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HOW THEY ENTERED CANAAN
(A Collection of Holiness Experience Accounts)
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

JOHN P. RAGSDALE
(Wesleyan)

[At the time this testimony was written, John P. Ragsdale was the dean of academic affairs
at United Wesleyan College.]

Ach, man! Look at the red-head Yank. Wearing blue jeans, no less! Within seconds I and
the boy who had hurled these taunts in my direction were locked in a dusty battle on the Mt. Frere
schoolyard in the Transkei South Africa.

Very quickly the principal stepped in, and in his office I witnessed my first "caning," as six
whistling cuts of the malacca cane left their stinging marks on the appropriate place. Being the new
boy, I was only warned -- this time. Later as the days turned into weeks and months, I was a
regular recipient of canings as my temper flared and flared again.

Years earlier I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour but had experienced repeated
failings, confessions, restitutions, and assorted spiritual ups and downs through childhood and
early teens. Again and again I would seek the second blessing which would once and for all get rid
of my uncontrollable temper. "Take it away, Lord. Cleanse me of this horrible passion," I would
pray.

A touring evangelist from the United States came to the mission field and preached on
sanctification. His testimony sounded so much like my experience, but he said, "I reached that
point when I prayed for the Holy Spirit to root out my sinful nature and from that point until now I
have never felt a stirring of anger or a loss of temper!"

My mother, who had, I imagine, felt anger with me when I got my deserved lickings, was
convicted to the point where she asked for prayer. I could not see why she had anything to pray for,
so I became angry again -- with the preacher this time. But then I felt convicted of my own anger
and again prayed for deliverance, with little result.

Finally, I was led to study carefully what the Word said about anger. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." "Be angry, and sin not." Examples from the lives of Bible characters came to mind. Christ cleansed the Temple (not gently) and denounced the Pharisees. Paul condemned the Judaizers.

I came to realize that the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification was not to remove personality, humanity, and character, but to infuse it with love and direct its expression according to the will of God. I had equated temper with the carnal nature, rather than recognizing that the carnal nature was controlling my temper. Whereas I had begun to wonder if my Dutch Reformed friends were right when they judged that I just wasn't chosen to be a Christian, I saw hope for victory.

My prayer changed as did its result. Now the temper that had once been unruly, misdirected, and selfish became controlled, was motivated by a sense of righteousness and justice, and rather than rearing up in defense of self was channeled into a constructive witness. Although the change I experienced was immediate, I discovered there were still many areas of growth and improvement in the management of my God-given personality and character. His work was done in my heart and surrender was complete; but daily there was and is, reaffirmation to living His day as it should be lived and a recognition of His work in expressing the holy life in word and deed.

What a release and freedom in the Spirit there is when we see Him transforming what we are into the image of His dear Son, rather than discarding what we are to begin from scratch. In practical terms, there is a holy anger which He controls, surrendered to His will.

Perhaps this shared experience will help another avoid the spiritual struggle through which I suffered and receive from His Spirit that peace which passeth understanding -- a peace with oneself and with God.

Source: "And They Shall Prophesy"
Compiled by George E. Failing

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THE END