THE HOLINESS PILGRIMAGE
By John A. Knight

Reflections On
The Life Of Holiness

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ABOUT THIS DIGITAL EDITION

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PERMISSIONS TO QUOTE

Quotations from modern versions of the Bible are acknowledged as follows:


PREFACE

The material here presented was prepared in its original form for the Lienard Lectures on Holiness at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., in February, 1971. Later, April, 1972, it was used in the Gould Lectures on Holiness at Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, Mass.

Both institutions received the lectures with appreciation, far beyond their merit. Faculty members and students were most generous in their kind comments and response. The writer was enriched by the warm fellowship shown by these outstanding communities of learning and piety. President William Greathouse of Nazarene Theological Seminary and President Leslie Parrott of Eastern Nazarene College, along with their colleagues, were gracious hosts.

Particularly it was a delight to meet Miss Margaret Lienard and Burke Lienard of Kansas City, who sponsor the Lienard Lectures in honor of their mother who was a pioneer in the holiness movement. And to sense the vision and spirit of Dr. J. Glenn Gould -- a truly great teacher and Wesley scholar and the one who made possible the lectures at ENC -- was a rich experience indeed.

Receiving the invitation of the Book Committee to adapt the lectures for publication, I have made some slight alterations. The documentation has been simplified. References for each chapter have been placed at the end of the book. A brief bibliography is included.

The secretarial help of my wife; of Mrs. Novice Morris, of Grace Church of the Nazarene, Nashville, Tenn.; and of Miss Norma Ickes, of Mount Vernon Nazarene College, was of inestimable value in the preparation of the manuscript.

The primary purpose of these chapters is to emphasize the dynamic, open-ended character of biblical holiness. Without minimizing the crises of Christian experience, our relationship to God is a moment-by-moment reality. The holiness journey involves an identifiable style of life. But Christ is at the heart of our holy walk, for as Thomas aKempis has said, "Without Jesus, the Way, there is no going." It is with Him, and for His glory, that the adventurous holiness pilgrimage is made.

-- John A. Knight

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. -- Isa. 35:8
INTRODUCTION

The revival of interest in the meanings of "sanctification" and "holiness" and their significance for the Christian life makes any discussion of these themes pertinent and timely. These are important and perennial concepts in the Wesleyan tradition, but they take on added significance in the light of the contemporary theological climate and the current "charismatic" emphasis. Hence this book..., these thoughts concerning some "nerve centers" vital to our faith and understanding.

Today -- perhaps as never before -- the holiness movement must relate in thought, preaching, and practice the biblical understanding of holiness to all her doctrinal stances. Failure at this point inevitably leads to the proclamation of a truncated version of the gospel which emphasizes only a small segment of biblical teaching. When the doctrinal and preaching horizon is too low, the very truth which we aim to promulgate becomes threadbare and unrelated, if not completely ignored.

John Wesley was convinced that God had called him "to spread scriptural holiness over these lands." We share his glorious vision! But it can be neither sustained nor fulfilled -- indeed threatens to be lost -- unless that which distinguishes us as a movement is understood in relation to the whole gamut of Christian faith and life.

Two errors frequently are made in the popular presentation of the Holiness message. Hollis Abbott has stated them thus:

"1. The term "sanctification" almost always is used to refer to the crisis aspect of Christian holiness.

"2. The concept of progressive sanctification is . . . confined to the pre-crisis period. As a result, entire sanctification has commonly been conceived as a terminal point, with disappointing results."1

Consequently, in our zeal to be true to our God-given heritage we have unconsciously isolated the crisis of entire sanctification from the broader tenets of our faith.

It is painfully true that many holiness adherents have the erroneous impression that those believers who have not yet entered the fullness of the blessing are somehow inferior Christians; or that entire sanctification is primarily for super-Christians. And if one chooses to remain in the "minors" and not advance to the "big leagues" spiritually, that is purely the choice of each individual believer, and is perfectly consistent with one's Christian profession.
This mode of thinking doctrinally is unbiblical and practically is detrimental to significant spiritual maturation. It dwarfs the full development both of our concepts and of our holiness "life-style." This unfortunate dual result should not surprise us; for where doctrine is impure, practice suffers.

We need to be reminded that our "cardinal" doctrine is redemption or holiness, while our "distinguishing" doctrine is entire sanctification. Holiness initiates and encompasses a divinely stimulated movement or process of grace and obedience, and extends from conversion to the final goal of glorification. Entire sanctification is a God-given moment or crisis of faith and covenant, which issues in increasingly responsible discipleship and immersion in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Wesley admonished his ministers to give priority in the gospel message to redemption, or holiness broadly conceived, With entire sanctification as one of its essential phases. He observed:

"If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed "fundamental" they are doubtless these two -- the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature."2

Even more explicitly, Wesley stated in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament (Col. 1:14): "Forgiveness is the beginning of redemption [holiness], as the resurrection is the completion of it."

This Wesleyan order of priority is biblical, for Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins . . . that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3-4, RSV).

The discussion in the pages which follow is focused on the totality of the life of holiness, which includes the moment of consecration and cleansing, or entire sanctification. It should be understood that we presuppose the necessity and reality of the crises of regeneration and entire sanctification within the total life of holiness.

Our purpose is not primarily to answer charges that have been leveled against our distinctive doctrinal position, but rather to advance and clarify the perspective which is necessary for our own proper self-understanding, and from which others also may correctly view us.

The major aim is to identify the locus of entire sanctification within the context of the larger life of holiness. This, then, is essentially an essay on our holiness theology, or on our theology of holiness.
John Wesley insisted that any doctrine must be tested in the crucible of human experience, and if not confirmed by it, is erroneous and should be corrected. However, not just any experience, either private or collective, is adequate for such a test, but experience supported by the Scriptures. Wesley sought to preserve the objectivity of doctrine and avoid the scourge of mere subjectivism, while at the same time subjecting doctrinal judgments to the tests of practicality.

Assuming that theology is experience shaped by the Scriptures, a theology of holiness should attempt to identify and describe accurately this pattern of Christian living -- indicating its Source and Sustenance; to relate comprehensively the propositions of this description to each other; and meticulously to draw out the practical and ethical implications of these relations. At best, only very preliminary observations may be made here as to the direction which such a theology might take.

The thought of John Wesley and John Fletcher will be used to enrich our understanding of the biblical teaching of holiness. Fletcher, whom Wesley chose for his successor, and the first Wesleyan theologian, will be our main guide. His basic faithfulness to Wesley is acknowledged by all who know their thought. But Fletcher, unlike Wesley, was a systematic thinker, whose broad understanding of the Christian life enabled him to develop a theology of holiness that has not been equaled in its consistency and richness.

In Chapter One, "The Life-style of Holiness," an effort will be made on the basis of Scripture to identify the fundamental themes of holy living, and to portray the totality and wholeness of the life of holiness.

Chapter Two, "Stages on the Way of Holiness," will set forth Wesley's description of the crucial points within the overall life of holiness -- the broad outline of which has biblical justification.

The last two chapters will deal almost altogether with the holiness theology of John Fletcher, who took what was implicit in Wesley -- namely, the "doctrine of dispensations" -- and used it explicitly as the heart of his theology. Chapter Three, "The Holiness -- Hope Tension," will discuss our knowledge of God. Chapter Four, "Holiness and Full Salvation," will depict Fletcher's view of the "perfect Christian."

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01 -- THE LIFE-STYLE OF HOLINESS

The purpose of this opening chapter is to draw a basic sketch of the New Testament Christian and to indicate that one who begins to walk as a Christian begins to walk as a holy person. This aim is not un-Wesleyan. John Wesley was fond of dilating on the Christian ideal, and in his writings and sermons he
frequently undertook to delineate the character of the true Christian. Indeed, his entire work and emphasis on holiness he thought of as the "recovery of primitive Christianity."

We may ask then: Is there a holiness life-style or life-experience, a model or realizable ideal, that in Scripture is descriptive of all Christians, which is appropriate for more than merely a distinct class of super-believers? Is there a vocation for the whole church, and not for a particular elite within it? A sound theology of holiness affirms that there is!

The Apostle Paul pointed to this "way" of life in writing to the Roman Christians: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable [spiritual] service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

J. B. Phillips' rendering of verse 2 is well known: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold." His lucid turn of words is well founded, for the word "conformed" has its root in schema, from which we get our English term "scheme." The Germans express the meaning of "world" with Zeitgeist, the "spirit of the age." Paul's admonition then may be paraphrased: "Do not allow yourself to be overcome by the schemes, aims, impulses, goals, drives, urges, purposes, aspirations, and secularism of the world."

Rather, the apostle enjoins, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." The word "transformed" is metamorphous -- the (present continuous tense). A form of the word is used to describe our Lord's transfiguration, when His countenance shone as the face of an angel (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). The Christian ideal, then, is to be continuously changed (metamorphosed) into the radiance and spirit of Christ, by whom and in whom believers have found salvation. This Christian "style of life" is stated explicitly by Paul to the Corinthians: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are \[being\] changed \[metamorphoumetha\] into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18).

Christlikeness is holiness . . . , for in Christ dwelt all the "fulness [including holiness] of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Thus we may claim that the life-style of holiness is increasing transformation by grace, and in grace, into the spirit and mind of Christ. The phrase Christianus alter Christus, "The Christian a second Christ," may sound almost blasphemous to uninstructed ears, but what else is the meaning of holiness? For what else has Christ redeemed us? Paul admonished: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5) -- love, humility, unselfishness, compassion, and the spirit of servitude. All are expressions of holiness.
To be "Christian" is to be like Christ. To be like Christ is to be holy. Therefore, to be "Christian" is to be holy.

To be becoming increasingly "Christian" is to be becoming increasingly like Christ. To be becoming increasingly like Christ is to be becoming increasingly holy. Therefore, to be becoming increasingly "Christian" is to be becoming increasingly holy.

In short, Christlikeness is holiness, and increasing Christlikeness is increasing holiness.

This truth is confirmed by the fact that Paul, in his Epistles, addresses the New Testament believers as "saints" (hagioi), literally, "holy ones" (see, for example, Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; Eph. 4:12). Life in Christ, then, clearly involves a life of holiness, or holy living.

The character of the Christian life is holiness, or godliness -- increasing conformity to the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ throughout every aspect of one's personal and social life. The believer's life of holiness does not make him a saint, but manifests him as a saint.

Therefore holiness is not a concept that is extraneous to the meaning of Christian faith; it is not a life that is "added to" the normal life of a believer as an option. It is not an experience that is designed to get the believer "high" quicker and for longer. Rather, holiness is at the heart of Christian faith -- the core of its message; it is the norm of Christian living-the constraint of its ethic; and it is a vital and personal relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit that is ever deepened, expanded, and enriched as the Christian walks in obedience -- the communion of its God-given life.

There is nothing new in this claim. The demand for holy living is thoroughly biblical and bears the stamp of the Church's approval from earliest Christian history. And we may rejoice that it is heard with increasing frequency in contemporary theology.

However we in the Wesleyan tradition have drawn deserved criticism because of the too frequent disregard of this biblical equation of holiness and the totality of the Christian life. In an attempt to preserve the truth of a second crisis over against a theory of mere "gradual" sanctification, we, unlike Wesley and Fletcher, have often reduced the many-splendored scriptural truth of sanctification to simply "the second blessing."

Thus, much of popular understanding of holiness, both within and without the recognized holiness circles, has not grasped Wesley's and Fletcher's sound biblical orientation. At best, holiness has been thought of as the "deluxe edition" of
the Christian life; or at worst, as an unnecessary -- or even dangerous -- trapping that could just as well be omitted.

We have acknowledged that holiness is central in the Scriptures. But have we made it so in our theology as well? Current discussions of "sanctification" and "holiness" challenge our sometimes shallow understanding at this point, and call upon us to compare again our thought and practice with biblical norms and teachings.

What, then, are the fundamental elements of the holiness life-style as shaped by Scripture? The list cannot be exhaustive, but let us suggest several motifs which are basic to the overall biblical picture, all of which to some degree characterize all Christians in their pilgrimage to final spiritual fulfillment.

Distinct In Its Separation

The holiness style of life is distinct in its separation. Throughout the Scriptures separation is included in the idea of holiness. In the Old Testament period, things were "set apart" (sanctified) for holy purposes. They became "holy" by their relation to God-for example, the ark (II Chron. 35:3); the Sabbaths (Exod. 20:8, 11); feasts of numerous types (Isa. 30:29); the priests' garments (Exod. 28:2); or the Temple (Hab. 2:20).

Even in the New Testament there is a "ceremonial" or "positional" holiness which describes prophets (Acts 3:21), apostles (Eph. 3:5), believing spouses (I Cor. 7:14), and the Temple and its altar (Matt. 23:17, 19; I Cor. 9:13).

However, in the New Testament the primary meaning of holiness is internalized. The temple regarded as holy is the "household of God, with all the saints, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:19-20). The "holy sacrifice" demanded is the living sacrifice of the believer's body (Rom. 12:1).

1. Separation for Service

A fundamental characteristic of the holiness style of life is separation for service. The writer of Hebrews argues that this kind of separation is a possibility because if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of heifers purified or sanctified the flesh, "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14)

Further, the New Testament teaches that Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

2. Separation from the World and Sin
Negatively, this involves separation from the world and sin as a prerequisite for service; and positively, separation to God for the world as an instrument of service.

The central idea of Christianity is moral purification of the heart from sin (Isaiah 6: Acts 15:8-9); that is, ethical sanctification. This cleansing from sin is by faith (Acts 26:18), and encompasses an internal renovation of the self (John 17). John the Baptist spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, who would "thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but . . . [would] burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

This separation is not between the tares and the wheat, or the wicked and righteous, but between the wheat and the chaff, or that which clings to it by nature. The coming of the Holy Spirit is to cleanse from all sin—both outwardly and inwardly.2

Envisioned in the New Testament is a life-style which presupposes a purgation or cleansing of the selfish aims and impulses, drives and goals of the world. Paul stressed the necessity of this cleansing, or crucifixion of the flesh: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

This cleansing will manifest itself in a life-style that is uniquely different from that of the world. In his collection of essays, Against the Stream, Karl Barth insists that "the sanctified Christian is not called to live a mildly respectable life; he is called to swim against the stream, to witness to God's judgment over every status quo."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the same point: "The Christian's worldly calling is sanctified only insofar as that calling registers the final radical protest against the world." To commit oneself to Christ is to answer the call away from the things of the world.

3. Separation to God for the World

But that aspect of the life-style of holiness which is a separation for service includes, positively, separation to God for the world. God separates a people to himself through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (see I Cor. 1:30-31). Therefore Peter declared: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9, RSV; cf. also Deut. 7:6).
The separation that is a part of the holiness life-style is not geographical separation from men and from areas of need, but a spiritual separation to God as an instrument of service. However, this separation is more than mere human dedication or consecration to certain worthy goals which will benefit mankind—as noble as this may be.

Rather, it is the offering up of one's total self to God for the service of men. This yielding of the whole man is absolutely necessary if one is to be distinctively Christian; for, as Augustine reminded us: "[Human] love feeds the hungry, but so does pride."

In addition, this radical separation in commitment must be accompanied by a divine empowering and enduement of love—God's kind of love — "shed abroad [literally, 'poured out'] in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

Wesley saw the necessity of this gracious bestowment, and thus finally rejected the holiness of Thomas aKempis because it issues in a strenuous program of self-denigration. It is aimed merely at total resignation, which becomes a kind of detached fatalism.

The holiness advanced by the "quietists" (like Madame Guyon) at first attracted Wesley, but then repelled him because of its antinomian and subjective tendencies. He saw clearly that holiness is more than consecration -- it is a divine cleansing and empowering. If one is to be true to the New Testament, one must take seriously the affirmative life-style of holiness in the world -- God's love poured out through human vessels in this life.

Any separation that is mere withdrawal from the world of broken persons who yearn in desperation for a display of God's love is false and unbiblical. And the practice of all such spurious separation is a betrayal of the New Testament portrait of holiness.

Paul Rees stated it clearly in his book Don't Sleep Through the Revolution: "If we are authentically Christian, nothing that is authentically human is beyond the pale of our concern . . . . Correct speech about the Cross of Christ which does not issue in 'holy worldliness' is neither 'holy' nor 'worldly'. It is escapism."

Dag Hammarskjold, the late secretary-general of the United Nations, was most biblical when he said: "In our era the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."

To be holy is to be sent "into the world" -- cleansed from sin and armed with love. It is to give oneself, made new by grace, in complete devotion to the redemptive purpose of God. Even the "Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
In His great high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for the involvement of His disciples: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but. . . As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:15, 18).

And as the Son gave himself in compassion to the fulfillment of His commission, so His faithful followers pour themselves out for the welfare of others. For them, as for their Master, this means a willingness to be as corns of wheat that fall into the ground and die. Holiness is involvement and investment expressing itself in love. Biblical separation is incarnational. Separation for service is the holiness life-style!

Disciplined In Its Sanctity

The holiness style of life is disciplined in its sanctity. The biblical reminder is: "God hath not called us unto [for the purpose of] uncleanness, but unto [for the purpose of] holiness [sanctification or sanctity]" (I Thess. 4:7).

It is unthinkable that the New Testament Christian could exist for the purpose of uncleanness, for sanctification or moral purification is "the will of God" (I Thess. 4:3). Thus Paul wrote to young Timothy: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:19, 21).

Again to the Corinthians the apostle confided: "I bruise my body and make it my slave" (I Cor. 9:27, Weymouth). The final sanctity is complete sanctity.

Discipleship presupposes discipline, and when it is absent, Christ's disciple is not fulfilling his calling as one of the "saints." Paul found it necessary to exhort the careless Galatians to exercise the discipline of love for the sake of others: "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. 5:13-14).

Holiness is spiritual fitness. It is keeping in shape so as to make optimum use of one's potential to minister. This understanding lay behind Susanna Wesley's wise counsel to young John: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over mind, that thing for you is sin."

Wesleyan thought has always emphasized the practical, social value of disciplined living. The one design of Wesley was "to promote . . . vital, practical religion, and by the grace of God to beget, preserve and increase the life of God in
the soul of man." His purpose was not to produce a group of spiritual recluses and ascetics, but rather to prepare believers for a life of ministry to persons in society. Of Wesley's 44 standard sermons, 32 deal with ethics, or religion in conduct. Indeed, Wesley's understanding of holiness developed in opposition to Calvinism, which he thought led to carelessness in Christian living.

John Fletcher also emphasized the necessity for careful discipline, and continued obedience within the Christian life. The tenor of his entire theology was intensely practical. He described his Checks to Antinomianism, for example, thus:

"In the Checks, the foolish virgin is reawakened, the Laodicean believer reproved, the prodigal son lashed back to his father's house, and the upright believer animated to mend his pace in the way of 'faith working by love' and to 'perfect holiness in the fear of God.'"

Daring In Its Sacrifice

The holiness style of life is daring in its sacrifice. In sending Epaphroditus back to the church at Philippi after he had brought a gift to the imprisoned apostle, Paul wrote a startling word of commendation for the envoy from the church. To the Philippians he exhorted: "Receive him. . , in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me" (Phil. 2:29-30). Literally, "He drew near to death, exposing his life."

The phase translated "not regarding" (paraboleusamenos) is from a verb meaning "to venture." It was commonly used by gamblers who were willing to stake everything on the throw of the dice. The idea was widespread among the early Christians, who called those who hazarded their lives for Christ parabolani, or the "riskers," such as Aquila and Priscilla, who risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:4). Epaphroditus, for the sake of Christ, had been willing to risk his life by becoming associated with a man who was being tried by the Roman government.

The holiness life-style involves such a venture in Christian living. One's entire life must be risked, considered expendable, for the cause of Christ. Personal ambitions and aspirations which run counter to Kingdom purposes are given up by a transformation of the self, in order that it may be a perfect instrument for the fulfillment of the will of God.

There is a complete and total redirection of oneself, and a death to selfish aims and motivations. The New Testament Christian is one who delights in the daring and adventure of loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and one's neighbor as himself.

God's call is still for "riskers." The indwelling of the Spirit of God which enables the disciple to stake all for Christ involves unconditional commitment to
Christ, and a death to the sinful self. Fletcher, like all reputable holiness theologians, carefully distinguished "selfishness" and a "well-ordered self-love."

The "death" that is called for in Scripture is not "the death of self" -- an unhappy and misleading phrase which is found often in our holiness nomenclature -- but "the death to self." That is, selfish seeking, selfish defense, selfish assertion are rejected.

It was for this purpose that Christ died, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Cor. 5:15). Or as Paul testified: "With Christ I have been crucified and still remain dead; and no longer is it the ego that lives, but Christ is living in me" (Gal. 2:20, literal translation).

Paul's personal experience qualified him to admonish the Romans to consider themselves "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11); and therefore to yield themselves "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and . . . [their] members as instruments [or weapons] of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

Jesus himself required: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Taking up the cross means putting oneself in the position of a condemned man on his way to execution, that is, going to the place of death. The supreme task of the Christian is not merely to save his soul, but to "risk" it for the sake of God's world.

The holiness style of life is the glad acceptance of this call to venture and daring. This attitude of heart is an internal "witness," or sign, which verifies to the risker his claim to Christian discipleship. The authentic Christian witness includes the joyful acceptance of the possibility of martyrdom, without the development of a "martyr complex." No morbid approach to life which thrives on self-pity is consistent with Christian holiness.

Nor does the Christian seek to antagonize or win the displeasure of the world. It has been pointed out that when Daniel was in the lions' den he did not pull the lions' tails. Yet the Christian whose first loyalty is to Christ can expect the opposition of the world.

Nevertheless, the true believer shares the spirit of his Master, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Discerning In Its Spirit

The holiness style of life is discerning in its spirit. It is characterized by a profound sensitivity both to the leadership and to the reproof of the Holy Spirit, and by an inward divine assurance.
1. The Leadership of the Holy Spirit

Paul underscored the significance of the guidance of the Spirit with his words: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). This New Testament ideal is illustrated by the record of the Spirit's guidance of the church at Antioch: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had . . . prayed . . . they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed" (Acts 13:2-4).

This leadership of the Holy Spirit is the New Testament norm. Before Pentecost, the disciples cast lots in choosing a successor to Judas (Acts 1:26). Following Pentecost, the biblical description is: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us" (Acts 15:28). Guided by the Spirit, the disciples' contacts were not accidental. They went where God led. Philip made contact with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-37), Ananias was directed to Saul (Acts 9:10-18), and Peter was sent to Cornelius (Acts 10).

The effects of the Spirit's leadership in these cases are astounding: the Ethiopian carried the gospel to Africa, Saul to Europe, and Cornelius to the Gentiles. Three contacts and three continents were involved—all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The true believer discovers that the God who led Philip and Ananias and Peter leads him also!

This leadership is possible because the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, who becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20). The believer is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit: "They that are in the flesh [controlled by the flesh] cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit [controlled by the Spirit], if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:8-9).

2. The Reproof of the Holy Spirit

The holiness style of life is sensitive not only to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, but to His reproof as well. Jesus promised the coming of "another Comforter," one like himself, who would "teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit comes to reveal truth to the believer, and to bring him to true self-knowledge through the light of Christ. He "desireth not sacrifice" but "truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:16, 6). A part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convict and reprove. Thus Jesus made clear that "when he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:8, 13).
The Holy Spirit comes to convict not merely of unethical or questionable acts—though He may do that. He comes primarily to uncover and reveal that which dethrones the Lord Jesus in the life, and puts Him to open shame and death. He works from within the human person and makes known man’s self-centeredness and hardness of heart.

The true believer does not resist this reproof, but welcomes it as for his good. He is not self-defensive, but open to the gentle chastisement of the Holy Spirit. He sees that the opposite of doing evil is not doing good—that is the futile way of human works and legalism. Rather, its opposite is doing truth, or being truth. He learns this from Him who is the "Spirit of truth."

3. The Assurance of the Holy Spirit

When the truth is accepted and acted upon, the Spirit applies His divine comfort—His assurance. Jesus promised: "Blessed are they that mourn [over their sins]: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). The Spirit applies this comfort by taking the things of Christ and showing them to us (John 16:14). He shows the adequacy of Christ's sacrifice for us; that our "old man of sin" was crucified with Christ—not just mended, but ended—"that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

As the dove with the olive leaf in her mouth assured Noah that there was one place on the earth where the waters had abated, so the Spirit assures the believer that there is One who is clear of judgment, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25).

The New Testament life-style of discernment, then, includes assurance, for "if any man sin, we have an advocate [paraclete, or 'Comforter'] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins" (I John 2:1-2). And, as has been noted, Jesus promised to send "another Comforter" (John 16:7). Thus the believer has two Paracletes, or Advocates, or Comforters: Christ is the believer's Advocate in heaven (I John 2:1), and the Holy Spirit is Christ's Advocate within the heart of the believer (John 14:26; 15:26).

If the Holy Spirit brings assurance, then the fullness of assurance comes with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore Paul admonished: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The disciple of Christ is to be filled with Him by whom he has become a new creature, with Him who has come into the heart.

The Holy Spirit is to be the permanent gift to the Church, and not the occasional possession of a few choice believers. That is, the actual Christian faith and life reflect the supernatural transforming power of God, the assurance of being accepted by Him through the merits of the death of His Son, and the miraculous indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
This assurance is never static, or once-for-all. It is dynamic, progressive, enlarging, and vital. The literal rendering of Paul's admonition is: "Be being filled with the Spirit." That is, "Keep on being filled with the Spirit." He uses the same tense—the present continuous tense—as is used in I John 1:7: "But if we walk [continue walking] in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us [continues cleansing us] from all sin."

The holiness style of life is a growing sensitivity to the new light and instruction given by the Holy Spirit. The true believer discerns both the Holy Spirit's guidance and His reproof, and is grateful for the Spirit's assurance.

Developing In Its Scope

Thus far we have suggested that the holiness life-style as portrayed in the New Testament includes several minimum characteristics:

... distinct in its separation
... disciplined in its sanctity
... daring in its sacrifice
... discerning in its spirit

These have been stated in general terms because they are intended to describe all those who have their existence "in Christ." That is, every genuine believer is characterized in some degree by each aspect of this holiness portraiture.

Having pictured the New Testament Christian, we must emphasize the wholeness, continuity, and progression, of this life-style. Common to and running through all these descriptions is the fact that the life of holiness is continuous and developing in its scope.

The Scriptures make clear that holiness is the design of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Holy living is the end toward which God is working in the lives of all men. In the Scriptures we learn that:

... God has chosen us "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4);

... God chastens His children, that they "might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10);

... the Word, the Truth, Jesus Christ himself, is the Instrument of sanctification and holiness (John 17:17);
Christ gave himself for us, to "redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14);

the Holy Spirit is given to sanctify, for God has provided "salvation through sanctification of the Spirit" (II Thess. 2:13) and by the "renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

In short, holiness is salvation! To be converted to Christ is to be set on the road to moral and spiritual perfection-to a life of holiness. It is to begin to walk in the way of holiness. To be "saved" is to be holy; to be being saved is to be becoming holy.

There are indeed critical moments within this life of holiness -- which will be identified and discussed in the next chapter. But a theology of holiness should steadfastly resist all temptation to reduce the biblical teaching of holiness to any one of the crisis instants within the life of the believer. To yield deliberately to such temptation in a frantic effort to preserve the distinctiveness of our heritage, or inadvertently to give way to carelessness in constructing or preaching our theology of holiness, is to destroy the beauty and vitality of the precious biblical truth of sanctification. To do so would be to proclaim a "mini-gospel" in place of the "whole counsel of God."

Wesley was suspicious of exalting any particular moment of Christian experience because this tends to retard further spiritual progress and growth. In his first conference with his Methodist ministers, 1744, this proposition was agreed to:

"Does not talking of a justified or sanctified state tend to mislead men? Almost naturally leading them to trust in what was clone in one moment? Whereas, we are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works; according to the whole of our inward tempers, and outward behaviour."6

Wesley had great fear that the salvation or holiness which is generated by the Spirit and grace of God would not be worked out in "fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). He sought to avoid any apathy which would deter the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit.

He argued that any moment of genuine faith is related both to the previous and the succeeding actions of the believer. Consequently, he objected to the idea and terminology of either a justified or sanctified "state," and substituted for it, in accordance with Scripture, a dynamic moment-by-moment relationship with God.

We who claim to follow in Wesley's tradition must guard against a "hardening of the categories" (to borrow Dr. Paul Culbertson's colorful term). To become rigid in our understanding of holiness will be to detach our message from life and its
ongoing dynamic processes, and therefore to become increasingly irrelevant. It will cause us to drive a wedge between our doctrine and our experience of holiness.

It could well be that one reason our message too often has been either ignored or rejected by our critics, or even not faithfully and adequately preached by us, is that we have not produced a well-rounded theology of holiness which preserves from the poverty of provincialism and the mentality of moralism.

Thus far we have sought to show that to be Christian is to be holy, and to live the Christian life is to live a holy life. We have attempted to identify the fundamental elements of this holiness style of life; and to underscore the continuity, totality, and progressive character of the life of holiness.

Great care must be taken, of course, to guarantee that we do not forfeit our obligation and privilege of declaring the glorious truth of entire sanctification, for which we believe the Lord has distinctly raised us up. We must insist not only on its proper understanding and faithful proclamation, but also upon its blessed reality in personal experience. These preeminent goals can be fulfilled best by placing the truth of entire sanctification in its proper setting within the total and larger framework of Christian thought and life.

In the following chapters we shall attempt to fill in this broader sketch of holiness by a description of the crisis moments of faith within the life of the Christian. An effort will be made to relate both holiness and entire sanctification to the broader theological understanding of our knowledge of God and of salvation.

02 -- STAGES ON THE WAY OF HOLINESS

It must be clear that the Christian or holiness life-style is made possible by, and presupposes, the destruction of sin from the heart and life. Sanctification in the fullest biblical sense denotes the complete recovery, by grace, from the effects of sin-albeit not simultaneously, but successively. The fact that all of these are not removed immediately implies nothing concerning God's ability, but relates only to man's capacity to respond to God's grace.

All holiness and sanctification are the result of God's gracious activity. The constant witness of Scripture is that holiness belongs intrinsically to God alone. If anything or anyone else is "holy," it is in a sense derivative from Him and dependent upon Him.

According to the Old Testament, God is holy (Ps. 99:3, 9; 111:9; Lev. 20:3). His holiness is of himself.
Persons and things become holy (II Chron. 35:3; I Kings 8:4; Exod. 20:8, 11; etc.). Their holiness is from God.

Since God is the Source of holiness, it was viewed in a personal sense even in the more cultic Old Testament periods. Though holiness was understood to be mediated by cult, ritual, or ceremonial observance, the holiness mediated was derived from a personal God who is himself holy.

The prophets, however, made explicit the personal aspect of holiness by incorporating ethical qualities into the concept (Hab. 1:3; Isaiah 6). This strongly personal character of the idea of holiness in the Old Testament was carried over into the New Testament, where it is predominant.

Not only is holiness viewed primarily in personal terms throughout Scripture; it also has an objective character. It is not merely an emotion or ecstatic experience humanly contrived; rather, it is conferred upon things and persons that are brought into right relation with God. Nor is holiness a quality naturally possessed. Instead, it is supernaturally granted from the underived holiness of God. Holiness is not acquired, but bestowed.

To speak of holiness as an "it," as we are doing, is to yield to the limitations inherent in language. Properly understood, holiness is not a quantitative substance, but a specific personal relationship, divinely initiated, between God and men. Even that holiness in Scripture which pertains to things derives its significance from its relationship to persons.

"Holiness," as it relates to man, refers to the quality and stages of one's moral or religious life; "sanctification" denotes the act or process by which one is made holy. To obtain that holiness which is both personal and objective is the purpose of scriptural sanctification.

We have seen that the holiness life-style is to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom. 12:1) -- a personal offering of the body, the total self, to the will and disposal of God. In this new and spiritual sacrifice, moral purity is demanded. The Old Testament cult expected a ceremonial purity in the sacrifice; the New Testament pattern demands an ethical or personal purity.

Biblical Meanings Of Sanctification

Since "sanctification" is the means to "holiness," or holy living, it is imperative that we understand the biblical meaning of the term. It is possible to distinguish in Scripture three broad meanings of sanctification, all of which are God's work, and by which man is made holy.

1. Continuing Sanctification-The Life of Holiness
The Greek word hagiasmos, translated "sanctification" in most cases in our leading versions of the Scriptures, occurs 10 times in the New Testament (Rom. 6:19, 22; I Cor. 1:30; I Thess. 4:3-4, 7; II Thess. 2:13; I Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14; I Pet. 1:2). One of its meanings is a "state of grace which is not native to its subject but the result of outside action or progress." According to W. E. Vine in An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, it refers also to the conduct befitting those who are sanctified. Sanctification is thus the dynamic or ongoing state made possible "by God for believers, into which in grace He calls them, and in which they begin their Christian course and so pursue it. Hence, they are called 'saints' (hagioi)." Other forms of the word (for example, hagiosune) also denote the manifestation of the quality of holiness in personal conduct.

Gerhard Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament concurs that "the hagiasmos or sanctifying effected by the Spirit is the living form of the Christian state." However, the term may be rendered by "sanctifying," rather than "sanctification," for it indicates also "a process which has as its presupposition the religious process of atonement." Arndt and Gingrich in A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament suggest that hagiasmos is used in a moral sense both for "a process" and for "its result."

Therefore, unless otherwise limited by the context, the term encompasses the total work of God -- both state and process -- in the life of the "holy ones" from the first moment of conviction (spiritual awakening) to the final "conformity" (if we may properly speak of "final") to the image of Christ. This continuing, or progressive, divine work of sanctification produces holy character, which is evidenced by a distinctive life-style.

Nowhere in the Scriptures is this life in grace understood to be the consequences either of mere human striving and effort, or of automatic and impersonal growth. That sanctification which issues in holiness in every aspect of daily life always presupposes the divine activity of grace. Therefore the Apostle Paul prayed: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men . . . to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness [hagiosune] before God, even our Father, at [in preparation for] the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (I Thess. 3:12-13).

2. Initial Sanctification (I Cor. 6:9-11)

This is the washing from the inward guilt of sin-the washing of regeneration. It is the cleansing of the sinner from that defilement which attaches to sinful deeds. All believers are washed from their sins, delivered from the dominion or power of sin. Initial sanctification occurs simultaneously with the "new birth," the moment of conversion to the holiness pattern of life. This cleansing is not a partial, but an undivided work of grace. Indeed, every work of grace is a whole since each has to do with a relationship between the Infinite and finite persons, and right relations are always self-contained.
3. Entire Sanctification

By faith, in a moment, the believer is cleansed from the inbeing or pollution of sin; and the heart is perfected in love. (See John 17:17-19; Eph. 1:4; 5:26; I Thess. 5:23-24.) Here God's work begun in regeneration and even before, is continued and extended to a "bond of perfectness" that ties the Christian equally with God and neighbor. This biblical truth is distinctively emphasized in Wesleyan theology.

Obviously, sanctification and its resulting holiness do not stand merely at the end of the Christian journey. Rather, they are present from the beginning of the Christian moral life and continue to its end. Progress in the Christian life is progress in sanctification and holiness, as well as progress towards them. As one restored from death to life might be expected to advance from sickness into health within the life to which he had returned (or to which he had been regenerated), so with one who by sanctification has been, and is being, made holy. A decisive transition is made in the moment of conversion or regeneration, at which time every Christian is initially "sanctified" or made "holy" (literally, "holified," if we had such a word). The true Christian enjoying continuing sanctification seeks to live out this "new relationship" and, under the tender tutelage of the Holy Spirit, moves normally to the next critical stage of Christian development in the life of holiness -- entire sanctification, and beyond.

4. Some Important Implications

If these are the meanings of biblical sanctification, it is inconceivable that one who is genuinely converted, born of the Spirit, could oppose the divine cleansing at any stage, or draw back from the ultimate goal of Christlikeness. He may wait for more light -- being obedient as he does so. There may be a relatively brief ambivalence or hesitating reluctance to move on to entire sanctification once he sees clearly the implications of his initial commitment, but he cannot stubbornly resist and at the same time be worthy of the name "holy."

On becoming a Christian, then, one begins to travel the Highway of Holiness. He begins a journey, a pilgrimage -- he is captured by a goal. There is not only dynamic in his life; there is direction as well. He is in pursuit of a divinely bestowed inheritance, while simultaneously being in possession of the "firstfruits" of his God-given legacy.

To understand the Christian life in this manner is not unbiblical. Jesus spoke of the "broad way" which terminates in spiritual death, and the "narrow way" which leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). The early disciples were called followers of the "way" (Acts 9:2). A favorite theme of St. Paul is the believer's daily "walk" in faith (Rom. 8:1; Eph. 2:2; 5:2; Col. 3:7).
However, to conceive of the life of holiness in this manner is to misconceive it, if the metaphor connotes merely a "journey" from this earthly wilderness to the Heavenly City -- and the sooner the pilgrimage is completed, the better. The rubric or motif is legitimate only if one does not view the time involved, the relationships encountered, and the terrain passed through while en route, as being inconsequential. Rather, the authentic Christian journey is one in relationships -- with God, the world, other persons, and the self. It involves a unique life-style in the here and now.

Holiness and history are intrinsically intertwined! Biblical holiness, therefore, is concerned primarily with man, his relation to God, and his life in this world. Accordingly, one of the first priorities of a theology of holiness is to portray the life of God in the soul of man. It must elucidate the stages, with their accompanying ethical concomitants, through which man passes in his life of holiness. This is the primary purpose of this chapter.

Failure to take account of these stages can create untold confusion in our theology, and uncertainty in our experience. The life-style of holiness grows out of the temporal aspect of the divine work of sanctifying grace in both heart and life, as it takes place in successive stages. Dr. H. Orton Wiley, still the dean of Nazarene theologians even though deceased, has observed: "Each of these stages is marked by a gradual approach and an instantaneous consummation in experience, and the stages together mark the full scope of sanctifying grace. Thus in His administration of sanctifying grace the Holy Spirit proceeds by degrees."3

Wesley: The Pilgrimage In Holiness

If some of Wesley's successors at times have neglected the idea of stages within the overall life of holiness, Wesley himself did not. In the tradition of evangelical Calvinism, which influenced him, the implications of sanctification were drawn out in the theologies of experience, which constituted the core of Puritan theology. For the Puritan of this period (seventeenth century) theology was a practical discipline, concerned with the development of the Christian life from the "first conversion" until the final restoration of the lost image of God in man. Much of Puritan theologizing took the form of spiritual diaries and biographies in which this process of transformation could be witnessed to, and all its spurious imitations detected and rejected.

Through this influence, Wesley (1703-91) came to see that the life of faith is a development of real righteousness looking toward being made perfect in love of God and man. Thus he drew up his own representation of the stages of the Christian life.4

Wesley's picture of the stages or "spheres of spiritual existence" was his attempt to describe the pilgrimage of an individual into and in the life of holiness. Each of the stages -- his "natural" man, "awakened" man, and "evangelical" man --
may be thought of as a style or pattern of life, organized around a dominant ordering principle. Through these stages the individual passes in his pursuit and practice of holiness. The appropriating individual, one who responds to God in faith and obedience, is committed to an exploration, a pilgrimage in "following after" holiness.

This is not a subjective affair, however. The way of holiness is traveled only by those who live in the "body of Christ," for the simple reason that the journey in holiness is a journey in Christlikeness. The "trip" necessarily is made with those who are "in Christ," that is, within the fellowship of the saints (I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:17). It is not insignificant that when the New Testament calls believers "saints," it does so in the plural. The true Christian traveler, as William Hordern reminds us, is "no 'Lone Ranger' who rides off in lonely individualism to serve God and become [holy, but is] one who grows [in] . . . his Christian life in continued relationship with others who, like him, are living in Christ's presence."

Further, the life of the holiness pilgrim involves complex social and personal relationships with unbelievers and nonbelievers as well. While sanctification is less an activity than a relationship, it involves an exercise. It is to the practice of their sanctification that Paul adjures believers to conduct themselves as those who are sanctified. This is the force of the word "unblameable" of I Thess. 3:13: "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God." In the sphere of the gospel, it is not "handsome is as handsome does," but just the reverse—those who are sanctified endeavor to give no occasion for reproach. Sanctification, by its very nature, issues in ethically worthy deeds and conduct.

For Wesley, there is no holiness but social holiness. "Christianity is essentially a social religion," he wrote, "and . . . to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it." Holiness expresses itself in all that one does and is in relationship to the world, and particularly to his fellowmen. Its influence touches all the religious, political, occupational, familial, and social relationships which make up life.

One endeavors to serve others, not just for his own perfection or salvation, but for the sake of all men whom God loves. Wesley wondered how one could do good to all men if he associated only with himself or other Christians. Or how one could be a peacemaker among Christians, who presumably would not need such service. He was certain that biblical holiness will not permit one to "renounce all fellowship" with unbelievers, although he will have no "strictness of fellowship with them."

For Wesley, then, holiness theology tells who the Christian is, and how the love of God and love of neighbor become realities in his life. It must necessarily concern itself with the stages in man's spiritual quest. Therefore we shall direct attention to Wesley's vision of God's dynamic and continuing grace within the individual, and to his elaboration of the various "stages" in the journey of holiness.
To think that the stages prior to the crisis of entire sanctification have little or nothing to do with holiness probably reveals a certain conditioned thought pattern which is inclined to limit the full-orbed meaning of scriptural holiness to one moment-- though a most important and real one -- of the Christian life.

1. The "Natural" Man

Technically, for Wesley, the "natural" man does not exist, since prevenient grace is given to every actual man in history, conferring upon him a degree of freedom and responsibility and enabling him to perform occasional acts of goodness. The "natural" man, therefore, is a logical or theological construction, and does not, in fact, exist. However, assuming prevenient grace, Wesley did speak of "natural" man, by which he meant sinful man (cf. I Cor. 2:14). It is this state of sinfulness into which man is born, and from which he needs to be saved to a life of holiness.

a. This is the state of "the love of the world," of idolatry, selfishness, pride-all of which are expressions of man's sinful condition• This state is "as natural to every man, as to love his own will. What is more natural," asked Wesley, "than to seek happiness in the creature instead of the Creator? . . . What more natural than 'the desire of the flesh?' . . . the pleasure of sense in every kind?"6 The style of life which characterizes the natural man is that in which personal pleasure is immediate, dominant, and controlling.

b. In this state, man is absolutely unaware either of himself or of God and His moral law, and consequently feels himself to be secure. Wesley observed:

"The Scripture represents . . . [the state of natural man] as a state of sleep. . . . His spiritual senses are not awake: they discern neither spiritual good nor evil. . . . He is utterly ignorant of God. . . . He is totally a stranger to the law of God, as to its true, inward, spiritual meaning. He has no conception of . . . evangelical holiness. . . .

He has not understanding enough to fear. . . . He is secure, because he is utterly ignorant of himself."

Because the natural man lives for the now, from decision to decision, he lacks a true self. Consequently for him, there are no moral standards which have a fixed continuity.

c. A false sense of liberty characterizes the natural man. In view of his spiritual blindness and stupor, Wesley declared: "It is not surprising, if [he] . . . dosed with the opiates of flattery and sin, should imagine, among his other waking dreams, that he walks in great liberty," while in fact, "he is the servant of sin."
The natural man is enslaved to his physical desires and drives. He is the slave or dupe of the momentary situation. The pattern of his life is determined by circumstances beyond his control. His "freedom" therefore is superficial and imaginary.

d. The pattern of life of the natural man may take various forms. He may be "a gross, scandalous transgressor, or a more reputable and decent sinner, having the form, though not the power, of godliness." But whatever the form, there is pointless movement between desire and meaninglessness.

2. The "Awakened" Man

The "natural" man in time will be graciously "awakened" or convicted by the faithful Spirit of God. He will experience futility and despair, and will begin the struggle to free himself from his slavery which he formerly fancied or feigned to be freedom. There are several characteristics of this "transition" stage.

a. The "awakened" man is one who has been convicted by the law of God, and made aware of his moral responsibility and accountability for sin. Wesley described him thus:

"A stupid, senseless wretch is going on in his own way, not having God in all his thoughts, when God comes upon him unawares, perhaps by an awakening sermon or conversation, perhaps by some awful providence, or, it may be, by an immediate stroke of His convincing Spirit, without any outward means at all . . . the arrows of conviction sink deeper into his soul."8

b. Lack of a true self haunts the awakened man, resulting in fear and frustration. According to Wesley:

"It is the ordinary method of the Spirit of God to convict sinners by the law. . . . By this is the sinner discovered to himself. All his fig-leaves are torn away, and he sees that he is "wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked." The law flashes conviction on every side. He feels himself a mere sinner."9

Consequently, the awakened man experiences "fear. . . of the wrath of God . . . Sometimes . . . [such fear] may approach . . . the very brink of despair."

c. To the awakened man pleasures become unsatisfying, so that he begins to struggle against sin and despair. Wesley reflected:

"Here ends his pleasing dream, his delusive rest, his false peace, his vain security. His joy now vanishes as a cloud; pleasures, once loved, delight no more. They pall upon the taste; he loathes the nauseous sweet; he is weary to bear them. The shadows of happiness flee away, and sink into oblivion: so that he is stripped of all, and wanders to and fro, seeking rest, but finding none. . . .
[The "awakened" man] truly desires to break loose from sin, and begins to struggle with it. But though he strive with all his might, he cannot conquer . . . . He would fain escape; but he is so fast in prison, that he cannot get forth. He resolves against sin, but yet sins on: He sees the snare, and abhors and runs into it .... The more he strives, wishes, labours to be free, the more does he feel . . . the grievous chains of sin."10

There is longing for the birth of the true self, but it is continuously aborted because of a moral and spiritual debility of the will. This is the man described by Paul in Romans 7, who wants to do good but evil is present with him.

However, this stage of "awakening" is necessary to move from spiritual death to life, from "sinnership" to "sonship." Wesley expressed it thus: "We must be cut off from dependence upon ourselves, before we can truly depend upon Christ."11

3. The "Evangelical" Man

The "awakened" man has a degree of faith, but it is the "faith of a servant." Here are the prenatal stages of Christian holiness. But a spiritual crisis is necessary by which a new self actually is brought into existence, a new kind of being is born, and one receives the "faith of a son."

For Wesley, there are two crises in the spiritual existence of the "evangelical" man, both of which are by faith: the new birth, by which one becomes a "new creature," or a "babe in Christ"; and entire sanctification, by which one becomes "a spiritual father."

a. The New Birth: "Babe in Christ" (Initial Sanctification)

(1) By the new birth one accepts, or is made alive to, moral and spiritual responsibility. Wesley stated it this way: "All. . . [the believer's] spiritual senses are..., exercised to discern spiritual good and evil . . . And now he may be properly said to live: God having quickened him by His Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ."12

The "babe in Christ" has become committed to the goal of complete renewal in the image of God. He has moved from ethical and spiritual neutrality to ethical and spiritual relevance, so that he is cognizant of the distinction between right and wrong in his thinking, and chooses right rather than wrong in his actions.

(2) By the new birth one acquires a new self, so that the priorities and goals of life are changed. One becomes a new person with a directed center and continuity. Wesley described the time element involved thus:
"When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness begins; and thenceforward we are gradually to "grow up in Him who is our Head." . . . A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time: afterward he gradually and slowly grows, till he attains to the stature of a man. In like manner, a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment."

Because of this transformation or birth of a new self, the style of life is reordered. There is a "transvaluation of values." The judgments of the newly created "evangelical" man concerning himself, happiness, and holiness are new. According to Wesley, "He would as soon . . . expect to dig . . . [happiness] out of the earth as to find it in riches, honour, pleasure, (so called), or indeed in the enjoyment of any creature. He knows there can be no happiness on earth but in the enjoyment of God."

Therefore in this stage there is a change of affections• The new birth is an "inward change; a change from inward wickedness to inward goodness. . . , from earthly and sensual to heavenly and holy affections." Pleasure is not considered evil, but is given its proper place, thereby removing its limitations and destructive tendencies.

(3) The "evangelical" man experiences freedom, from slavery and fear. He is no longer the slave of sinful pleasures. The man has the pleasures; the pleasures do not have the man. By faith in Christ, he is saved from the "guilt and power of sin," and therefore "from all servile" fear. However, his deliverance from this fear may be intermittent until his faith is strengthened.

(4) In this stage one experiences an inner assurance and a passion to serve God and others. The "evangelical" man continually desires the holy and perfect will of God. Thus his holiness is properly begun. To be such a "new creature" is "so to hope in God. . . as to have not only the "testimony of a good conscience," but also the Spirit of God bearing witness with your spirits, that ye are the children of God. . . It is, so to love God: . . . so that ye are constrained to love all men as yourselves; with a love not only ever burning in your hearts, but flaming out in all your actions and conversations, and making your whole life one "labour of love," one continued obedience to those commands, "Be ye merciful, as God is merciful; . . . . Be ye holy, as I the Lord am holy; . . . . Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Though this style of life is lived in accordance with duty, it is not merely duty-performance. Rather, the "evangelical" man has a new self in which the fulfillment of his responsibilities is motivated by love and not by some external demand. The glory of God and service to his fellowmen are his aim in all his essential acts and choices.

b. A Second "Transitional" Stage. Just as there must be an "awakening" before one can be transplanted from the "natural" stage into the "evangelical," so,
for Wesley, the person who has experienced the new birth must be made aware of
his need for a further critical work of divine grace in order that he may "be borne
on" to perfection. Thus there is a "transition" between the stages of being a "babe
in Christ" and a "spiritual father."

Doubts and fears may still remain in the newly born "holy one." But when his
faith is strengthened, he receives the abiding witness of the Spirit, and enjoys the
"full assurance of faith." Here all doubt is removed, as well as "fear that hath
torment," or condemnation. One then has the consciousness of the divine favor
without any intermission, and may be called, in the language of I John, a "young
man" (2:13).

One who by grace has advanced to this stage of holiness at first normally
sees neither the need nor the possibility of further progress. Thus Wesley asserted:

"How naturally do those who experience such a change imagine that all sin is
gone, that it is utterly rooted out of their heart and has no more any place therein!
How easily do they draw that inference, "I feel no sin; therefore, I have none. It does
not stir; therefore, it does not exist. It has no motion; therefore, it has no being!"
But it is seldom long before they are undeceived, finding sin was only suspended,
not destroyed."16

There is such a qualitative change from the "natural" style of life that initially
one supposes that to be a new creature in Christ is the goal or destination of his
pilgrimage. This assumption seems to be justified because the believer is an
"evangelical" or holy person, whether he be a "babe in Christ" or a "spiritual
father."

However, in actual experience the individual sooner or later, under the
direction of the Holy Spirit, discovers hindrances. He discovers discrepancies
within himself. He is made aware of a spirit of double-mindedness, desiring the
good, for example, but at the same time solicitous that the good should bring with it
certain rewards; wanting God's will, but in his own way. Consequently, the more
seriously he takes his new life in Christ, the more grieved he becomes over his
inward coddling of the self and his consequent inability to make significant spiritual
progress in holiness. This is the "Spirit-born," but "carnal," man described in I Cor.

As the "natural" man is convicted of his sins, the regenerated man is grieved
for his spirit of sinfulness and confesses his abject helplessness and need for
divine assistance. There is, then, a "repentance" that is appropriate for the
"evangelical" man as well as for the "awakened" man. However, Wesley
emphasized that "the repentance consequent upon justification is widely different
from that which is antecedent to it. This implies no guilt, no sense of condemnation,
no consciousness of the wrath of God . . . . It does not suppose any doubt of the
favour of God. It is properly a conviction, wrought by the Holy Ghost, of the "sin"
which still 'remains' in our heart, of the . . . 'carnal mind,' which 'does still remain' . . . 'even in them that are regenerate'; although it does no longer reign."

So great is this conviction that one in this stage is "now more ashamed of . . . [his] best duties than formerly of . . . [his] worst sins." At a deeper level in the self he is made aware of his need of God. This second "awakening" is a sense of one's utter impotence and "inability to think one good thought or to form one good desire; and much more to speak one word aright, or to perform one good action, but through [God's] free, almighty grace." Apart from this sense of need and "repentance" there can be little spiritual progress and no "perfection in love." Indeed, a spirit of penitence is a continuous part of the Christian's life at every stage (Notes, Acts 22:20).

c. Entire Sanctification: "Spiritual Fathers." This is the stage in which the believer in a critical moment of faith, and by a second instantaneous act of God's grace, is ushered into a further stage in the journey of holiness, which Wesley called "Christian perfection." He, of course, wrote much concerning the life-style of the believer in this stage, although his sermon on "Christian Perfection" surprisingly devotes only a relatively small section to it. The reason appears to be that Wesley viewed this as only one stage -- though a most important one -- in the holiness pilgrimage.

What, then, are the leading characteristics of "spiritual fathers," those who are "entirely sanctified," or "Spirit-filled"? (See I Cor. 2:15-16.)

(1) To live in this stage is to be freed from evil thoughts, and tempers-from inward as well as outward sins. In his conversion or regeneration, the "evangelical" man found himself, as well as God; but now he finds God in a new way. He exists and lives in the immediate presence of God. Wesley spoke of this new level of holiness as follows: "It is not only a deliverance from doubts and fears, but from sin; from all inward as well as outward sin; from evil desires, and evil tempers, as well as from evil words and works . . . . It is a deliverance from all evil dispositions." It is circumcision of the heart by which one receives all good dispositions.

(2) A "spiritual father" is one who is purified from pride, self-will, and inordinate desire. His "every desire is in subjection to the obedience of Christ. The will is entirely subject to the will of God and the affections wholly fixed on Him." He is granted a "purity of intention" without which none of his actions can be truly holy.

The "spiritual father" has made a complete offering of himself to God. In his conversion by the new birth, the pilgrim received the beginnings of some kind of order in his life. But in his entire sanctification, another reordering is required. Now he sees that to travel the "holiness way" on God's terms, not on his own, has far greater implications for the self-life than he at first saw. All finite satisfactions consciously become candidates for renunciation, and by one's willingness to place
them in such candidacy one discovers if he actually is in a proper relationship to 
God-- if he is still traveling in the way of holiness. However, one must not apply this 
test of offering oneself only once, but continuously. The Spirit of his Master 
unceasingly dominates his life: "Not my will, but thine, be done."

(3) The "perfection" of this stage -- and there is a "perfection" in every stage - - is that of "perfect love." It is "love excluding sin, love filling the heart, taking up 
the whole capacity of the soul." Christian perfection, Wesley affirmed, is "the loving 
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."20

Absolute resignation to God, complete consecration, is necessary, and good 
as far as it goes. But it may be a human work, and where it is such, it at best can 
deal only with those actions or omissions which fall short of the ideal. And even so, 
it cannot cope with them successfully. Consecration alone cannot deal with that sin 
which inclines the believer to active rebellion against a loving and holy God.

There must be also a divine cleansing from that pollution of the will which 
hinders the believer from maintaining himself in an absolute relationship to God, 
and in a relative relationship to everyone and everything else. Only by this 
circumcision of the heart" can one live in this world as one who belongs to 
another world, or seek to transform this world by love without becoming attached to 
the world in love.

(4) "Assurance of hope" characterizes the "perfect" Christian throughout 
most of his life. The "babe in Christ," once his faith is strengthened, receives the 
assurance of faith" -- divine acceptance -- but the "spiritual father" is granted, at 
least periodically, the "assurance of hope." Wesley expressed his meaning thus:

"They to whom the Apostle John gives the venerable title of Father . . . 
generally, though I believe not always, enjoy the . . . "full assurance of hope;" 
having no more doubt of reigning with . . . [Christ] in glory, than if they already saw 
him coming in the clouds of heaven. But this does not prevent their continually 
increasing in the knowledge and love of God."21

In describing assurance, Wesley asked the following question and gave his 
own answer, which is applicable to both the "assurance of faith" and "of hope":

"How does it appear, that we do love God and our neighbour, and that we 
keep His commandments? Observe, that the meaning of the question is, How does 
it appear to ourselves, and not to others? I would ask . . . How does it appear to you, 
that you are alive, and that you are now in ease, and not in pain? Are you not 
immediately conscious of it? . . . By the same immediate consciousness, you will 
know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and 
have the ease of a meek and quiet spirit . . . . Now this is properly the testimony of
our own spirit; even the testimony of our own conscience . . . . But what is that testimony of God's Spirit, which is superadded to, and conjoined with this? . . . The Testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God."22

Though "entire sanctification" is the gate into the final stage in the Christian's pilgrimage, it is not the end of the holiness journey. The culmination of the "order of salvation" will occur only at the last day when one will be "finally justified" before God. In the meantime one continues to increase through grace in love.

For Wesley, love is "the root of all holiness." The pilgrimage into and in holiness is a sojourn into and in love -- love of God and love of man. The various stages on the way are summarized succinctly in Wesley's beautiful comment on I John 4:18 (Notes):

"'There is no fear in love' -- No slavish fear can be where love reigns; but perfect, adult love casteth out slavish fear; because such fear hath torment, and is inconsistent with the happiness of love. A natural man has neither fear, nor love; one that is awakened, fear without love; a babe in Christ, love and fear; a father in Christ, love without fear. 'We love him, because he first loved us' -- This is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity. None can say more. Why should anyone say less?"

The Stages And Holiness Theology

Wesley's "stages" are his attempt to trace the normal activity of God in the life of an individual. Candor compels us to observe that though these descriptions are supported by both Scripture and experience, they are nonetheless abstractions. They are thus not necessarily accurate descriptions of the reality of experience in every detail, for life is larger than logic, and language inevitably to some degree falsifies the actual human situation. Further, the characteristics of each stage to some extent may overlap in the development of a given individual.

Therefore we should not expect to find any pure examples of each stage. Because of the complexity of life and the uniqueness of distinct persons there can be no formula which might enable us to identify absolutely the stage which another specific individual occupies. God alone can see the inward and invisible aspects of one's life and only He can judge absolutely.

Wesley himself warned his preachers not to speak of Christian perfection "too minutely or circumstantially, but rather in general and Scriptural terms." His counsel may be followed with profit regarding each of the other stages as well. Yet his schema provides a helpful and reliable guide for interpreting man's pilgrimage in holiness, and a means of better understanding ourselves and the work of God with His creatures.
This review of Wesley's description of the believer's pilgrimage into and in holiness prompts several observations:

1. Each stage has its appropriate ethical characteristics. Holiness, then, is involvement in the real world of men and events. It encompasses a life to be lived now outside the monastery in the midst of temporal ambiguities.

2. Whatever is truly "good" for the believer in any stage is always preserved by God in the succeeding ones. The farthest stage reached always contains within itself, telescoped as it were, all the previous stages in their properly subordinate degree of importance. Therefore the life of holiness is not restrictive, though it is disciplined.

3. Entrance into any new stage is through the door of a moral and spiritual crisis, a total life commitment, so that progress is neither automatic nor impersonal. Admission into the stages of a "babe in Christ" and of a "spiritual father" is by an instantaneous act of God. The Christian or holiness life, then, is intensely personal in nature. Therefore, as Stephen Neill suggests in his book, Christian Holiness, holiness is "not so much something that happens to us, as it is Someone who unites Himself with us." The assurance which the believer has in any stage "is a consciousness of [this] Some One; the first moment [of the holiness pilgrimage] is like the commencement of an intimacy between two who had known one another casually before. The communion given to the soul is as a friendship about which definite things may be said. [Thus] the experience has an intellectual content."23

4. All spiritual progress is a result of the divine initiative, and comes by faith. One is absolutely dependent on continued assistance from outside oneself for moral and spiritual wholeness.

5. The life of holiness is dynamic and ongoing—a continuum. One may be able to abstract the stages and draw in fairly sharp outline the main features of each, but in real life there is continuity and connectedness. Once the self comes into being through the new birth, it is the continuing self that makes the journey. Whatever obtainments by grace one may come to enjoy, there are vast frontiers yet to be explored in one's ever deepening relationship to God and his fellows. There is always a goal which lies ahead -- either some new stage to enter or some new phase within a stage to anticipate.

Wesley's "stages," then, clarify the life-style of holiness which we have observed in Scripture: different from the world, but redeemingly involved in it; controlled, but not confined; personal in its faith and absolute commitment to God, but not subjective; cognizant of its constant dependence on divine assistance, but
concerned to assume moral responsibility in every aspect of life. It means advancing by grace in an ever enlarging relationship to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, thereby avoiding in the words of R. N. Flew, "a placid contentment with [spiritual] mediocrity," or the supposition "that God has nothing better to do than to ferry unchanged men over the troubled waters of this world to a peaceful habitation in heaven."24

If these indeed are the fundamental motifs of the holiness life-style, as they appear to be from Scripture and as taught by Wesley, then a theology of holiness must affirm:

1. That holiness is incarnational—not monastic or ascetic.
2. That holiness is disciplined—not negativistic or legalistic.
3. That holiness is personal—not individualistic or esoteric.
4. That holiness is Christological—not humanistic or perfectionistic. And over-arching all of these characteristics,
5. That holiness is teleological—not static or uncreative. On the basis of our conversations thus far, we may observe that holiness inevitably is interwoven with human experience -- not in a merely subjective sense, but in the sense that it is at this level that man is properly adjusted to God and to his fellowmen.

A sound theology of holiness acknowledges this experiential element, and understands holiness as an intimate and wholesome relationship, ever maturing, between God and man. The Church of the Nazarene, therefore, in her "'Agreed Statement of Belief," is justified in requiring of her members only those avowals of faith which are "essential to Christian experience." This position sharply distinguishes those doctrines which are considered essential for salvation from those which are viewed as nonessential.

Wesley adopted this stance regarding the priority of doctrines. His Conference Minutes reveal the standard doctrines of early Methodism to be the reality of sin in human experience and the inability of man in himself to overcome it; free grace, law, and gospel; the necessity of repentance (and works) both before and after justification; justification and sanctification by faith; assurance of divine acceptance by the witness of the Spirit; eternal reward of the faithful and the impossibility of a sincere seeker after truth being lost; and eternal punishment for the impenitent who have heard the gospel.

These doctrines are found also in Wesley's Standard Sermons, from which are noticeably absent such doctrines as the Trinity, divine sonship, the true humanity of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit, and the revelation and inspiration of the Scriptures. This observation is not to claim that Wesley considered these as
being unimportant, but it is to suggest that he did not give them top priority among doctrines which affect most directly the Christian life.

Both Wesley's Minutes and Sermons are concerned primarily with experiential themes; for example, justification, sanctification, and assurance, and their ethical implications. From his own religious experience and that of thousands of others, he came to see that these doctrines are fundamental. For him, essential doctrine and experience are inseparable.

An adequate theology of holiness, following Wesley's lead at this point, must develop its doctrine of salvation and/or sanctification in terms of one's relationship to God as a Person. This relationship must be viewed as positive and continuously developing. It is noteworthy that for Wesley salvation is from "servile" fear to an intimate consanguinity with God—a position which kept him from speaking often of salvation from hell. He was more concerned about a salvation and holiness that are directly related to our time and history.

If a theology of holiness must be concerned primarily with personal and existential themes, its fundamental doctrines might be developed along the following lines:

1. Sin is the absence of holiness in human experience, from which desperate situation man cannot save himself, but from which he may be delivered by God's grace.

2. Free grace means that all holiness is derived from God.

3. Law and gospel refer to the convicting aspect of God's holiness, and to the promise of sharing this divine nature with man.

4. Guilt and repentance describe respectively one's awareness of his lack of holiness, and the active acceptance of his responsibility for being unholy.

5. Justification by faith is the gracious divine response (assuming God's initial gift of prevenient grace) to man's admission of his need for holiness.

6. Sanctification by faith is the divine holiness imparting itself to man, renovating his life and nature and motivating him actively to seek the good of all men.

7. Assurance is the consciousness that one has been and is being transformed by grace in holiness.

8. Eternal rewards are for those who have been made holy and thus enabled to follow the life-style of holiness.
9. Eternal punishment is the ultimate and inevitable consequence of rejecting God's holiness, thereby eternally losing the self.

The perennial problem of holiness theology, of course, is to preserve the dynamic, progressive element of the holiness life-style without minimizing or removing the crises by which one enters the succeeding stages of spiritual development. In the following chapter, our attention must be given to some doctrinal implications of this issue. With the assistance of John Fletcher, we will endeavor to indicate how the dynamic and realized aspects of the holiness pilgrimage relate to our understanding of the degrees of the knowledge of God. The concluding chapter will attempt to portray Fletcher's view of the "perfect" Christian, and to consider some common misconceptions regarding entire sanctification.

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

03 -- THE HOLINESS-HOPE TENSION

The purpose of the divine work of sanctification is to bring the whole man into harmony with Christ's law and life. Its result is holiness, which is spiritual wholeness or health; that is, the proper balance of all one's personal and moral powers or functions. However, to suppose that any person at any one stage of sanctification is completely or finally balanced is contrary to human experience. Nonetheless, every step taken on the journey of holiness permits one to enjoy increasing, but real, degrees of wholeness and balance. Holiness, therefore, is both a possible present reality and an anticipated future hope—and it is these things simultaneously.

A theology of holiness must be judged by how it handles this crisis-process issue. A theology of holiness which is biblical must hold together both these aspects—continuing sanctification and realized sanctification—and reflect this tension in its fundamental doctrines.

To emphasize process to the denial of crisis makes holiness to be an ever receding goal, and destroys all possibility of genuine assurance in the believer. Such an emphasis may lead one to seek to provide his own assurance by setting up arbitrary means of measuring one's spiritual advancement, or to an understanding which considers holiness as an impossibility in human experience, thereby eliminating hope and resulting in a lack of moral and spiritual seriousness. It either fails to see that man is helpless to provide his own holiness or, if it does see this, it minimizes the provisions of divine grace.

To emphasize crisis to the neglect of process can only produce moral insensitivity and stagnation, spiritual infantilism, and a lack of real Christian growth. Or it may create introspective, if not legalistic, Christians whose primary concern is to preserve the holiness they already "possess," rather than living creatively and abundantly the life which they have come to share in Christ. This
emphasis, like the exclusive accentuation of process, also eliminates hope, though for a different reason. Here hope is removed from the holiness journey because one has already "arrived," so that there are no further conquests to be enjoyed, and no greater love to be expressed. Consequently, discipleship is undercut.

This second error is the one to which the holiness movement is most liable, while those outside holiness circles often may be justly criticized for the first. But in both cases, wittingly or unwittingly, unscriptural and arbitrary limits are placed on the grace and power of God. And for both extremes, holiness becomes, for all practical purposes, a static entity, substance, or "thing," which one either "has" or "has not."

To maintain in proper balance the element of truth in each of these extremes is incumbent upon a theology of holiness. Success at this point could enable those who are distinguished by their insistence upon the scriptural truth of entire sanctification to make a positive contribution to the revival of emphasis on sanctification in the wider theological circles, for it is on this issue that contemporary interest in the doctrine is being focused. William Hordern has made precisely this point:

"The new concern with sanctification in theology can be seen as an attempt to do justice to two basic New Testament themes. On the one hand, the New Testament emphasizes that man is a sinner who is helpless to do anything for himself. His only hope lies in the forgiving love of God. But this man, forgiven by God's love through Christ, has laid upon him the stern call to discipleship. On the one hand, he is not saved by good works; but on the other hand, he is saved for good works. . . Because of the tension between these two themes, Christians have at times emphasized man's helplessness to the point where they have lost sight of the need of, or the hope for a new life. At other times the emphasis upon the new life has been such that its attainment has become a new law imposed upon man with the implication that he can fulfill it if he will but try. The new concern with sanctification is trying to do justice to both New Testament themes."1

These themes we may call "holiness" -- that quality of spiritual life which is characterized by faithful discipleship; and "hope"-total reliance upon God's gracious ability and willingness to redeem man, both instantaneously and continuously. In Chapter One we noted the most obvious scriptural characteristics of holiness; the Scriptures also make clear the foundation of the Christian's hope.

The life-style of holiness is everywhere shown to be nourished by a living God of holy love, who initiates a personal relationship with His creatures, and who is revealed in Christ and known through the Holy Spirit. Paul referred to this God, the Source of all holiness, thus (italics are mine): "Now the God of hope fill you . . . that ye may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). He spoke of the "Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope" (I Tim. 1:1); and of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).
He admonished believers to "continue in. the faith. . , and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23).

Numerous other scriptures sound this glorious theme of dependence and hope: "Hope maketh not ashamed [i.e., brings assurance]; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 5:5); "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:2-3); "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). All believers have "such hope" (II Cor. 3:12), and they make the holiness journey "rejoicing in hope" (Rom. 12:12), because they no longer are "without Christ. . . having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12-13).

Understood in their biblical meaning, holiness and hope are Siamese twins. One cannot exist and remain itself apart from the other. Holiness without hope has lost its goal, its power for transformation. It is a style of life that is shallow, rigid, pharisaical, colorless, uncreative, unattractive -- and void of the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, hope without holiness has lost its motivation for discipleship and degenerates either into a humanistic fatalism which belittles God's use of human instrumentality in the coming of His kingdom or into an unbiblical antinomianism which makes a mockery of the moral demands of Christ and His gospel.

The biblical teaching of sanctification insists on both holiness and hope. It requires a received reality of grace, that is, a vital relationship with God, possible in the present, which issues in a life of obedience, love, and discipleship. But there must also be a continuous and growing reliance upon Christ for salvation, coupled with anticipation of increasing moral and spiritual development in the future. To live a holy life is to walk "the path of the just"-but the path "is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

This delicate balance, or creative tension, must be apparent in the explication of all doctrines which are pertinent to Christian experience and development. Failure at this point can have disastrous practical consequences by requiring more of human nature than even God asks of it; or, in contradistinction, by "eliminating that dimension of ultimate demand and ultimate self-commitment [to Christ] which is the realm in which Christian Holiness moves."

Our purpose now is to describe the crisis-process or holiness -- hope tension which runs through the fundamental doctrinal positions of a theology of holiness. Specifically, we shall be concerned with our understanding of the knowledge of God and some of the practical implications both for preaching holiness and for Christian discipleship.
We shall rely heavily upon John Fletcher, universally considered one of the
greatest of the classical Wesleyan thinkers, and one whose entire theological
system beautifully balances these twin graces of the holiness journey. A
contemporary of Wesley, he remains the "holiness theologian of hope," par excellence. However, unfortunately, he is too frequently known only by passing
allusions to him or occasional brief quotations, while the overall structure of his
thought remains hidden to all but a few. Therefore, before embarking on our
assignment, it may be well to remind ourselves briefly of Fletcher's relation to
Wesley, and his credentials as a worthy model of holiness thought.

The Significance Of Fletcher

John Wesley was concerned that at his death his mantle should fall upon a
man of "faith, unselfishness, diligence, and a degree of learning." These
endowments he found in John William Fletcher (1729-85), whom Wesley invited to
become his successor.

Fletcher was unequaled as a saint and eminent as a theologian. Wesley
thought he was without a spiritual peer and wrote that he had not found one to
equal him-"and I scarce expect to find another such on this side of eternity." The
Conference Minutes of 1786, in answer to the usual question, "Who died this year?"
carried this notation: "John Fletcher, a pattern of holiness, scarce to be paralleled
in a century."

Fletcher's stature as a theologian is reflected in part by various
commentators on his life and thought. Of him, Luke Tyerman, his biographer, has said:

"He did for Wesley's theology what no other man than himself at that period
could have done. John Wesley traveled, formed societies, governed them. Charles
Wesley composed unequalled hymns for the Methodists to sing; and John Fletcher.
. . explained, elaborated, and defended the doctrines they heartily believed"
(Wesley's Designated Successor).

It has been said that the theology of the early Methodist movement was the
theology of John Fletcher. Noteworthy is the fact that to his theological writings
Wesley gave his approval.

Moreover, Fletcher was a "mediating" theologian, who sought a "middle way"
between theological extremes in accordance with his understanding of Scripture.
This characteristic makes him significant for the problem to which we here are
addressing ourselves -- namely, the doctrinal difficulty and necessity of holding in
complementarity crisis and process, holiness and hope, discipleship and grace.

The doctrine which Fletcher used in maintaining this balance, and the over-
arching conception of his theology of holiness, was his doctrine of dispensations.
He was convinced that to obscure this teaching is to make genuine holiness an impossibility, or to destroy the ideal and hope which is necessary for Christian maturation. Therefore he made constant use of a unique dispensationalism, exclaiming, "It is my key and my sword."2

Wesley expressed his endorsement of this doctrine thus: "Mr. Fletcher has given us a wonderful view of the different dispensations which we are under. I believe that difficult subject was never placed in so clear a light before. It seems God has raised him up for this very thing."3

Holiness And Our Knowledge Of God

The foundation stone of Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations is "prevenient grace," which he accepted as being scriptural, and which is of preeminent importance in all holiness theology. It was a key weapon of the Wesleyans in the "Calvinistic Controversy" of the 1770's, and is indispensable to success in exposing those who insist on absolute predestination and the impossibility of holiness and freedom from sin in this life. It affirms that God's graciousness, God's extravagant goodness, God's purpose for mankind, is constant, universal, and prior to any conscious human response to the divine-human encounter.

Fletcher, as well as Wesley, was certain that grace suffuses all human life, even life in rebellion against God, or life in ignorance of God's grace. It is this prevenient grace, this grace that goes before, that has surrounded and anticipated man at every point. It is the precondition for his knowledge of God and for his conscious response to the redemptive grace of God in Christ. It makes both freedom and responsibility possible.

Fletcher concluded that if Christ tasted death for every man, as the Scriptures teach, there is undoubtedly a gospel for every man. A "general gospel," then, is revealed to all men, according to the clearer or more obscure dispensation under which they live.4

The term "dispensations" Fletcher used to refer to facets of the knowledge of God, by which all men may be generally classified. While there are infinite degrees of the knowledge of God, there are three main stages of divine knowledge, or three distinct dispensations: (1) of the Father (that of the Gentiles and Jews); (2) of the Son (that of John the Baptist); and (3) of the Holy Spirit (that of the perfect gospel in Christ).5

Each dispensation applies to a particular class of men. Fletcher felt that in his doctrine of dispensations he was giving an overview of history. By it he affirmed that, though knowledge of God may be partial, it is nevertheless significant and real. This means that human existence pivots around the doctrine of freedom-independence of man, who is dependent upon God for everything in life, and yet is also in every aspect of this dependent existence free and responsible. And this
means, in turn, that God has not left himself without witness anywhere. Before the Incarnation, God manifested himself both in the community of Israel and among the Gentiles, whose responsibility became a threshold of, and a preparation for, the whole gospel.

But beyond this, and more importantly for our purposes, Fletcher was convinced that the spiritual pilgrimage of individual men in each of the dispensations is a recapitulation or microcosm of the way God is working in all of history. That is, every man usually will go through successive stages in his own experience of revelation analogous to the ages of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore an understanding of the dispensations should cast light on God's personal relationship to believers in their journey of holiness.

1. The Dispensation of the Father

Included in this dispensation are both a general and a particular revelation of God. The general dispensation of the Father refers to that knowledge of God held by "Gentiles," that is, persons who have never heard of God's choice of Israel, or of Christ, or of the Holy Spirit. It is the realm of natural religion, in which man is controlled by his conscience or the law of nature, and also judged by his adherence to them. Of this dispensation Peter spoke when he said, "In every nation he that feareth him [God], and worketh righteousness [according to his light],6 is accepted of him" (Acts 10:35).

The particular dispensation of the Father, Fletcher called the "dispensation of Judaism," which refers to God's more "luminous" revelation to Israel. Included within it is the moral law, given by Moses, which was but a new edition of the natural law given earlier to Adam following the Fall. The message of this dispensation is stated succinctly in Samuel's words: "Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart [according to the Law]6 . . . But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed" (I Sam. 12:24-25).7

Under both Gentilism and Judaism the Redeemer is anticipated, but the dispensation of the Father is inferior because of the low degree in which the Redeemer is understood. Nevertheless it is good and preparatory, for the promise of this dispensation is the coming of the Son.8

2. The Dispensation of the Son

This dispensation was inaugurated by the coming of Christ, and relates to the knowledge of God held by those who know His life and are challenged by His example of meekness and love. It calls to salvation by means of repentance, as well as by faith and obedience.

Fletcher described this dispensation as Christianity, but as yet "infant" because it falls short of the "kingdom of God come with power," or the indwelling
power of the Holy Spirit. Christ is apprehended only as a Saviour manifested in the flesh, to accomplish the external act of redemption.9 The promise of this dispensation is the coming of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Dispensation of the Holy Spirit

This dispensation began at the first Christian Pentecost, and refers to that knowledge of God held by those who have been made aware of the possibility of being filled with the fruit of righteousness, and with the love of God. Fletcher referred to this dispensation as the "perfect Gospel of Christ," which contains all that is excellent in the earlier dispensations. The dispensation of the Holy Spirit includes the preceding ones at their full maturity, plus the coming of the Holy Spirit as an indwelling, sanctifying Comforter to those who obey.

One is savingly introduced to this dispensation of perfect Christianity by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which brings spiritual redemption in the soul and deliverance from sin through faith in the special efficacy of Christ's death, resurrection, and triumph. "Henceforth," according to Fletcher, "He is a Comforter, not only with, but in us." The promise of this more advanced dispensation is the second coming of Christ.10

4. The Unity and Progression of the Dispensations

Fletcher insisted that though these dispensations are not of equal significance, yet they are aspects of the one gospel. He contended that there is only one "everlasting Gospel," and that the Jewish and Christian gospels are only two of its brightest expressions. This is seen in the fact that the three dispensations have one common goal-namely, to manifest the various perfections of a holy God, "to raise man from his present low estate; and to perfect his nature." It is the same God who personally relates himself to men in every dispensation and "who operates everything in the Kingdom of grace." Consequently, according to Fletcher, "there never was a time in which the Son and the Spirit were not occupied in completing the salvation of believers," although "there was a time when the Son became manifest upon the earth," and "when the Holy [Spirit] . . . began to work in a more [visible] . . . manner." "The Old and New Testaments sufficiently prove, that the special influences of the Spirit are to be universally experienced by the faithful in every age."11 The Holy Spirit, then, is personal-as is all holiness-and His activity cannot be confined to a specific era. As the wind, the Spirit blows when and where He will.

This understanding may be helpful in interpreting the spiritual experiences of several men of the Old Testament. There is a degree of moral holiness emphasized in personal experience wherever and whenever the holy God communicates His own holy nature to man. The prophet Isaiah, though an exception, is an example of this personal experience in holiness prior to the historical revelation in Christ. After
he had confessed his sin, his lips were touched and he was assured: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isa. 6:7).

Regarding this Old Testament cleansing, Dr. D. Shelby Corlett has commented: "In this wonderful experience Isaiah had communicated to him the very nature of the holy God." Referring to this account and also David's request for a "clean heart" (Ps. 51:7, 10), Dr. Corlett further affirmed: "I believe that a holy God did not allow such deep hungers and earnest desires for purity . . . to go unanswered," although "we cannot put these experiences entirely on a par with the full new covenant standards of holiness,"12 as they are revealed in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. He was asserting the same truth that Fletcher had advanced earlier. For Fletcher, then, every dispensation genuinely obeyed brings a "degree of saving faith." The New Testament commandment is not only to believe, but also to love-or to "believe with a faith 'working by love.'" Accordingly, one who begins to love truth in any dispensation is moving toward final salvation. Thus truth embraced by faith converts and transforms the soul in every dispensation in different degrees. Because faith is unitary, though existing in different degrees, Fletcher could write:

"I make no more difference between the faith of a righteous heathen, and the faith of a father in Christ, than I do between daybreak and meridian light. That the light of a sincere Jew is as much one with the light of a sincere Christian, as the light of the sun in a cold, cloudy day in March, is one with the light of the sun in a fine day in May. And, that the difference between the saving faith peculiar to the sincere disciples of Noah, Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, consists in a variety of degrees, and not in a diversity of species."13

The faith which accomplishes this acceptance with God is not a "rational" faith which merely gives mental assent to a religious truth, but an "affectionate" faith-a "spiritual manifestation" -- which is living, hearty, loving, and obedient. That alone is a "saving" or "justifying" faith which believes the "saving truth with the heart unto internal, and [as we have opportunity] unto external righteousness, according to one's light and dispensation."

Saving faith engages the total powers of an individual -- that is, the totality of oneself at his particular stage of spiritual development. Faith is "saving" and "operative" only when it is alive, working righteousness, and loving truth.14 There can be no saving knowledge of God, therefore, in any stage until one in obedience has accepted with one's whole being -- insofar as he is consciously aware-the truth which God has revealed.

Wesley shared Fletcher's view of the unity and "degrees" of faith, and of the possibility of salvation, or justification, in every dispensation. He observed that there are not different kinds of faith, only a difference in degree. "By this [single] faith we are saved, justified, and sanctified; taking that word in its highest sense."15 Whatever faith is, it is that which leads from one point to another in
salvation. To continue in faith is to be led from the lowest to the highest experiences of grace. And as faith grows, love grows. We are to progress from faith to faith just as we are to progress in love. No matter what the degree, "all stages of faith please God and save from divine wrath and the guilt of sin."16

For Fletcher and Wesley, faith is a primary reality in Christian experience, but not its totality. It is a means to a higher end. Thus Wesley urged: "Faith itself -- even Christian faith. . , still is only the handmaid of love."17 The goal of the believer's life in holiness is "the fulness of faith." This means the consecration of the whole self to God and to the neighbor in love -- the presentation or delivering up of one's entire life to God. Therefore the believer's aspiration to holiness is as truly a function of faith as justification itself is. The faith that justifies -- in every dispensation -- bears its fruit in the faith that works by love.

Fletcher employed several illustrations to clarify his understanding of the unity of dispensations. He frequently illustrated his view by alluding to Jesus' parable of the talents. He explained that the Christian, in the dispensation of either the Son or the Spirit, has five talents. The Jew, one in the particular dispensation of the Father, has two; and the heathen, who is in the general dispensation of the Father, has one. A person is responsible for those talents that have been dispensed to him, for the light of his dispensation. And yet every man, regardless of his dispensation, by prevenient grace has "received sufficient light to discover, as well as sufficient power to perform, what God has been pleased to require at his hands."18

But Fletcher emphasized also the progression of the dispensations, the truth that the revelation of a later dispensation is more advanced than that of an earlier one. That is, for example, the revelation of the dispensation of the Spirit is fuller and richer than that of the dispensation of the Son. If one is sincere he will be led inevitably, given sufficient time and favorable circumstance, to faith in Christ and to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. However, the manner of God's self-revelation cannot be prescribed by man.

Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations preserves the holiness -- hope tension in the knowledge of God by uniquely combining both a settled (firm) reality and a dynamic quality. On the one hand he saw that there are varying degrees of holiness and discipleship; and that holiness, at whatever stage of development, is the faith of love and obedience. On the other hand, he was sure that, while the benefits of the gospel vary according to the dispensations, God is faithful, and will invariably lead all who are obedient to the next phase of spiritual light in their holiness journey. Thus hope or grace is central in the life of the believer in every dispensation.

Within each of the dispensations, there is the motif of Fulfillment and Promise, Holiness and Hope. That is, at every stage there is the reality of the knowledge of God in some degree; yet there is always a promise of a richer knowledge yet to come. The dispensation of the Father, for example, promises the
coming of His Son for the redemption of sinners; the dispensation of the Son promises the gift of the Holy Spirit for the entire sanctification of believers; and the dispensation of the Holy Spirit promises the future return of Christ for the glorification of His saints.19

5. Practical Significance of the Dispensations

Though these dispensations are successive in time from the standpoint of their inauguration, they are essentially coexistent in human experience. The revelations of God to men vary according to their different capacities. That is, God deals with each man personally. To one may be given the light appropriate to the dispensation of the Father; to another, that of the Son, or that of the Holy Spirit.

Fletcher made clear the spiritual characteristics or concomitants of the various stages. One who lives obediently under the dispensation of the Father, in either the general or the particular version, is accepted by God, but is characterized by uncertainty and doubt. The fear of God is more dominant than love. In this stage one lacks assurance and ought to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of his death?" (Rom. 7:24) The person in this stage is the same as Wesley's "natural" man who has been "awakened," and is walking in his new light. Nonetheless, there is not yet deliverance from either the guilt or the power of sin.

In the stage of grace referred to as the dispensation of the Son, not only is the obedient believer accepted by God, but in addition his doubts are dissipated, and love begins to gain ascendency over fear, enabling him to exclaim, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." This stage corresponds to Wesley's "evangelical" man who has experienced the "new birth."

One who genuinely accepts the truth of this dispensation is a Christian, but not a "perfect" Christian until he is filled with the Holy Spirit. The Christian in this stage of "infant" Christianity is granted partial (a degree of) assurance, but he is to seek for the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, which is the peculiar promise of the dispensation of the Son. "And," Fletcher warned, "if the believer does not press after the faith of . . . [full] assurance. . . [he is] in the utmost danger of losing . . . [his] talent of grace."

The apostles and those who have been filled with the Spirit declare the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. If one walks in the light he will be graciously guided into this fuller truth by the faithful Spirit of Truth. Here fear is cast out by "perfect love," and one receives the full spirit of adoption, in which the Spirit bears witness with his spirit that he is the child of God (Rom. 8:16). This believer corresponds to Wesley's "evangelical" man who is "entirely sanctified."

In any Christian congregation there normally will be persons in each of these dispensations. Consequently, Fletcher insisted that the true minister must know
intimately these stages in order to discharge faithfully his duty, and preach the whole gospel. He spoke of several "real advantages" which may follow from this knowledge.

a. By this doctrine, obedient believers of every stage of holiness may be taught "to acknowledge and esteem one another, according to their different degrees of faith." An informed Christian who spiritually is living in the dispensation of the fullness of the Holy Spirit -- in the realm of perfect love -- is cognizant that there are varying degrees of light. Therefore he is grateful for God's dealings with any man, and accepts everyone who is obedient as his brother in Christ, though the revelation or holiness granted may be relatively less advanced than that given to another. But he is simultaneously insistent on absolute obedience to the truth and light which has been divinely bestowed. Nor will he claim to know when the truth has become "light" in another's spiritual pilgrimage. He can allow himself this fine balance of holiness and hope because he is sure of both the wisdom and the goodness of God.

b. By acquaintance with these dispensations every holiness preacher will be enabled to distribute spiritual food which is suited to his hearers' conditions, capacities, and circumstances. Some require the "sincere milk of the word," while others need stronger food. Those who are dead in trespasses and sins need to be awakened by the first principles of the gospel; those already awakened from the delusions of sin, he must lead into the paths of grace; and those who have fled the powers of the world to come must be conducted on to evangelical or Christian perfection. Thus Fletcher warned:

"Without an experimental knowledge of these several stages, a minister can no more lead sinners to evangelical perfection, than an illiterate peasant can communicate sufficient intelligence to his rustic companions, to pass an examination for the highest degree in a university."

c. By a proper delineation of the dispensations of grace, a holiness minister, according to Fletcher, must

"make out the boundaries of those particular stages which believers of different classes are observed to enjoy . . . . [He can] discover whatever great promise is still before us, and solicit, without ceasing, the accomplishment of that promise. He who preaches the Gospel, without tracing out the lines which separate the three dispensations of grace, may be said to exhibit a sun dial upon which the hours are unmarked, and from which little else than confusion, if not dangerous mistakes, can be expected to flow."21

6. Concluding Observations

We may be tempted to complain, as Charles Wesley did, that Fletcher's view of the dispensations is likely to encourage the earlier ones to such an extent that
persons will rest short of the faith which belongs to "perfect Christianity." Fletcher sought to obviate the fear by insisting that to disallow the possibility of some degree of salvation and holiness to those who are fully obedient to their lesser degrees of light is both cruel and unscriptural. Further, he thought all spiritual complacency, failure to go on to all God has for one, simply reveals the insincerity of one's present faith, and denotes a faulty relationship to God.22 Fletcher carefully admonished his readers:

"Go on, alternately striving and waiting, according to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, till, having passed through all the inferior dispensations of Divine grace, thou enter by faith, into the rest that remains for the people of God, and take possession of that Kingdom of God, which consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Thus Fletcher pleaded for the preaching of the dispensation of the Spirit, since he felt it must be regarded "by every well-instructed Christian, as the quintessence of our holy religion."23 The true believer dares not treat any degree of the knowledge of God as the highest possible point of spiritual light and life. Rather, he willingly and gladly proceeds "from faith to faith." Those who refuse deceive themselves and are not accepted of God. This is the "holiness" [continuing sanctification]-transforming grace authenticated by absolute obedience to one's light -- "without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

We may quibble with some of the details of Fletcher's doctrine, and perhaps murmur over what seems archaic terminology, but his meaning is fundamental to a proper understanding of holiness, and to the sound biblical preaching of it. Further, it conforms to the canons of reason and human experience. To ignore this concept is to destroy the creative balance between holiness and hope, crisis and process, discipleship and grace. And where this tension is not preserved, misunderstanding and confusion result, including the erroneous and unbiblical equation of holiness and entire sanctification. Another result is the tendency to make judgmental and qualitative distinctions between believers in various stages of the holiness pilgrimage. On the other hand, there may be the temptation either to deny the gracious possibility of that holiness which is pure love, or to rationalize away one's failure to demonstrate and pursue it wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord.

Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations carefully elaborates the point that holiness is concerned with the total existence of the whole man at all times and in all places. It does not relate merely to one aspect of his being in Christ, nor only to one particular stage of spiritual development. It comes by grace, and grace is dispensed at different levels or stages. While grace and holiness are unitary, man's development and capacities demand these stages. God, the Source of all holiness, is the all-wise Pedagogue, who accommodates himself to His creatures. He is the Infinite Person, who deals with each individual as a unique person. By the gracious leadership of His Spirit He leads, not drives, obedient believers to an ever enlarging knowledge of himself, and to an increasing participation in His divine holiness.
This insight of the essential unity of grace we often have overlooked, though our best theologians have insisted on it. Dr. Wiley, for example, stated: "We hold there is no distinction in the nature of grace between prevenient grace and saving grace, that it is all of one nature."24

There can be no distinction in grace between justification and sanctification, or any other aspect of salvation. We must guard carefully against the misleading distinction between "saving" grace and "sanctifying" grace. Dr. Mildred Wynkoop has stated this truth clearly:

"Since love and grace are qualities of God's personality, the outflow of these qualities is the outflow of God himself. There are not different kinds of grace accomplishing different kinds of results. Rather, there are varying kinds of appropriations, on man's part, of the benefits of grace. This would account for the differences in Christian experience. Grace is not an impersonal power, or a thing to be received. It is God making himself available to us. It is the full measure of His redemptive love held out to us without reserve. But the results of grace in man are limited to man's grasp of God. Each step toward God and each step within the circle of His love requires the highest and noblest response of which man is capable at any given time. These are stages on man's way, not different 'gifts' on God's part."25

By his doctrine of dispensations, Fletcher was not saying that man can receive or obey whatever degree of knowledge he chooses. Instead, to travel the way of holiness is to be obedient to all the light which one receives, and to accept a life of fullest responsibility according to one's fullest capacity. Yet both light and responsibility will increase under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Thus holiness and hope walk together.

This is an elementary point, but it is one which is fundamental and popularly disregarded. Has not our sometimes unbalanced and muddled preaching of holiness given occasion for our hearers to conclude that there are at least two different standards within the Christian life -- one for the "merely saved" person and another for the believer who goes on to holiness? Has not such faulty thinking stymied real Christian growth and soothed the consciences of the indifferent and complacent? Is it not a common misconception among us that one is not called to absolute and radical commitment to Christ until he comes to the time and point of entire sanctification; that the inner self can go on having its way while at the same time spiritual life may be indefinitely prolonged? Are there not many who justify their failure to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit by use of the hasty quip that they are not one of the "sanctified," and therefore they are not to be judged by that standard?

Fletcher exposed the fallacy of such reasoning by observing:
"If the most inconsiderable trader among us is not allowed to say, "I deal only in trifling articles, and therefore should be indulged with a false balance," -- if such a trader is required to be as just in his shop, as a judge on his tribunal; and if the lowest volunteer in any army is called to show as much valour in his humble post, as a general officer in his more exalted station -- the same kind of reasoning may be applied to all believers whatever their particular dispensation of grace. Indeed, the "morality of the Gospel is the same in every age, and for every condition."26

Fletcher's analogy reveals how foreign to the biblical understanding of holiness are such rationalizations. The truth is that the life of a Christian, the life of holiness, is a whole piece of cloth. In actual practice one prays essentially the same prayer to enter every new and crucial stage of grace, as well as to progress within each. Technically and theologically, we may make some valid distinctions, but the spirit of the prayers are identical -- namely, whole commitment to Christ insofar as one is aware of himself.

How ludicrous for a person to pray:

"O God, just for the record now, I am asking for forgiveness of my past sins, for regeneration, for the new birth, for the alleviation of this gnawing condemnation. But please understand, O Christ, I am not seeking entire sanctification; I am not offering myself as an instrument of Your service. My will, my talents, my future, my dreams, my ambitions, I will keep for myself -- at least for now. Perhaps at some later date I will yield myself unreservedly to You. So, thank You, for becoming my Saviour; it may be that, in time, You shall become my Lord and Master as well."

It is not difficult to sense how little such a prayer would accomplish.

In contrast to this, biblical holiness requires all there is of us at any given moment. Again quoting Dr. Wynkoop:

"In the Bible the lowest allowable level of obedience is the highest possible capacity for man at any given moment. The capacity may vary but the responsibility is always equal to possibility. When one says "perfect obedience," and "perfect love," it does not mean that fully matured capacity is expected. A child can qualify in spite of his imperfect [immature] development. What is required is all one is at any one time . . . . But more important even is this, that all we can contribute by way of moral responsibility is required. It is not the faith we do not have which is demanded, but that which is ours to exercise by way of full commitment which is required . . . . Even a little faith is the whole available self open toward God."7

Christ will be Lord of all your life-however much or little that may be, depending upon your degree of light-or He will not be Lord of any of your life.

Fletcher was certain, however, in harmony with Scripture, that as one walks in obedience he will be made aware of a deep propensity to coddle the self, which
calls for a radical circumcision and full cleansing of the heart. But having been brought face-to-face with oneself in a new and deeper way, the obedient believer willingly submits to this heart surgery -- so that, whereas he formerly was "curved in" upon himself (to use Luther's phrase), he now is "curved outwardly" toward God and others. This occurs in the "moment" of entire sanctification.

To this crisis or moment, and to the life of "Christian perfection," in which it issues, we must give our attention in our final chapter. However, our understanding will be inadequate if we do not appreciate fully the genius of Fletcher, and Wesley as well, in fusing "disciplined love" and "aspiring love," or holiness and hope. Both of these they found in the Scriptures. In developing the former they learned much from the ancient and Eastern tradition of holiness, whereas the latter was emphasized in their own Anglican heritage. It was the synthesizing of these concepts that Wesley -- whose thought was systematized by Fletcher -- regarded as his own most distinctive doctrinal contribution. To a friend he wrote near the end of his life: "This doctrine [the peculiar blending of entire sanctification and progressive sanctification] is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists, and for the sake of propagating this He appears to have raised us up."28

Any theology of holiness will be un-Wesleyan, as well as incomplete, unbalanced, and unbiblical, if it does not preserve both poles of this creative tension-holiness and hope, crisis and process, discipleship and grace, entire sanctification and continuous sanctification, responsibility and Christian liberty. Apart from this tension, the life of holiness can degenerate only into a static perfectionism, an esoteric quietism, or even a dangerous antinomianism.

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04 -- HOLINESS AND FULL SALVATION

Salvation, in its broadest sense, includes the beginning of saving grace, and extends to our deliverance from the effects of this present evil world. We may speak of it as a past event, a present experience, and a future hope. In referring to salvation, the Scriptures employ all three verb tenses: (1) in relation to the past we "have been saved" (Eph. 2:8, RSV; also II Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5); (2) in relation to the present, we "are being saved" (I Cor. 1:18, RSV; also II Cor. 2:15); and (3) in relation to the future, "we shall be saved" (Rom. 5:10; 13:11; also Matt. 10:22; Acts 15:11; I Peter 1:5).

Hence there is biblical justification for the distinction in holiness theology between initial salvation in justification and regeneration, full salvation in entire sanctification, continuous salvation in maturation by grace, and final salvation in glorification.
Salvation means "deliverance" from sin. Thus it is sometimes said that in justification we are delivered from the past or guilt of sin, and simultaneously in regeneration we are delivered from the power of sin; in entire sanctification we are delivered from the pollution of sin; and in glorification we shall be delivered from the presence and effects of sin. At every stage we are being delivered or saved continuously moment by moment.

Popular holiness terminology is not altogether biblical when it states that one is "saved" in conversion and subsequently "sanctified." The truth is that one is also sanctified (initially) when first saved, and is being saved when entirely sanctified. It might be more in accord with scriptural usage to say that one is not saved until he is sanctified wholly. But even this is not the whole picture since one will not be finally saved until the last day.

Since holiness is that quality of life which results from being saved through the process and/or act of sanctification, and there are degrees of holiness, then there also are degrees or stages of salvation.

The stage which concerns us here is that which has been entered by those whom Wesley termed "fathers in Christ," to which we referred earlier, in chapter two. Fletcher taught that such persons have their spiritual existence in the "dispensation of the Holy Spirit." The distinctive doctrine which describes this stage of holiness, is stated well in Article X of the "Articles of Faith" of the Church of the Nazarene.

"We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotion to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.

"It is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.

"Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

"This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases, such as 'Christian Perfection,' 'Perfect Love,' 'Heart Purity,' 'The Baptism with the Holy Spirit,' "The Fullness of the Blessing," and 'Christian Holiness'' (Manual, Article X).

The key affirmation in this statement seems to be that entire sanctification is a divine work which instantaneously by faith brings: (1) freedom or cleansing from
original sin; (2) assurance through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit who empowers for service, and (3) entire devotion to God.

The goal of this final chapter is to discuss, in the light of all that we have been saying regarding the holiness pilgrimage, these themes—and some accompanying misconceptions—which are fundamental to our view of full salvation. Specifically, relying upon the thought of John Fletcher, we shall discuss our understanding of Full Salvation and Sin, Full Salvation and Assurance, and Full Salvation and Perfection.

Full Salvation And Sin

Holiness and sin stand in complete opposition. Therefore, where holiness increases, sin decreases. "Sin," broadly conceived, refers to any falling short of the glory of God. This idea of missing the mark, or falling below a divine standard, is a biblical concept. Theologians sometimes call it the "objective" or "legal" view of sin. However, the primary biblical meaning of sin is that of willful, deliberate, premeditated transgression of, or disregard for, God's known law. It is sometimes called the "subjective" or "ethical" view of sin.

These must be held in tension because one without the other can only lead either to despair or to presumption; to a confusion of creatureliness and sinfulness, or to a rationalization which excuses from responsibility.

Both holiness and sin refer to personal qualities and relationships—toward God and toward others. Therefore, Fletcher used the concept of guilt, which implies personal responsibility, to maintain the balance between these two aspects or levels of sin.

He defined a sin as a transgression of a divine law, and observed that man may be considered under either one of two laws: (1) the "anti-evangelical, Christ-less law of our Creator," or (2) the "evangelical, mediatorial law of our Redeemer." With respect to the first law, which was given to Adam prior to the Fall and requires absolute conformity, Fletcher, like Wesley, denied the possibility of a "sinless" perfection. Man's mental and bodily powers are so enfeebled that he inevitably falls into errors—and having done so, according to the judgment of this original law, is a transgressor forever.

By this standard, Fletcher acknowledged with Martin Luther, "In every good work the just man sinneth." With respect to this law, only Christ can say, "I am clean from sin: I fulfill the Adamic law of innocence." Christ has fulfilled this law for man, but now man is given—as was Adam following the Fall—the second law which can be kept, must be kept, and is kept by established Christians through sincere repentance and loving faith. Love is the fulfilling of this evangelical law.
Judged by the original "anti-evangelical" law, all sins would merit equal judgment. However, this law has been superseded by the "evangelical" law of Christ, which relates to man's will and intention. Judged by this second law, Fletcher concluded that not all "acts" of sin are of the same degree, for an "atrocious crime" is different from a "sin of surprise." He supported this in part by Jesus' comment that the Pharisees would receive "the greater damnation."2

Further, he acknowledged a difference in degree between willful sins and sins of ignorance -- those which arise out of limited understanding. Imperfection of knowledge may produce errors in judgment and consequent errors in conduct, but if these are without malice, and confessed, God will not impute them to man. To sin ignorantly, then, is to remain guiltless. In proportion to the degree of sin there are degrees of guilt, depending upon the spirit of the offender, and the greatness of his advantages or knowledge.

Fletcher contended, however, that man is responsible for sins of omission, although he will be punished finally for those sins only which involve an act of the will. Willful unbelief is the only damning sin. Any external sins, which might include unconscious omissions, are against God's justice and holiness, but deliberate unbelief and continued sinful actions are against His mercy as well, and consequently are unpardonable.3 Man, then, is guilty only of willful sins, but is responsible for confessing and rectifying sins of omission when they become known to him.

Man becomes increasingly aware of his sin as he receives new light from God. This is consistent with the New Testament teaching that knowledge of sin comes by the law (Rom. 7:7; 5:13; also Gal. 3:19; I Tim. 1:9). This does not mean that until one is quickened, convicted, or made aware of his sin, he does not sin. Rather, it means that before one is given the knowledge of the law he is not guilty or condemned by God. All real guilt presupposes sin, but not all sin involves guilt, responsibility, or condemnation.

Wesley asserted the same thing in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament: "All deviation from perfect holiness is sin; but all sin is not unpardonable" (I John 5:17). He observed that Paul committed sin by persecuting the Church ignorantly. This did not take away his sin, but "left him capable of mercy." Had he acted contrary to his conviction and continued to do so, he would not have been able to appropriate God's mercy (I Tim. 1:13).

Whether the Christian believer who is made aware for the first time of some falling short experiences "guilt" is partly a semantic question. If by "guilt" is meant a deep sense of unworthiness and grief over an inadvertent or omitted action, then obviously the believer feels guilt. But if "guilt" connotes the condemnation of God which disrupts and destroys fellowship, then he does not. The important point for us is to see how Fletcher used the concept of "guilt" -- in the sense of condemnation-to avoid either that interpretation of sin which makes humanity
coequal with sinfulness or that which denies that sin may be present before one is cognizant of it.

The apostle Paul made a clear-cut distinction between "sins," those acts properly understood in Scripture as involving the will, and those which we legitimately label "infirmities." To the Romans he wrote: "All have sinned [past tense] and do now fall short [present tense] of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, literal translation). There is no state of grace which excludes inadvertent transgressions, and for these Jesus admonished His followers to pray for forgiveness (Matt. 6:12; 18:23 f.; Luke 11:4; also see I John 1:8-9).

If this point is not carefully observed, one may grow self-defensive when new light is given. The holiness movement has sometimes fostered a theology which will not permit confession or acknowledgment of falling below God's ultimate standard. This has drawn the criticism of W. E. Sangster, and others with him, that as a result, some have "blunted their own conscience, believing that what they were doing was to the glory of God. When that inner monitor of the soul stirred in disapproval, they flung 'a promise' at it, and called the warning 'unbelief.' With passing time the conscience ceased to function with any accuracy or power and they are found proclaiming themselves free of sin while guilty of conduct which a worldling would know to be wrong."4

Fletcher was highly critical of such spurious holiness. Indeed, he insisted that one of the marks of an entirely sanctified man is his refusal to be self-defensive. J. A. Wood, in his great holiness classic, Perfect Love, has made the same observation: "None see their need of the Atonement so clearly, or feel their need of its merits so deeply, as the entirely sanctified. He, more than any other man, feels, 'Every moment, Lord, I need the merit of Thy death.'" He senses his faults, seeks pardon for them, and presses on to the final mark. Every believer, regardless of how advanced he is on the way of holiness, lives on the basis of forgiveness. We saw in our first chapter that one of the features of the holiness lifestyle is marked sensitivity to the guidance and reproof of the Holy Spirit. "Progress in saintliness always means at the same time progress in penitence," without a loss of confidence that one is accepted in the household of God.

An adequate theology of holiness refuses to define sin "properly so-called" as any lack of conformity to God's final standard. Yet it steadfastly affirms that to insist that something is sin only if one believes it to be sin is less than scriptural. It proclaims that sin in its primary biblical meaning may result from willful transgression or from conscious failure to progress in holiness and the knowledge of God, and that sin in its secondary meaning also needs the continuous atonement of Christ. Holiness theology preserves the creative tension between deliverance from willful sin and a growing awareness of one's lack of total conformity to the "stature of Christ."
What has been said thus far is applicable to every Christian believer, whether he be a "babe" or a "father" in Christ, initially or entirely sanctified. He enjoys a freedom from sinning according to the "evangelical" law of Christ. By this standard he does not sin every day in word, thought, and deed. The whole purpose of Christ's coming was to "save his people from [out of] their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The believer is consequently saved from the guilt and dominion of sin. Sin's power over him is broken by the power of grace in the new birth.

What, then, is that freedom from sin that distinguishes the entirely sanctified? It is salvation from "indwelling" sin, or "the sin" of which Paul speaks numerous times in Romans 5--8.

Fletcher understood this "original" sin to be a spirit of willfulness, self-sovereignty, greed, revenge, and obstinacy. It is a false condition of egocentricity, a reliance upon one's own efforts to progress in the way of holiness, and a willingness to live independently of God-taking God for granted, or presuming upon Him. (See Gen. 3:1-6; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:2; Gal. 3:1-3.) This spirit is not the product of habit, inadequate education, or ill example. Rather, man reveals this spirit from his first conscious choice.

"Original" sin is not a static substance, but a divine-human relationship in which man has not completely opened himself to God-although in his conversion he previously thought he had. The power of original sin lies in its dynamic and personal character, which can be overcome and thwarted only by the greater power of divine love.

This deep self-centeredness of man must and can be dealt with in a radical, instantaneous cleansing of the wellsprings of the heart. Holiness theology claims that this moral crisis -- called "entire sanctification" -- conforms to man's experience, and that it is taught in Scripture by the use of the aorist tense (which usually denotes a momentary past occurrence). For example, in Rom. 6:13, believers are admonished to "yield" themselves in a specific act of consecration and submission to Christ, resulting by faith in the divine expulsion of sin from the heart.

Because "original" sin is not a material entity which in that case could never return once its roots were destroyed, the cleansing that occurs in a moment must continue moment by moment. Thus Fletcher emphasized that Christ is needed continuously to guard against the reappearance of "the" sin which has been cast out of the soul, just as a candle remains necessary to prevent "darkness"-though the darkness has been dispelled.

The question is often raised as to whether one who has been entirely sanctified and later goes back to a life of sin must again go through separate stages of new birth and entire sanctification. In logic these are two distinct steps and normally they are separated by some interval of time. But in actual practice there
need be no appreciable span of time. The stages are simply levels of awareness of need, and where the need is known and conditions are met, God's grace is sufficient. Fletcher observed that though "sanctification is not generally the work of a day nor a year," God can "cut short his work in righteousness."8

Faith is the only condition necessary to entire sanctification. This faith, according to Fletcher (in concurrence with Wesley), is a conviction that God has promised sanctification in the Scriptures, that He will perform His word, will do it now, and that He does it. But one act of faith is insufficient. One's faith must be his life. As one cannot live on indefinitely by one breath, so one cannot sustain spiritual life by a single moment of faith.

This is consistent with the repeated teaching of the New Testament in which the word "believe" is always in the progressive present, indicating a continuing responsibility on the part of the believer to maintain the new "walk of faith" which includes obedience and love (cf. John 1:7; 3:16-17; Acts 13:39; Rom. 10:10; John 20:3). Both Wesley and Fletcher objected to the notion that God ever introduces man "into a state where [he is] unalterably fixed in his blessed favor, and forever stamped with his holy image; so that it matters no longer whether the tree is barren or not, whether is produces good or bad fruit; it was set at such a time, and therefore it must be a 'tree of righteousness' still."9

Thus, in their understanding of sin, Fletcher and Wesley underscored the wholeness and continuity of the holiness pilgrimage. In conversion sanctification begins, namely, "that powerful work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of a pardoned [justified] sinner, by which he receives power to go on 'from faith to faith.'" By this divine activity the believer is brought to "the highest . . . [stage] of sanctification," which is to love God with all the heart, soul, and strength, and one's neighbor as himself. Describing this continuity, Fletcher wrote:

"Whatever is the . . . [stage] of one wholly renewed [entire sanctification], must be, in a less degree, the . . . [stage] of all "who are born from above": and whatever is the fruit of perfect holiness, to walk by the same rule must be the way to obtain the same salvation. The image of God is one, grace is the same; and to be in Christ is to believe, and have the fellowship of His Spirit . . . . Neither is the whole of this salvation, of our justification, or of our renewal after the image of God, finished, till the resurrection . . . . Nor can we ever have so much of the likeness of God as to be incapable of more."10

Full Salvation And Assurance

Fletcher's dominant concern was for inward holiness and assurance, by which he meant a righteousness which removes guilt, peace which removes torment, and joy which expels doubt. That such a quality of spiritual life is possible he showed by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, His high-priestly prayer in John 17, and various parts of the Epistles of Paul and James.
Simultaneous with justification and initial sanctification, the believer is given a degree of assurance. However, for Fletcher, it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit which alone brings full assurance, and to enjoy this is the obligation and privilege of all Christians (Eph. 5:18; I Cor. 6:19).11

It is well known that Wesley did not speak often of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," apparently because of the danger of seeking some gift or emotion instead of Christ and His will. It is common knowledge also that he felt that Fletcher's sharp distinction between justification and initial sanctification, on the one hand, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, on the other, implies that one does not receive the Holy Spirit in conversion.12

However, Fletcher did not affirm this. On the contrary, he maintained that at the moment of justification "the Spirit of God witnesses with . . . [the believer's] spirit that' his sins are pardoned . . . . [The believer] receives the power to love much, as he feels that he has much forgiven."13 Therefore, he is granted some degree of the witness of the Spirit.

This is not to say that the views of Fletcher and Wesley at this point are identical. Wesley acknowledged that they are "a little different, though not opposite."14 Both men agreed that holiness begins in the new birth, and that the fruit of the Spirit is manifested when one is "grafted into Christ" by faith. Neither was willing to minimize the new birth at the expense of "the second blessing." This reluctance holiness advocates have not always demonstrated.

In any case, the apparent difference between Fletcher and Wesley at this point is reflected in the popular thought of the later holiness movement. Some have assumed that, since the work of holiness is not perfected in the new birth, therefore the Holy Spirit is not given them at all. Specifically, they have asked: How can the Holy Spirit abide in the Christian where there is "original" sin?

The question seems to presuppose that "original sin" is a substance. If this concept is removed, then a personal analogy may shed light on the question. Two persons may be getting to know one another, and yet both of them may be keeping themselves unconsciously in reserve from the other -they are not completely open. But the relationship is nonetheless fruitful and rewarding. However, when either becomes conscious of this reservation, he must open himself to the other person, or the relationship will be disrupted and broken off. This is analogous to the life and experience of the Christian not yet entirely sanctified. He thought at his conversion that his submission was complete, but later is made aware of his inward reservation which protects the self.

Others do not deny the reception of the Holy Spirit in conversion, but misunderstand it, and ask: Does the believer receive a part of the Holy Spirit in the
initial work of grace, and the balance, or another part, when he is entirely sanctified?

The question embodies a quantitative analogy and thus is misleading. Since God is a Person and we are persons, a personal analogy may be better. Consider the relationship of love between a young man and woman. Their romance may reach such a stage that "engagement" is appropriate--a "crisis" involving distinct and critical vows to one another. This we may compare with "conversion."

In a normal relationship this new life commitment will develop to the critical moment of marriage, in which each completely yields his life to the other. Each thought he had given all at the time of engagement, but standing before the altar sees more involved now than before. Yet with eyes open each commits himself unreservedly. This may be analogous to "entire sanctification."

Then comes the actual life in marriage, in which new situations arise and new commitments and sacrifices are made -- but the once-for-all commitment is not up for review. This compares to the "life" of the entirely sanctified.

Further, the relationship becomes increasingly deeper. It would be less than adequate to say that these young persons receive one part of each other at one stage, and the remainder at a later stage -- if by these terms we refer to a quantitative entity. Rather, we say that they come "to know" -- love, appreciate, understand -- each other progressively better. They are increasingly "comfortable" in the presence of the other and progressively assured of the other's approval. In no way does this minimize the crises of engagement and marriage.

No analogy is fully satisfactory. But if what we have been saying is true -- that holiness is personal -- then the analogy, a biblical one, seems appropriate. God initiates a romance with man through prevenient grace. Unlike a human partner, however, He gives all. He does not give a part of himself to one man, and reserve a different fragment of himself for another, or for the same man to be given later. God is not an Infinite Philanthropist, who in every gift withholds more than He has given. Rather, He gives all of himself at any given moment. But men's capacities and abilities to respond vary according to their stage of spiritual development.

When men respond obediently there is an engagement -- the crisis of new birth occurs. As the romance deepens, the believer comes to see what this engagement means--the total giving of oneself. He may have thought this problem of self was solved, but the growing relationship shows otherwise. Thus he is faced with the second crisis of entire sanctification, in which he submits to the full implications involved. Then comes the life of "Christian perfection," which must be lived moment by moment. New situations will arise and further decisions will be called for, but the fundamental and critical commitment does not require reconsideration. A call to special ministry, for example, is not a crisis in the sense of deciding whether to do God's will -- though it may be critical regarding what is
God's will. And, like marriage, this divine -- human love affair becomes increasingly rich and full.

Fletcher's emphasis on the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which brings full assurance, reflects the explicit teleological or goal-oriented character of his thought. He constantly held before the Christian the possibilities of spiritual growth. He insisted that one "must not be content to be only cleansed from sin . . . [he] must be filled with the Spirit." He observed that the work of sanctification among the early Methodists was hindered by not pressing it on the believers, and also by "holding out the being delivered from sin, as the mark to be aimed at, instead of the being rooted in Christ, and filled with the fulness of God, and with power from on high. The dispensation of the Spirit is confounded with that of the Son, and the former not being held forth clearly enough, formal and lukewarm believers in Jesus Christ suppose they have the gift of the Holy Ghost. Hence the increase of carnal professors." See Acts 8:16.15

For Fletcher, divine forgiveness is not the summum bonum of the Christian life. There must also be the "fulness of the Spirit." The marks of this "filling" he expressed in a letter to a friend:

"I believe . . . you have received more than forgiving love. See John 20:22. But whether you have received the other Comforter in His fulness, or the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Ghost, is what it concerns you to inquire into. You may know that measure of grace by the following marks. It is great grace, and abundant life; it destroys [the sinful] self, it fills with power from on high, it perfects in love. It is, at least, accompanied with the gift of prophecy [speaking to the edification of those with whom they converse] . . . . It makes us always to triumph in Christ."16

Wesley spoke similarly of a perfection "far beyond a bare freedom from sin," that is, being filled with the "fulness of God" (Notes, Eph. 3:19). According to Dr. Wiley, Dr. P. F. Bresee's emphasis also was on "divine infilling," though he did not undervalue the cleansing aspect.17

The emphasis of Fletcher, Wesley, and Bresee may have been neglected in our preaching. While declaring that entire sanctification is deliverance from indwelling sin, as well as from deliberate sinning, should we not also affirm that it is Christlikeness and enduement of love and power? To "put off" the "old man" must we not "put on" Christ? The absence of this positive note can lead to chronic spiritual-pulse-taking, and to giving undue attention to one's feelings and emotions. To be constantly analyzing one's spiritual state and asking, "If I only knew the depths of my soul, could I say I am really free from sin?" is to become a spiritual neurotic. It is as foolish as to be always asking, "Do I really love my wife, and would I be true to her in every conceivable situation?" The primary question relates to fundamental and moment-by-moment loyalty to God's will and purposes.
Full assurance brings an inner rest and certitude. According to Fletcher, one can distinguish mere "feelings" from full assurance by a "three-fold demonstration:" (1) a "lively demonstration of the Almighty's presence," (2) an internal evidence of the "affection of Christ," and (3) the "most indisputable testimonies of the sanctification and consoling operations of the Holy Spirit."18 The great fear of Fletcher was the antinomian who insisted that he enjoyed full assurance regardless of his immoral or unjust actions. The antinomian in making such a claim ignores his own feelings of condemnation. Yet Fletcher wanted to avoid equating assurance with mere psychological or physiological feelings. Consequently, he insisted on "spiritual sensation." By that term he meant faith, the validity of which is found in a personal sense of God's presence in one's life, attested by outward actions which are consistent with the revelation in Christ, and produced by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Corresponding to the various degrees of faith are degrees of assurance. A type of assurance accompanies faith in the inferior dispensations, for the Divine Spirit, for example, "can no more bear witness to an accepted, mourning Cornelius, that he is not accepted in any sense, than [He] can give testimony to a palpable contradiction." But this assurance is negative and temporary. Full assurance comes only with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is the "faith of Christianity in its state of perfection."

One is not to despise one's present degree of assurance. But by becoming a vessel of clay, one can be emptied of selfishness and filled with God. One must, therefore, make a proper use of the "joy of hope," which is to be one's strength till "the Lord comes [in full assurance] to his temple to make his abode there."19

Full Salvation And Christian Perfection

For Fletcher, full assurance, perfect love, and Christian perfection are aspects of the same stage of holiness. Therefore the gift of "perfect love" accompanies full assurance, and is received instantaneously. "But what is given in a moment, is enlarged and established by diligence and fidelity. That which is instantaneous in its descent, is perfective in its increase," he said.

Consequently, there are degrees of perfect love. The hearts of those who have love "are as replete with charity as sparks are filled with fire; and doubtless the smallest spark may be said to shine with a degree of perfection, in its little sphere, as well as the brighter sun in his more boundless course."20 That is, there may be infinite degrees of perfect love among an infinite number of entirely sanctified Christians. Qualitatively this love is of the same kind; it varies only in degrees. Fletcher approvingly quoted Wesley's words:

"If you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way, and when you are asking others, 'Have you received this or that blessing?' if you mean anything but more love, you mean
wrong . . . . From the moment God saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing but more of that love described in I Corinthians 13."

Wesley's view of Christian perfection, therefore, was defended by Fletcher as being nothing more than love for God and for one's neighbor. It is perfect love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, making one steadfast and abounding in good works. Christian perfection is "the internal kingdom of God ruling over all"; "it is Christ fully formed in our hearts, the full hope of glory."

Consistent with his overall theology of holiness, Fletcher maintained, as we noted previously, that the degrees of perfection correspond to the dispensations of divine grace, and according to which some are higher than others. "Perfection" he defined as "the maturity of grace peculiar to established believers under their respective dispensations. Thus the perfection of one dispensation may be imperfect in comparison with the perfection of a higher dispensation. He held that Scripture supports his view, for "Noah was perfect in his generation" (Gen. 6:9); but this was obviously not the perfection of Judaism, which required circumcision.

Though a perfection is possible in every dispensation, Christian perfection is that "grace and holiness which established, adult believers attain under the Christian dispensation . . . the cluster . . . of the graces which compose the Christian character in the church militant." It is more desirable because perfect Christians (other things being equal) glorify God more than those who remain full of inbred iniquity, and they are more useful members of society. Any who trifle away the accepted time without receiving the perfection of their respective dispensation cannot be saved finally. However, "so long as a Christian believer sincerely presses after Christian perfection, he is safe; because he is in the way of duty." Sincere seeking after perfection cannot of itself bring the gift, for the gift is all of grace. Yet through proper preparation one may place himself in a position to receive this grace.

In the same person at the same time, perfection in one sense is consistent with imperfection in another sense. Even Jesus did not have absolute or infinite perfection, since He grew in wisdom and was not omniscient (He did not know the hour of final judgment [Mark 13:32]). Further, though He was perfect in love, He was not yet perfect in sufferings or glory before His agony (Heb. 5:8-9). Paul spoke in his letter to the Philippians of a "perfection of love" presently possessed and a "perfection of glory" persistently pursued. Even glorified saints will not all be equal, for each will have different capacities to enjoy and praise God.

Therefore a certain imperfection of "work" is consistent with a perfection of the "worker." The perfection of the workman consists in inward sincerity and uprightness of the heart toward God, and may intermingle with all kinds of imperfection of performance. Man can never achieve absolute perfection of "work," though the perfect workman endeavors to perfect his work increasingly. Thus, sincere obedience, ""though imperfect yet has a certain... imperfect perfection." To
deny this perfection of the "workman," or "evangelical sinless perfection," is to insist on the continuance of indwelling sin or heart antinomianism.26

Fletcher exposed numerous misunderstandings of Christian perfection. He denied that it leads to pride, for perfection includes "perfect humility." It cannot create a "holier-than-thou attitude," for the perfect Christian acknowledges, and with genuine penitence prays for, the forgiveness of his involuntary trespasses. Christian perfection and pride are antithetical. If perfection resulted in pride, it would have to be argued that sin, the opposite of perfection, leads to humility. But, contended Fletcher, "Who has more sin than Satan? and who is prouder? . . . The holier a believer is, the humbler he shows himself." Perfection "tends to promote humility rather than pride."

Perfection also excludes bigotry, though it does not immediately remove all prejudice. The moment one confines his love to those persons who agree with him, or to those preachers who exactly suit his taste, he falls "from perfection" and becomes a "bigot."27

Particularly did Fletcher object to the notion that the Christian has perfection only "in Christ." If the phrase means that perfection is from and through Christ, then it is biblical. But if it implies that the believer is perfect in Christ in the same way as "country freeholders, entirely strangers to state affairs, are perfect politicians in the knights of the shire who represent them in parliament," then it must be rejected. If believers were perfect in Christ's person, they would all be equally perfect. But the author of I John clearly talks of some who are made perfect and others who are "not yet made perfect in love" (I John 4:12, 17-18).

Further, if believers are already perfect "in Christ," why should they be exhorted to "go on to perfection"? Such a position opens the door to antinomianism with the excuse, "We are perfect in Christ." In contradistinction, Fletcher insisted that the perfection which Christ preached "is a perfection of holy dispositions, productive of holy actions in all his followers. And that, of consequence, it is a personal perfection, as much inherent in us, and yet as much derived from him, and dependent upon him, as the perfection of our bodily health."28

Fletcher wisely rejected a static interpretation of perfection which would limit God's manner of working with an individual. This is seen particularly in regard to the question: Is Christian perfection ever granted simultaneously with initial sanctification, or is it always a subsequent work of grace? Fletcher thought that normally it is the latter. However, he thought it would "betray a want of modesty, if . . . [he] brought the operations of the Holy Ghost, and the energy of faith, under a rule which is not expressly laid down in Scripture." To be a perfect Christian,

"we must receive so much of the truth and Spirit of Christ by faith, as to have the pure love of God and man shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given
unto us, and to be filled with the meek and lowly mind which was in Christ. And if one outpouring of the Spirit, one bright manifestation of the sanctifying truth, so empties us of selfishness as to fill us with the mind of Christ and with pure love, we are undoubtedly Christians, in the full sense of the word?"29

However, God does not usually remove indwelling sin until it has been discovered and lamented.

Fletcher's dynamic understanding is reflected also in his answer to the question, Is Christian perfection instantaneous? Though he asserted that in most cases it is, he ardently emphasized the gradual element. But, like Wesley, he steadfastly refused to confine God to a given method.30

Not only did Fletcher deny the mistaken notion that perfection cannot be lost, but also he felt it is possible to lose one's perfection without losing justification. He wrote:

"As a carnal professor31 may occasionally cross Jordan, take a turn into the good land, and come back into the wilderness, as the spies did in the days of Joshua; so a spiritual man, who lives in Canaan, may occasionally draw back, and take a turn in the wilderness, especially before he is "strengthened, established, and settled" under his heavenly vine, in the good land that flows with spiritual milk and honey."32

Fletcher testified that he lost the blessing of entire sanctification or Christian perfection four or five times by not testifying to it. He had waited for more fruits or evidences before testifying, and consequently lost the witness of the Spirit.

He strongly denied that entire sanctification is by death. Indeed, death forever removes the possibility of attaining it. He reasoned:

"If Christian perfection is nothing but the depth of evangelical repentance, the full assurance of faith, and the pure love of God and man shed abroad in a believer's heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him, to cleanse him, and to keep him clean from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; and to enable him to fulfill the law of Christ, according to the talents he is entrusted with, and the circumstances in which he is placed in this world; -- if this, I say, is Christian perfection, nothing can be more absurd than to put off the attaining of it till we die and go to heaven."33

To attain perfection by works alone also is an impossibility. Fletcher was certain that Christian perfection (as every stage of the holiness journey) comes by faith, which is possible by assisting, previous grace, and an assisted free will. It comes neither by antinomian stillness which asserts that free grace must do all, nor by pharisaic activity which claims to do most, if not all. Rather, these two partial systems must be taken together. Faith, then, is 'alternately a receiver and a bestower: first, it passively receives the impregnation of Divine grace . . . and then it
actively brings forth its heavenly fruit with earnest labor.' Fletcher supported this definition with such scriptural statements as, 'God worketh in you both to will and to do,' and, 'Therefore work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' He admonished: 'Resolve to be perfect in yourselves, but not of yourselves.'"34

Because Christian perfection is by faith, and not by works, it may be received instantaneously in the moment of faith. Fletcher quoted Wesley's well-known words:

"Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment. Why not this hour, this moment?. . . If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are; and if as you are, then expect it now. It is of importance to observe that there is an inseparable connection between these three points, -- expect it by faith, expect it as you are, and expect it now. To deny one of them is to deny them all: to allow one is to allow them all."35

Entire sanctification issuing in a life of "Christian perfection"-this is the legacy of every Christian believer. The conditions for receiving one's full inheritance are consecration and faith -- absolute submission to the lordship of Christ and the presentation of one's whole being to the fulfillment of the will of one's Heavenly Father.

To enjoy this "full salvation" which will carry us holiness pilgrims on to that final perfection -- " till we all come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13)-our continuous prayer must be that expressed in words which Fletcher borrowed from another:

To do, or not to do; to have,
Or not to have, I leave to Thee;
To be, or not to be I leave:
Thy only will be done in me.
All my requests are lost in one:
Father, Thy only will be done.

Suffice that, for the season past,
Myself in things divine I sought,
For comforts cried with eager haste,
And murmur'd that I found them not.
I leave it now to Thee alone:
Father, Thy only will be done.

Thy gifts I clamour for no more,
Or selfishly Thy grace require,
An evil heart to varnish o'er;
Jesus, the Giver, I desire;
After flesh no longer known:
Father, Thy only will be done.

Welcome alike the crown or cross;
Trouble I cannot ask, nor peace,
Nor toil, nor rest, nor gain, nor loss,
Nor joy, nor grief, nor pain, nor ease,
Nor life, nor death; but ever groan,
Father, Thy only will be done.36

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REFERENCE NOTES

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INTRODUCTION


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CHAPTER ONE


5. Ibid., I, 483.


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CHAPTER TWO


4. He did this in numerous writings, but see, for example, A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity.

5. WSS, I, 188, 183.


7. See WSS, I, 181-85, for this quotation and the two previous ones.

8. Ibid., I, 257-58.

9. Ibid., II, 52.

10. Ibid., I, 187-89.

11. Ibid., II, 433.

12. Ibid., II, 232-34.

13. Ibid., II, 239-40.


15. WSS, I, 41-45,294.


17. Ibid., VI, 51.

18. Ibid., VII, 237; VI, 17, 46; also Notes, I Pet. 1:22.


20. WJW, VI, 46; XI, 394.
21. Ibid., VII, 237.
22. WSS, I, 206-8.

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CHAPTER THREE

2. FW, II, 15-16.
3. LJW, VI, 137.
4. The fact that Fletcher gave his fullest account of the various dispensations in his Portrait of St. Paul, which is his expression of the ideal minister, indicates the fervor of his practical concern. See FW, III, 166 f.
5. FW, II, 261f.
6. Brackets are Fletcher's.
7. FW, III, 178-81, 176; II, 262-63.
8. Ibid., III, 170-73, 179; I, 580.
9. Ibid., II, 262-63; III, 179.
10. Ibid., III, 176; II, 262-63; III, 179, 170-73.
14. Ibid., IV, 276, 335; I, 524, 540-43.
15. MCM, I, 1-2; Notes, Rom. 4:21; WSS, "Scripture Way of Salvation."


17. WSS, II, 38 ff.

18. See FW, I, 139, 144; III, 175.


21. Portrait, pp. 193, 172. Wesley agreed that preachers must suit doctrine to their hearers' needs. Notes, I Cor. 3:2.

22. FW, I, 577-78; also IV, 376-77; Portrait, p. 194. Wesley also had taught that failure to follow after holiness means to disrupt one's relationship to God. Notes, Heb. 12:14.

23. FW, III, 371; Portrait, p. 197.


28. LIW, VIII, 238.

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CHAPTER FOUR

1. Fletcher, Checks to Antinomianism.

2. FW, I, 181-82; IV, 424. Wesley acknowledged that it is difficult to judge "sins of surprise" (WSS, I, 172). Later holiness theologians have made the same point as Fletcher and Wesley. Dr. A. M. Hills, for example, observed: "To hold that a Christian believer in every moral act is as good or bad as he can be, and that the least sudden sin of a warm-hearted Christian plunges him to the level of the worst sinner, is too great a tax on credulity to be accepted" (A. M. Hills, Fundamental Christian Theology [Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1932], II, 253).
3. FW, III, 36; I, 315; III, 278; IV, 177, 179.


5. WJW, V, 149. See St. Paul's careful development of this in Romans 6.

6. FW, IV, 427.

7. Dr. Wm. Greathouse has observed that "this corresponds with 'perfecting holiness' (II Cor. 7:1); it is to be 'sanctified wholly' (holoteleis, 'entirely and perfectly,' I Thess. 5:23); it is also to be 'filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18; cf. Eph. 3:14-20), and 'blameless in love' (Eph. 1:4; cf. I Thess. 3:13; Eph. 5:25-27)."

8. FW, II, 574; IV, 113-14; II, 645-46; IV, 345. (See also WSS, II, 451-52, 457.)

9. Ibid., I, 56.

10. Ibid., IV, 113-14, 267.

11. Ibid., III, 183.

12. WSS, I, 119, 290; LJW, V, 228, 215.


14. LJW, VI, 146.


16. FW, IV, 385. Second brackets are Fletcher's.


18. FW, I, 429; III, 142.

19. Ibid., I, 590-91, 579, 585-87; IV, 367, 343. (Also see WSS, I, 87.)

20. Ibid., III, 76, 162. Wesley also insisted that there is no "perfection of degrees . . . none which do not admit of a continual increase" (WSS, II, 156).

21. Ibid., V, 213.

22. 'Ibid., I, 270-71; IV, 414.
23. Ibid., II, 523-29. Fletcher wrote: "Jewish perfection principally stands or fails with Deut. 6, and Mt. 22; and Christian perfection with Mt. 5 and 19, to which you may add the joint testimony of St. Paul and St. James." (See FW, II, 597.)

24. Ibid., IV, 415; I, 530; II, 620-22, 492, 523-29.

25. If the word "sincerity" is taking in its full latitude, it conveys "the fullest meaning of teleiotes, that is, 'perfection'" (FW, IV, 414 n.; also II, 492 n.). Wesley came to see this also, but he felt that one cannot love sincerely until he has a degree of faith (WJW, III, 5). He defined "sincerity" as "willingness to know and do the whole will of God." It is the "one condition of our acceptance" (WSS, I, 145). If one is sincere, "God will infallibly give him [greater] faith" (WSS, I, 194-95). Adam Clarke (1762-1832), the Methodist Bible commentator, later held this view. See "The Letter to the Philippians" (1:10), The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), VI, 491.

26. FW, II, 496, 486; IV, 421.

27. Ibid., II, 501-3; IV, 319; II, 663.

28. Ibid., II, 504-6; IV, 436.

29. Ibid., V, 167-69. Wesley took the same view. He distinguished the "substance" of Christian perfection from the "circumstance." The former he thought is taught in Scripture; the latter has to do with the methodology of human appropriation of grace. Two works of grace are supported both by experience and by Scripture. But regarding the circumstance Wesley was not dogmatic. Reception of Christian perfection in one work of grace, however, would be an "exempt" case. See A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.

30. Ibid., II, 631-33; WJW, XI, 423.

31. Fletcher held that the "carnal mind" still cleaves to imperfect Christians; however, he thought when it is applied to Christians, it should be softened and qualified, since Paul called the "carnal" Corinthians "babes in Christ." (See FW, II, 541-42.)

32. FW, II, 546. Fletcher was identifying the "wilderness" with justification and initial sanctification, and "Canaan" with Christian perfection. This analogy at best can only illustrate and not prove the point. Some Wesleyan interpreters have questioned whether one could lose entire sanctification without losing justification.


34. Ibid., II, 634-35, 641.
35. Ibid., V, 192.
36. Ibid., V, 222.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the works listed in the references, the following books on holiness may be read with profit:


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THE END