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Why is the Doctrine and Experience of Holiness Important?

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Introduction

Christianity has many doctrines. People from different denominations view these doctrines differently. These doctrines lead to one reality. In this paper, I am going to look at why the doctrine and experience of holiness is important. I will first define the term “Christian holiness” and then list one or two words that express the same reality.

Definition of the Term

According to John Wesley in his book *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* holiness is defined as “The loving of God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul and that all the thoughts, words and actions are governed by pure love.”¹¹⁸ Holiness can also be understood as separation, setting apart from a common use to a sacred use. Other terms used to express the idea of Christian holiness are entire sanctification, circumcision of the heart, baptism with the Holy Spirit, perfected in love, etc. Let us then look at the importance of the doctrine of holiness.

Importance of the Doctrine of Holiness

This doctrine is important because it tells us about the primal attribute of God in which other attributes rest. Through the centuries we see how scholars have come to understand it and how they have differed. In this doctrine we find God’s redemptive relationship to humanity, which brings us to an understanding of why humanity must be holy, or to an understanding of what form this holiness is to take in man. We also see “God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature” (Romans 1: 20).¹¹⁹ This helps us to understand and fill the gaps of our conception of

¹¹⁸ Wesley, John. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966. p. 51

¹¹⁹ Taylor, Richard. *Exploring Christian Holiness* v. 3. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press,

God's personal character and His thoughts towards humankind.

The doctrine of holiness is important as it makes us aware that "God's holiness is the fundamental principle not only for our worship, but of his whole saving revelation and economy of love. It is the moral principle of both love and grace. It is love's content."¹²⁰ The above statement shows us that God's holiness not only calls us to worship and revere Him but is also a dispensation of His love. Forsyth said,

"Any conception of God which exalts his Fatherhood at the cost of His Holiness, or to its neglect, unsettles the moral throne to the universe. Any reaction of ours from a too exacting God which leaves us with but a kindly God, a patient and a pitiful, is a reason which sends us over the edge of the moral world.... It is a conception which tends to do less than justice even to God's love. It tends to take the authority of the Gospel, the sinew out of preaching, the insight of our faith, the stamina out of character, and discipline out of home."¹²¹

This doctrine teaches us that holiness is the underlying attribute of God. No attribute should be magnified at the expense of this attribute of holiness.

This doctrine indicates that holiness is native to humanity because humanity was created holy, not neutral. We see that holiness is a righteous relationship, primarily with God, then with fellow human beings, and then to the environment. We note that this original holiness is a native affinity for God and right - the living personal relationship.

We have seen how important this doctrine is, and now we need to talk about the importance of the experience.

Importance of the Holiness Experience

God calls everyone to be holy. In I Peter 1:16 it is stated, "Be holy, for I am holy." This is a call from God. Because God is holy, when humanity was first created before the fall, we were holy. God is now calling us to the restoration of this holiness. God wants those who are related to Him to be like Him. As God is holy so His people are also to be holy. Shelby said

1985. p. 13

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 14

¹²¹ Forsyth. *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*. New York: George H. Doran Co. No date. p. 354

that holiness is a “characteristic of the nature of God...”¹²²

Holiness is also a recognition of authority, demanding recognition as humanity is constituted so that unless we recognize a higher power and authority than ourselves, we become lawless and live on the animal plane of our nature. “Holiness makes a great contribution ... to man in the fact that it sets before him a God who is absolute Authority of the universe... God is superior to every relationship of humanity; the more man is conscious of His true character, the more he senses an authority to which he is responsible.”¹²³ This experience of Holiness makes a man know who he is before God and to submit to God as His child.

Holiness gives a concept of righteousness. It presents a set of definite standards of wrong and right. It leads to sharp distinctions between sin and righteousness and to living according to God’s intention when He created humanity. As holiness comes from God and His character is pure, so He gives the power to abhor the wrong.

This experience is important because it is the second work of grace. It leads to purity of heart, and it is the baptism by fire (Matthew 3:11) in which impurities are dealt with. This experience symbolizes the death to self as Paul said that he is crucified with Christ, “...I do not live but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). It is the singleness of the eye. “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness” (Matthew 6:22–23 KJV). Singleness of the eye is the opposite of what James addresses as double mindedness. He calls people to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts. The person focuses on God alone; he or she is no longer unstable. It is also an experience of devotedness and separateness to God. This is an experience of one giving oneself totally to God. It is being led by the Spirit, which is very important in the Christian walk.

It is important because it is the perfection of oneself. Matthew 5:48 states, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is

¹²² Corlett, Shelby D. *The Meaning of Holiness*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1944. p. 10

¹²³ Corlett, Lewis T. *Holiness in Practical Living*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1949. P.

perfect.” This is the fulfilment of the scripture as well as attaining what was lost in the Garden of Eden.

Conclusion

As we look at this matter critically, being holy is being set apart, and at the same time reflecting a holy God as individuals and as the Church. The scripture calls for holy living – it is a scriptural obligation. Holiness sets the Church apart from being a mere human institution.

In the Church of the Nazarene, holiness is a doctrinal distinctive which sets us apart from other denominations. The Church of the Nazarene serves as the yeast of holiness within the larger body of the Church, although all churches have some element of holiness. Holiness is present in all churches to some degree due to its function as one of the four marks of the church (sanctity, catholicity, unity and apostolicity).

The doctrine and experience of holiness is important as it shows that holiness is not just a mere attribute of God, but it is the basis of all attributes. It is an experience that a believer can achieve in his or her lifetime. As children of God we are called to holiness. As we experience holiness we may worship God in fullness. It helps us to know that holiness is not something new to mankind but was an original characteristic. When people experience this, in actual fact, they are going back to the first state before the fall even though we no longer attain that absolute perfection. Holiness is important for a child of God. Experiencing holiness is an affirmation of doing what is right. It becomes easier to fight temptations as one goes into a deeper experience with God. It helps to have an undivided heart towards God. It becomes easier to trust in God.

In the Church of the Nazarene, we have understood and taught the doctrine of holiness in terms of personal piety. We also go on to teach that our Christian holiness is rooted in the holiness of God. This is a good teaching, but most of us have failed to put this experience into practice; instead, it has produced individualism. Is that what holiness is all about? We have also forgotten to preach on the holiness of the Church. This has affected the church as a whole.

I am of the mind that if the doctrine of holiness was taught and preached to the masses with emphasis, our congregations would cease to become social clubs where people congregate every Sunday. People are to experience the

self-sacrificing love of Jesus, as it is the essence of holiness.

Remember, without holiness no one shall see God.