

Christian Holiness: in terms of faith and practice

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As believers, we are encouraged by the Apostle Peter to always be able to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give a reason for the doctrine that we hold (1Peter 3:15). My reason for choosing this topic is motivated by these words of Peter. It is my belief that every Nazarene theological graduate should be well informed and acquainted with our doctrine of Christian Holiness, and when required, be able to satisfactorily relate this concept according to our tradition. In order to have a correct understanding of the doctrines of Christianity, it is imperative that this doctrine be considered. It is my assertion that Christian Holiness, according to the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition is a biblical concept that brings one to the point of sensing a deep need for the experience, and a realization that Christian Holiness is indeed both the goal, and beginning of the Christian life.

According to J. Kenneth Grider, Christian Holiness is an appropriate name for entire sanctification, if it is our aim to appeal to outsiders with an inoffensive name for it (1994: 371). For the purpose of this assignment however, the two terms will be used interchangeably, together with others. In order to relate Christian Holiness to one outside the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, I feel it is necessary to include the following important issues: why we are called Wesleyan-Arminian, what does Christian Holiness mean, and the theological views on the sin problem. However, one should not forget the role of prevenient grace and justification by faith, as well as instantaneous sanctification, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the practical implications of Holiness. For the sake of not explaining obvious theological terms and concepts, it is assumed that the person to whom this doctrine is related is someone with a theological background.

An obvious starting point in explaining Christian Holiness according to the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition would be a brief background on its historical development. Wesleyan-Arminian is the technical name given to the holiness church's theological heritage, and refers to the teachings of James Arminius and John Wesley. Along with other denominations, the Church of the Nazarene forms part of the holiness movement. The holiness movement takes its roots from John Wesley. One characteristic of John Wesley's teaching was the importance of entire sanctification of believers by which their hearts are made perfect in love for God and other persons.

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James Arminius, opposed the Calvinistic teaching of the predestination of those whom God elects for salvation. He stressed that God had foreknowledge of all those who would later have faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life, and all those who reject Him for eternal separation from God. Arminius emphasized that God has given human beings the free will, true freedom to either accept or reject salvation. As a holiness movement we are Wesleyan-Arminian in that we believe in Wesley's teaching of entire sanctification as a second work of grace; and in Arminius' emphasis on the individual's choice to accept salvation by grace through faith, or reject it.

Concerning the concept of Christian Holiness, as a Wesleyan-Arminian, I believe that true holiness, entire sanctification, is not merely having high moral standards and being detached from the ungodly

things of this world. Neither is it a modification of man's behavior. The above qualities are a necessity in living a holy life, and can be found even in the lives of Buddhist monks, fundamental Muslims, and pious Jews. Certainly the presence of these qualities does not qualify them to be called holy Christians. The difference between Christian Holiness and the holiness of for example, a Muslim, is in the Person of Jesus Christ. Christian Holiness is found in the holiness of Christ. Being in Christ is a prerequisite to Christian Holiness.

Christian Holiness is not man's attempt to please God, since it is not a matter of 'what' we can do to achieve holiness. It is a matter of 'who'. The 'who', referring to God, who through His grace enables man to be holy. Holiness according to our tradition is relational. General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, Paul G. Cunningham, was quoted at the Quadrennial Address of the board of General Superintendents to the 25th General Assembly, as saying, " Christian Holiness is born of a relationship with Jesus that is nurtured and grows as we become seekers after the mind of Christ. Holiness is Christ-likeness" (Holiness Today: August 2001). Since holiness is the work of God, it does not mean that the believer takes on a passive role in sanctification. Such an approach would tend to be Calvinistic and contrary to what we believe. The question remains, how does one enter into Christian Perfection?

At this point, it is vital to look at what is referred to as a most significant area of Christian theology: the sin problem. In understanding Christian Holiness it is important that we have a correct understanding of the origin of sin and how it affected the image in which man was created. Contemporary theologian, Paul Tillich, correctly views sin as an estrangement from God. He is, however, incorrect in saying that this estrangement coincides with the nature of original man, and that the Genesis description of man before the fall was a myth (Dunning 1988: 284-285). For Tillich therefore, sin is part of the creaturehood or spiritual make-up of man. The most obvious observation of this contemporary view is that even if one is restored to the original image, it would not imply

freedom from sin in this world. He rejects the idea of original righteousness and takes on the ontological view of sin as a substance.

In Wesleyan circles, we understand sin to be an intrusion, totally foreign to the human nature as God created and intended it to be. Man was created in the moral and natural image of God. The natural image would include intellect, conscience, reason, and authority to rule over the earth. The moral image on the other hand would include the freedom of choice, exercise of will, righteousness, and holiness. Being created in God's image did not suggest that man was created as a robot, controlled by God. Such a relationship could never be a genuine one. Because of the freedom God gave to man, the option of disobeying God always existed. Unfortunately, the original relationship that God had with man was violated when Adam and Eve willfully and knowingly disobeyed a law given to them by God. The consequences of their action were a loss of the original relationship, a separation between man and God, including a loss of original holiness. In his book, *Grace, Faith, & Holiness*, Ray Dunning rightfully defines sin in brief as,

This first act of sin, referred to as 'Adamic sin' was inherited by all of humanity, being all Adam's descendents. It is not to be understood that sin is inherited biologically because it is not a substance found in our genes. The Church of the Nazarene strongly believes in sin as a condition or principle, and not a substance. A recommendation was made to replace a term that could be misinterpreted as referring to sin as a substance. At the twenty-fifth General Assembly held in Indianapolis, it was proposed that the word 'eradicate' (when referring to original sin), be removed from its articles of faith and be replaced with the term 'the hearth is fully cleansed'. 'Eradicate', when correctly understood, simply refers to the act of removing sin from the heart. However, it also refers to the removal of physical matter. In order to avoid any such misinterpretations, this proposal is receiving a unanimous vote.

In the holiness tradition Adamic sin is also called 'original sin', referring to the condition of sin found in all mankind as a result of the original man's act of sin. Because of the intrusion of sin, the image of God in man was corrupted or polluted, but not destroyed. The possibility of redemption, as well as the restoration of the image of God in man existed. The problem, however, was that because of sin, man was guilty before God and in need of being justified. The central question throughout the Bible is how can sinful man be reconciled with a holy God? The Bible sees sin as a barrier separating man from God (Isaiah 59:2, Romans 3: 23). Man was able to erect this barrier or condition in which he finds himself, but found himself unable to break it down on his own. What was needed was an act of God to enable man to have an urge or desire for God and for man to be set free from the bondage of sin that separates him from a holy God. This initiative on the part of God is called God's prevenient grace, meaning the grace that comes before, or that prepares.

Charles Carter does justice to this grace by describing it as the favor of God bestowed freely and selflessly to work for the redemption of all sinners (1983: 485). Although prevenient grace is extended to all men everywhere, it is not saving grace. It is the grace of God that prepares man for the possibility of salvation based upon whether the person responds positively toward it.

The all-important role of the Holy Spirit should not be neglected at this stage. The Holy Spirit is the One who makes this grace available to all mankind, and is an effective agent in both justification and entire sanctification. Along with administering the grace, it is also the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the world in regard to sin (John 16:8). It is when the response to prevenient grace, together with the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is positive, that it becomes saving grace. Here again Calvin taught of a grace that cannot be resisted. Calvinists view the grace of God as irresistibly received by those whom God had elected to have eternal life. Both James Arminius and John Wesley stressed that although God is the initiator of the possibility of salvation, it requires a human response. In the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition therefore, the one condition that we consider pivotal to our belief is that of faith.

The believer is active in his/her salvation only through faith in Jesus Christ. But this faith should not be contributed to human effort. It is given to man by the grace of God. Faith is believing that God has promised to save from all sin, that He is able and willing to purify from all sin, and believing that He can do it now! It is then, when we repent of our sins and believe that God saves us, when He redeems us from our bondage to sin. With the first work of grace, our sinful acts are forgiven, we are pardoned from the guilt of sin, we are adopted as sons of God, we receive spiritual life, and restored to the favor of God. Scholars refer to this as initial sanctification. According to Grider, "Justification, regeneration or the new birth, initial sanctification, reconciliation, and adoption- each refer to one aspect of redemptive grace. The first work of grace includes them all "(1994: 350). God-given faith does not end at the moment of justification. It continues to give assurance that at the first work of grace, we are indeed saved. While at this stage we have received spiritual life, there remains within the heart of the converted Christian a tendency to sin. What man needs after being forgiven of committed sins, is inward healing of the disease that causes this tendency toward evil. John Wesley referred to this as ' sin in believers'. Theological terms used to describe this inward state or conditions within man are: original sin, sinful nature, inbred sin, inherited depravity, racial depravity, and Adamic depravity. Whatever term one decides to use, the all-important issue is to be found in how a believer could be cleansed from original sin. It is precisely these two forms of sin, committed sins also referred to as sin as act, and the sinful nature referred to as sin as state, that two works of grace are required. The first being that of justification, and the second that of entire sanctification, where original sin is dealt with.

After almost four years at Nazarene Theological College, and reading a fair amount of books and articles on the doctrine of entire sanctification, I have found Reverend Luther Lee's definition on entire sanctification (Quoted by Williams 1928:21) the most satisfactorily and worthy of direct quotation:

host, received through faith In Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement has power to cleanse from all sin; whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, which is justification, but are washed

entirely from its pollution, freed from its power, and are enabled through grace, to love God with all our hearts, to walk in His holy commandments blameless.

Again, just as with justification, entire sanctification is received by faith. When addressing the Council in Jerusalem concerning the Gentile believers, Peter ascribed the sanctification of both the disciples and that of the Gentiles as by faith (Acts 15:9). Also equally important is that entire sanctification is as instantaneous as the first work of grace. For John Wesley, although the act of entire sanctification is instantaneous, it is gradual at the same time. By this it is not meant in any way that the second work of grace is received gradually and that the heart is cleansed from sin in fractions or stages. What is meant here however is that there is a progressive preparation of the mind and heart for the sanctification by the Holy Spirit, as the believer matures spiritually. The crisis moment of entire sanctification remains instantaneous. Just as prevenient grace is not saving grace, but is that grace which prepares the person for salvation by faith, in a similar manner progressive sanctification prepares the believer for the second work of grace. Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification. As the believer then grows in grace toward a more perfect obedience to God, preparation for the crisis event of entire sanctification takes place. Since we are here looking at Christian Holiness according to the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, the view of other traditions and persuasions need to be considered for the purpose of comparison.

Reformation theologians, Calvin and Luther, had different viewpoints on the instantaneous standpoint. When the name Martin Luther is mentioned, one of the first concepts that come to mind is that of 'justification by faith'. He did not have the same view concerning the doctrine of entire sanctification. For Luther, it was not an instantaneous event, neither was it received through faith. Luther stressed that we are sanctified gradually through living a disciplined Christian life. The Calvinistic position on entire sanctification is that it is never entire, neither is it completed in the course of this life. The reason for this belief was that entire sanctification to Calvin was impossible while still in the lustful

flesh. While on earth the elected believer lives a life consecrated to the Lord, he/she will progress in sanctification until the time of death. It is only at the point of death when one can be truly free from sin. The Roman Catholic belief is that entire sanctification is received after death. When a person was hindered by small sins and bad habits in this life, such a person will go to Purgatory when he/she dies. Here souls are purged and cleansed from sin, through suffering. In Purgatory they are spiritually perfected, which is essential if they are to be united to God. Another movement worth mentioning is the Keswick movement. They rightfully believe in Christian Perfection, which they refer to as the deeper life, where the believer is empowered for service and victorious living. But the point of difference is that they deny salvation from all sin, thus entire sanctification. For them, when the believer lives victoriously through the power of the Holy Spirit, sin is counteracted, but the heart is never completely cleansed from sin. Sin is suppressed within the heart and not given opportunity to surface. Along with these there are other viewpoints and teachings on Christian Holiness. Instead of raising objections to these views, I would rather have us look at reasons why we believe entire sanctification to be an instantaneous event, which produces a real change in the believer not at the time of death, but in his or her present experience.

First, it is instantaneous because instantaneous symbols are used in Scripture to describe how the blessing is received. The water baptism of John the Baptist symbolized repentance. In the context of this paper, this would refer to the first work of grace. Just as the first work of grace prepares the believer for the second work, the baptism of John prepared the way for the baptism by Jesus, which was Spirit baptism (Matthew 3:11). It is this baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire that purges and cleanses from all sin. The act of baptism is never an extensive process, neither is it partial and incomplete. It is always instantaneous and complete. Yes, it is by faith that we appropriate the second work of grace, but it is not our faith that cleanses the heart from inbred sin. It is by the instantaneous event of baptism with the Holy Spirit that we are made holy. Christian Holiness is effected by the baptism of the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from inbred sin. Jesus' prayer for his followers in

John 17 was that God, through the Holy Spirit, would, " Sanctify them fully..." This prayer was answered when the Holy Spirit baptized the one hundred and twenty believers on the day of Pentecost. It was only after Pentecost that the followers of Jesus became true witnesses and lived victoriously over sin.

Secondly, entire sanctification is instantaneous because it is symbolized by the act of circumcision. The physical act of circumcision was introduced as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham. When looking beyond the act itself we find that circumcision also had a symbolic meaning attached to it. The doctrine of entire sanctification is in no way a New Testament concept. In Deuteronomy 30: 6, we read that God Himself is the one who circumcises the heart, resulting in a perfect love for God and abundant life. When addressing the believers in Colossians, Paul makes reference to the act of circumcision, but emphasizes its spiritual nature (Colossians 2: 11). It is through the symbolic act of circumcision that the heart is purified of the sinful nature and the believer is cleansed from all sin. I do not have any doubt that circumcision as used here, is symbolic of the cleansing of the heart from all sin. Since circumcision is never gradual but is an event, similarly entire sanctification is an instantaneous event, and not a process. Wesleyan holiness writers include other reasons in defense of an instantaneous work, but I feel the above should be sufficient. One should bear in mind that any amount of words and terms could not suffice in satisfactorily relating the doctrine of entire sanctification. It is more than a doctrine, it is more than a theological term, it is a blessing that has to be experienced by all believers, in this life.

Another term used for Christian Holiness is Christian Perfection (1966, 1872). Christian Perfection to John Wesley was Perfect Love. It means that when we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, then our love for our neighbor, our words, our actions, and our thoughts, will be governed by pure love. Surely this implies deliverance from all sin, for it would be impossible to love God and man perfectly while sin is still present in the heart. I find Wesley's definition of 'Perfect Love' to be the

most practical of entire sanctification because it covers three important practical implications of Christian Holiness.

Firstly, entire sanctification implies that victorious living over sin and temptation is possible in this life. Adam and Eve were created in the perfect image of God, and yet when tempted, they chose to knowingly disobey God and sin. How much more are sanctified believers open to temptation, and even falling into sin? Being entirely sanctified means that we are made to be Christ-like, having the attitude of Christ within us. Even Jesus was tempted. Because He was Holy Spirit empowered and was Holiness Himself, He was able to overcome temptation. Likewise, the person living a life of holiness receives the personal presence of God the Holy Spirit living within. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit within, we are empowered to overcome temptation. Since sin consists in yielding to temptation, when one overcomes temptations as they arise, no sin is committed. Thus, the holy Christian is indeed empowered to live victoriously over sin and temptation.

Secondly, I believe that the sanctified Christian is empowered for effective service and witness for God. Biblical studies, Church history, and personal experience, have revealed that God always effectively used those whose hearts were cleansed from sin. A holy Christian means being a pure and clean instrument that God can use effectively. In South Africa, recent news has revealed the deaths of young men while undergoing their traditional initiation. The cause of the deaths was the use of germ-infected knives in the act of circumcision. In the Pentateuch, we read that when something was considered to be holy, it was set apart for the exclusive use by God, and withdrawn from common use. Such objects included the garments worn by the priests, the anointing oil, the sanctuary vessels, and other objects dedicated to God. It was required that these instruments and objects to be uncontaminated, in order to be used for God's service. In the same way God requires the believer to be holy, entirely sanctified, in order for us not only to be used, but to be effectively useful in His holy service. We also note how the self-seeking disciples of Jesus became not only servants of God, but

pillars of the Christian Church after being sanctified fully by the Holy Spirit. They became witnesses not only by what they did, but also by way of conduct. Likewise, the sanctified believer is to be a living testimony of the Christian Faith.

Thirdly, the sanctified believer is empowered through the indwelling Holy Spirit to live in peace with his fellow man. I realize that this is not always an easy thing to do, especially since sanctification does not make it impossible to be offended. However, just as the Holy Spirit will guide and assist in times of temptation, He will perform a similar work in times of being offended. To believers who doubt their sanctification, to those who need assurance, I have the following to say: If they live a life where they have daily victory over sin and temptation; where they are clean instruments in His service, and living witnesses for Christ; and live at peace with both God and man, I cannot find any further reason for such a person to doubt. Praise God for the grace of living a life worthy of His calling, through His enabling presence within us. This is God's part in the relationship; we need to do our part.

The way in which the believer will be able to retain this blessing and actively oppose anything that will reduce one's love for God and fellow man is to constantly walk in God's light. This would include being bold enough to witness about the sanctified life, never to neglect the reading and meditation of God's Word, and having a consistent prayer life. It is when we walk in His marvelous light, the light of His Word, which is the lamp to our feet and a light to our path, that the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses us from all sin (Psalm 119:105; 1John 1:7).

By now it should have been made quite clear that Christian Holiness is indeed both the goal and beginning of the Christian life. It is a goal in that God calls every believer unto holiness. It is the beginning of Christian life, in that when we receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live the abundant life that is found in Christ. According to the Wesleyan–Arminian tradition, we believe that God saves men from a life of estrangement from Him to a life of where the

original relationship between man and God is restored. God saves man from sin to holiness instantaneously, through faith in Jesus Christ. This new life, where the heart is fully cleansed from sin, is achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit in two works of grace. These two works of grace are required because it is God's method of dealing with the two types of sin, acts of sin that requires justification and inbred sin that requires entire sanctification.

At the Global Theological Conference held in Guatemala City in April 2002, the doctrine of Holiness was one of four themes discussed. There it was stressed that in a multicultural church, with diverse societies, that our ways of communicating the message of holiness must continually be contextualized. If in the process the message is not compromised, and as a church we maintain unity in proclaiming the holiness message, I agree. However, I fail to think of any better way to do this than by living out this holy life within our own unique cultural settings. After all, the greatest work that we can do for God is in being living ambassadors that will make the world hungry for Christ, and the gift of Christian Holiness.

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