN: 0-917851-24-2

Suggested Subject Headings:

1. Church Renewal
2. Holiness

Recommended Dewey Decimal Classification: 262.0017

BRISTOL BOOKS

An imprint of Bristol House Ltd.

3131 E. 67th Street

Anderson, IN 46013

Phone: 317-644-0856 Fax: 317-622-1045

To order, call 1-800-451-READ

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
--------------------	---

Section I

God's Holiness, God's Power

1. The Cosmic Switchboard	
<i>The Nature of Gods Holiness</i>	7
2. Jason and the Magic Lute	
<i>True and False Holiness for the Believer</i>	19
3. The Finger of God	
<i>The Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God</i>	29
4. Power, Not Power	
<i>Power in the Kingdom and the World</i>	41
5. The Man in the Monkey Suit	
<i>The Inner Work and the Outer Image</i>	49

Section II

Pentecost Then and Now

6. The Shadow of God	
<i>Pentecost and the Power in Ministry</i>	61
7. A Kiss and Hug	
<i>One Spirit, Two Works</i>	73
8. The Hair of the Dog	
<i>Life in the Spirit</i>	85

Section III

The Balanced Spirit-Filled Life

9. The Dual Antennae	
<i>Ministry in the Spirit</i>	93
10. Unfathomable Modern Conceit	
<i>The Gifts of the Spirit</i>	109
11. Of Spiritual Nit-Wits	
<i>More on the Gifts</i>	123
12. Forbidden Perfume	
<i>Worship in the Spirit</i>	129
13. The Virtue of Christ	
<i>Healing and the Spirit</i>	139
14. Palaces Forsaken	
<i>The Power of Evangelism</i>	153
Appendix	
<i>Hanging by a Thread</i>	161

INTRODUCTION

A DIVORCE AND A WEDDING

TIME TO REUNITE HOLINESS AND POWER

Only a few years ago at a small holiness college in the Midwest, the body of a student, gruesomely mutilated, was found in his room. The county coroner sealed off the blood-drenched dormitory room as a crime scene. To her it appeared an obvious and brutal homicide. Yet the local Methodist pastor quietly but steadfastly maintained it was suicide.

"Suicide?" the coroner asked. "How can a boy inflict dozens of savage wounds on himself? He would have passed out. College suicides take poison," she continued, "they don't slaughter themselves with a butcher knife."

But she was wrong. The forensic tests, fingerprints and detailed inquest proved conclusively that it was indeed a suicide!

After the inquest the coroner visited the pastor at his home. "You knew this was a suicide," she said. "How could a boy do that?"

The pastor explained that if a person's obsessive drive for perfection is met by deep disappointment, self-hatred — blind, vicious, *lethal* — can be the result. The boy was killing his worst enemy because he could not measure up to some internal standard of legal holiness.

What had the boy done? Who knows. Maybe an impure thought had darted across his brain. Perhaps some immature habit continued to dog him. Perhaps it was some outright sin. That is hardly important. The boy is dead, and his family grieves in confusion.

Meanwhile, just a few states away, a multimillion-dollar televangelism empire crumbles around the slumped shoulders of its fallen hero. The Christian community watches in horrified dismay as the whole grimy story unfolds like a Harold Robbins novel. Sexual indecency, rolex watches, million-dollar salaries, expensive homes and air-conditioned dog houses make a laughingstock of evangelical Christianity in general and the charismatic renewal in particular.

A guilt-ridden holiness college boy takes his life and a glitzy,

Hollywood-style Pentecostal preacher falls into materialism and gross immorality. What can these two desperate tragedies possibly have in common?

Historically in the Church an emphasis on the work, person and ministry of the Holy Spirit has always been concomitant with renewal. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of revival.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit for *power in ministry* is axiomatic. Furthermore his work of *sanctification* in the believer is a fundamental biblical doctrine. Both emphases find their roots in Scripture to be sure and both are valid. The problem is that in the heat of revival, many have been receptive to either *power in ministry* or *holiness of life* to the exclusion or even denial of the other.

The strange and perplexing historical reality is that the "theological schools" which have encamped around these poles of *power* and *holiness* have frequently seen themselves as adversaries. Their spiritual, historical and biblical connection has sometimes been obvious to everyone but themselves. They have often presented the tragi-comic picture of Siamese twins in a fistfight.

Who is Who?

Churches such as the Nazarene, Wesleyan, Salvation Army and Christian Missionary Alliance and portions of the United Methodist Church have become known as "holiness" denominations. The Assemblies of God, Church of God, Pentecostal Holiness and (since the 60s) the charismatics have assumed the role of "Pentecostal" denominations with an emphasis on gifts and ministry.

Even such a wry observer as the *New York Times* has seen the connection. In its February 23, 1988 edition writer Peter Steinfeld describes the Assemblies of God:

The denomination's roots are in what is called the "Holiness Revival," a wave of religious fervor that swept through the ranks of American Methodists in the decades after the Civil War.

The movement expressed a rigorous quest for personal Christian perfection, a traditional Methodist concern that the "holiness" adherents believed to have been attenuated as Methodist churches became more sedate and middle class.

Church members also looked for a "second blessing" by the Holy Spirit that marked their sanctification. One

strand of the holiness movement became known as Pentecostals for their belief that all Christians should seek the same gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in “tongues,” that Jesus’ disciples received on what Christian churches celebrate as the feast of Pentecost.

Today, groups emphasizing these gifts—or charisms—of the Spirit form charismatic movements within almost every major branch of Christianity.

Throughout the history of the Church, especially in the West, these two divergent streams of renewal have repeatedly evidenced themselves. At times they have appeared to flow together for a season only to separate again in angry turbulence. At other times both seemed to vanish, leaving less hope than a sun-baked creek bed in a summer drought. Still more confusing were those periods when they seemed to suddenly, mysteriously change places, directions and expressions.

There have been times when the sober “holiness movement” has found voice for shouts of victory, has been “slain in the Spirit” and has gained strength to run and leap in the aisles. The Pentecostals have frequently been more legalistic and bound-up in holiness rules than their “holiness” cousins. Then the charismatics exploded onto the scene in the 60s as exciting, excitable, delighted, delightful, exasperating love-children. Both of the embarrassed probable-parents fervently denied paternity.

The Need for a Wedding

My burden in this book is to give expression to a long-held dream of mine. If the deep, solid theological roots of the holiness movement could be wedded to the liberty and dancing joy of the Pentecostal-charismatic experience the result might well be a new Great Awakening.

The sins, excesses and theological absurdities allowed by the Charismatics must now be met with balanced biblical doctrine. The holiness movement has often been so theologically “proper” that it is certainly right—*dead* right. It badly needs the vitality of the Pentecostals.

This book is about a wedding. The marriage of holiness and power in the kingdom of God. The second half of the book speaks to some practical applications of all that a marriage made in heaven might mean. These include evangelism, the gifts, worship, order and healing.

A precious friend, upon reading the manuscript, said, “I believe this is a fair book. You have equally insulted both groups.”

I pray that, somehow, it will not be received that way. My dream is that some readers will say “Yes, yes—that’s it! We Pentecostals and Charismatics *need* a new and exciting emphasis on holiness.” Perhaps others may say, “It’s true! It’s really true. We holiness folks *need* the power of ministry in the kingdom and we need it now.”

SECTION 1

**GOD'S HOLINESS,
GOD'S POWER**

THE COSMIC SWITCHBOARD

THE NATURE OF GOD'S HOLINESS

If the charismatic movement is to mean any more to the modern church than momentary pyrotechnics it must eschew the sensational and lay hold of the substantial. No doubt the miracle wind of God's Spirit is moving in exciting ways. Yet where the heart of the movement is not sanctified, its ministries devoted to healing and power fall prey to brokenness and fleshy impotence.

By the same token, the great Wesleyan holiness school is in danger of becoming hardly more than a lot of blustery old men rattling rusty sabers and shouting antiquated camp meeting slogans to no one but themselves. Holiness is not served by iron-clad, pharisaical legalists campaigning more for a depression-era vocabulary rather than for true revival.

A great revival can still belong to this generation. If, that is, it is not forfeited by peevish preachers more intent on defending the sacred cows of their own private theological stockyards than upon seeing an unhindered move of God.

*Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God,
his holy mountain.*

Psalm 48:1

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of holiness because our God is a God of holiness. The kingdom is like unto the King. We must again invest ourselves creatively in uncovering the great hope of humanity, which is the holiness of God.

Scripture affords no lovelier divine description than holiness. For a needy, neurotic humanity longing for some faint ray of hope that God is after all *good*, this one word *holiness* affords a splendid munificence. It is pregnant with hope, pungent with meaning and plenteous in mercy. And yet it remains veiled in mystery and discarded in contempt.

Driving through a small town in North Georgia I spied a rudely hand-painted sign with an arrow underneath the words: "Holey Ghost Revival."

Perhaps, I thought, the blockade to true revival in the church lies more in the spelling than I had imagined. Holiness, properly spelled, is essentially a matter of wholeness. To be holy is to be perfect—that is, by definition that which is holy is neither lacking nor burdened with the superfluous.

A “perfect” circle is one defined by being equidistant from the center at every point on the perimeter. Such a circle could, in a sense, be said to be “holy.” It meets the definition of perfect, undiluted “circleness.” Now, a circle lacking even one degree of enclosure is more “holey” than holy. By the same token if that same gap on the perimeter were to be “filled in” with a line inconsistent with the definition, the circle, though complete in one way, remains profoundly imperfect. It is now an “unholy” circle.

A lady in one church said, “Brother Mark, you keep talking about “drawing nigh unto.” I don’t want to get close to God. I just want to get over in a corner and sneak into heaven quietly. I don’t want to be a saint. I just don’t want to go to hell.”

“I cannot believe what I’m hearing!” I exclaimed.

“I can explain it easily,” she said calmly. “When I started the ninth grade I set my heart on finishing high school with straight C’s. And I did. You see, if you fail you have to repeat, and I wanted *out*. But if you start making A’s people begin to expect things of you.

“It’s exactly like that with God,” she continued. “If you’re too bad you’ll go to hell, and I don’t want that. But if you’re too good, he’ll send you to India, and I don’t want that either.”

Quite apart from the obvious theology of works, her theory of “C-class Christianity” betrayed a pathetically distorted understanding of the character and nature of God. Her confusion, far more serious than the merely epidural misjudgment of “how God acts,” sprang from her twisted concept of “who God is.”

Far from being an isolated story, hers is a tragedy repeated with only slight variations in the lives of multiplied millions of sincere, but sincerely confused, Christians. These crippled children of a God who is whole live shadowy lives of terror, fearful of a God they do not know and longing for a father they can trust. Without knowledge of the holiness of God, these people will—if they do not perish—at least huddle in cold darkness away from the light of his marvelous love.

The Question of Who God Is

Out of the burning bush God spoke to Moses, calling him to the great life’s work for which he had been raised up. It was a task of monumental

proportion and must have been stunning to Moses. Of even greater significance to the individual believer is Jehovah's self-declaration in that same conversation.

"Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?'" (Ex. 3:13). It is quite provocative to note that Moses required no such revelation to sway the might of Egypt. The demonstration of power was sufficient there. This message was for the bound and backslidden people of God who needed fresh revelation. The children of Israel had been so long in slavery amidst the pantheistic paganism of Egypt that they had lost sight of the true nature of the true God.

"We know the name of Isis and the name of Ra," Moses could imagine their responding. "When you speak of the God of our fathers, what is his name?"

"Now Lord," Moses seems to be saying to God in a peculiarly earthy bit of wisdom. "These are a people with more than four hundred years of theological confusion bred into them. They have largely forgotten your name *and* who you are. I am *not* going down there and tell them a burning bush sent me! What is your name?"

Moses appears to grasp the principle that the kind of genuine, obedient faith necessary to spring open a revival (another name for deliverance from bondage) will not be found in an atmosphere of confusion. In fact, it is upon that very principle that Moses appeals to God for a fresh revelation.

God's declaration of his own holiness is magnificent! "No more," he seems to say to Moses, "shall my people be in bondage to distorted images of me. I am that I am."

We are free in the unshakable knowledge that God is nothing other, less or more than himself. The present tense, unchanging, unchangeable ultimate reality of the universe, the ground of all truth and the hope of humanity, is that God is perfectly God.

In the Far East an old woman told me of an odd custom surrounding the birth of a baby. If the child were perfect, healthy and of the desired sex it would be immediately hidden. The father would plunge hysterically out of his house loudly cursing the gods with all the appropriate histrionics. Screaming as if in agony of soul and renting his garments like some half-mad, Old Testament monarch he would revile the gods with blasphemous epithets.

Similarly, when visitors arrived to view the new baby, knowing glances and silent winks of congratulations would be exchanged, but howls of indignation would be lofted heavenward.

"Curses, O curses on all the gods," they would wail, "for the grief brought on this poor home. This wretched, pitiful excuse for a baby will bring no happiness to this home!"

Bizarre? Certainly! But it is the predictable end of theological confusion. You see, in their view the gods were simply human beings whose power had been multiplied by thousands. One normal human brain thus magnified becomes a formidable force and one to be reckoned with. The problem is that if the gods are simply "overgrown human beings" their human frailties, weaknesses, lusts and sins are necessarily magnified as well!

Hence the gods become petty, selfish, whimsical demon-spirits to be pacified but hardly to be adored. If such gods saw the joy of a young couple nestling its newborn progeny, they might in envious pique maim or even kill the child.

Only slightly more sophisticated is the blithe Greek acceptance of a god who in rapacious lust would assume animal form for the bestial molestation of mortal woman. These primitive but more subtle forms of this same heresy are hardly to be avoided if God is seen as the unpredictable but powerful ruler of the universe.

Can God Do Anything?

As an undergraduate student I was confronted on my Christian faith by an atheistic professor. He was one of those militant, aggressive atheists not content to simply go to hell. He wanted all the rest of us to go with him.

"Rutland," he said to me in class one day, "I understand you're a Christian." He spoke the word "Christian" as one might say "fascist," "nazi" or "cat-hater."

"Yes, Dr. Johnson [not his real name]," I said, "I am."

"Then you must believe in God," he concluded.

"Yes, of course," I said, "one can hardly be a Christian without believing in God."

"Well," he said, "let me ask you this. Can your God do everything?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, eager to make a profession of faith before him and the whole class. Alas, mine was an answer drenched in hopeless naiveté.

"Then riddle me this," he said, with a triumphant verbal lunge, "Can he make a rock he cannot pick up?"

The professor smiled wickedly, as if to say, “touché,” and gloated over the spectacle of yet another hapless Christian impaled on his pet pattern of thrust, parry, thrust. At that point there *was* no answer.

Ah, but how often I have considered returning to college with what I know *now*. I wonder if he is still asking that same question.

More than perhaps he even realized, this is the greatest question of all. And it demands a bold answer; yet one informed with true biblical faith.

Can God do everything?

NO! Praise his name, God cannot do everything. Because he is holy he cannot sin, lie, cheat, steal or treat us falsely. He cannot will, think, act or speak in opposition to his own nature. He cannot contradict himself. He is I AM, and he must in every moment *be* I AM. No, God *cannot* do everything!

Unlimited in power, God is more surely bound than a galley slave. He can never be less than nor other than who he is. He must always be true, perfect, holy “Godness.” Hence his every impulse, motive and deed find reality only within the circumscribed parameters of his own nature. Simply put, God cannot, even for a fraction of a second, quit being God.

God—An Angry Heavenly Cop?

But it is not God’s holiness that separates me from God. It is my sin. In fact, it is only because God is holy that I can draw nigh unto him in faith, knowing that he is to me, no less than he is to anyone else in all the earth, I AM.

There is not a god of the river, a god of the sea or a god of fire. Neither is there a god for plumbers, one for electricians and one for seminary professors. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God; and he is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Deuteronomy 6:4, italics mine).

Furthermore, he is the same in character in all three persons. Because God is holy, when he breathes, he breathes himself. When he speaks, his Word is himself. Whether he is the *Godhead*, the pre-existent Word, the *Word* in expressed form, or *breath* he is not variable in nature.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2).

I once had a great friend whom I loved dearly. Barry (a pseudonym) was a fine tennis player as well as a warm and witty companion. His wife, Martha, however (the name is changed to protect the guilty), was demonized. She was as mean-hearted, mean-spirited and cold-blooded a woman as ever lived.

Martha refused to condescend to such trite niceties as answering the phone with a "hello," "good morning" or even "Barry and Martha's." Instead she would jerk the phone from its cradle as if personally insulted by its ring and loudly demand "What?!" in a tone that would have evoked envy in a gestapo agent.

"Martha," I would say, "this is Mark Rutland. Is Barry home?" "Yes," she would snip. "He's home, but you can't speak to him. I'm tired of his dead-beat tennis-bum friends calling up every time he has a few hours off. He's not going to play tennis today. We're going to work here at the house, and *anyway*, why don't you get married and settle down?"

This had a decided tendency to ruin my day. I finally became Unwilling to risk such harrowing encounters.

"Barry," I told my friend, "I love you and want to play tennis. But from now on *you call me*. My mama answers the phone with 'Hello.'"

If I could have secreted myself across the street to watch the house until Martha left, I might have called. But I would rather have missed the tennis date with my friend than risk hearing her shout "What?!" into the phone.

God himself alone knows how many multiplied millions of serious, church-trained Christian folks are utterly paralyzed in their devotional access to God because they are not certain who will answer the phone when they dial heaven. If they could be certain to get Jesus on the main line they would perhaps approach prayer with confidence. They perceive God the Father to be an angry heavenly cop. God the Holy Spirit is often hidden behind an almost impregnable insulation of ignorance and prejudice.

A great many mainline Christians, while espousing Trinitarianism, are actually functioning Unitarians, serving the God Jesus and living in unwholeness and uninformed terror of the full Godhead. This heresy is cultivated and encouraged unthinkingly at a cultural level through much of accepted worship practice.

The Pocahontas Heresy

I have childhood memories of schizophrenic Sundays that schooled me in the worship of a schizophrenic God. Sunday school was gay and warm. A smiling, gray-haired teacher condescended to sit on a chair my size. She colored pictures with me and told me that Jesus loved me. How easy it was to believe! His blue-eyed, chestnut-haired countenance beautified the classroom wall, and upon our felt-board the teacher fearlessly put children right on Jesus' lap. We celebrated Jesus'