

CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

Lesson 89

The Holiness - Pentecostal Movement – Part 1

The estimates vary, but the general belief is that one out of every four Christians in the world is a Pentecostal. At a time when many denominations are shrinking or struggling to keep their membership, the Pentecostal church is booming. More than 19 million new members join the Pentecostal Church each year (54,000 per day!). Much of that growth is coming from Africa, Latin and South America and the Far East.¹ Some researchers predict that by 2025 there will be 1 billion Pentecostals worldwide.²

The figures are estimates because there is no one “set” denomination that is the Pentecostal Church. The Church is spread out over innumerable sect and denominations and individual churches. That makes it difficult to count the members; and it also makes it difficult to count the churches!

The movement has not only brought about large numbers of adherents, but it has also had tremendous effects on other denominations. Hardly a “contemporary worship service” convenes on a Sunday morning that does not sing at least one of the songs that have come from the movement.³ The Pentecostal movement is also reckoned by many as the catalyst for the Charismatic movement that has swept through most every Christian denomination in the twentieth century.⁴

Our efforts through this class will be to lay the ground work for the Pentecostal movement of the 20th century (and late 19th century) by examining American revival in the 1800’s specifically as it gave rise to the Holiness Movement. As we do so, we should keep in mind the Holiness Movement is distinct in name and doctrine from the Pentecostal Movement, even though the Pentecostal Movement arose from the Holiness Movement. As we put these movements into historical context, we should be better able to understand not only the movements, but their effects on other denominations as well.

¹ Christianity Today, Nov. 16, 1998.

² Grant McClung, Christianity Today, posted 4/01/2006.

³ Consider, for example, *Shout to the Lord*, the Christian song by Darlene Zschech, a music minister from the Hillside Church in Sydney, Australia.

⁴ One can find strong charismatic expressions in virtually every denomination including the Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist traditions.

HOLINESS

When we speak of “Holiness” as either a movement or a doctrine, we are using it in a special sense beyond its common meaning. Webster’s Dictionary defines “holiness” as “the quality or state of being holy.” When we read our New Testaments and we find the word “holy” we are reading a translation of a Greek form of *hagios*. This word references something set apart or devoted to God. It is something that applies by definition to all Christians.

But within Church History “holiness” as a doctrine took on a more specific meaning. This special usage traces its roots back to John Wesley (see lessons 70-73). As we discussed in our Wesley lessons, Wesley emphasized the real difference faith made in the Christian’s daily life. The “methods” by which one strove to live right with God gave birth to the “Methodist” label that attached to Wesley and his followers.

Wesley taught that all Christians should not only seek a holy life, but that there was within reach some greater measure of holiness that was a type of human perfection. In his work, *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, Wesley wrote,

Some thoughts occurred to my mind this morning concerning Christian perfection, and the manner and time of receiving it, which I believe may be useful to set down.

1. By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions. I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or whole... And I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.
2. As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant. But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant.
3. As to the time. I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before. I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five months after it.⁵

Wesley’s words conveyed a message that some of his followers understood as teaching a state of the Christian that conquered the passions and motivations that moved one to sin. This was, as Wesley understood it, a “second work of grace”

⁵ *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11 (Zondervan) p. 446.

beyond the first work of grace: salvation. Wesley's close friend John Fletcher considered this second work of Grace to be a "baptism in the Holy Spirit."

Methodism brought an emphasis on holy living for all Christians. As Methodism swept across portions of America, it is seen as a principal reason that the drunken, carousing and violent expressions of the early American pioneers turned into prayerful expressions of Christian grace and lifestyle. Preachers like Thomas Webb were emphatic,

"The words of the text were written by the Apostles after the act of justification had passed on them. But you see, my friends, this was not enough for them. They must receive the Holy Ghost after this. So must you. You must be sanctified. But you are not. You are only Christians in part. You have not received the Holy Ghost. I know it. I can feel your spirits hanging about me like so much dead flesh."⁶

This idea of perfect holiness became more pronounced in the 1800's with the revivalist preaching and teaching of Charles G. Finney (1792 – 1875). Finney taught that Christian perfection was "perfect obedience to the law of God." It was,

"perfect, disinterested, impartial benevolence, love to God and love to neighbor. It requires that we should be actuated by the same feeling, and to act on the same principles that God acts upon; to leave self out of the question as uniformly as he does, to be as much separated from selfishness as he is; in a word, to be in our measure as perfect as God is. Christianity requires that we should do neither more nor less than the law of God prescribes. Nothing short of this is Christian perfection. This is being, morally, just as perfect as God. Every thing is here included, to feel as he feels, to love what he loves, and hate what he hates, and for the same reasons that he loves and hates."⁷

Finney would go on in the same lecture to call this perfection a "duty" and to explain that it was "attainable" in this life. Interestingly, Finney gave this lecture shortly after reading Wesley's book; "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" to which the excerpt of Wesley's given above was attached as an appendix.

Finney taught that "permanent sanctification" was brought about through a "baptism of the Holy Spirit." This teaching became fairly common throughout America as part of what scholars have termed the "Second Great Awakening" in

⁶ J. F. Hurst, *The History of Methodism* (New York 1902), Vol. 4, p. 1252 quoting a sermon preached 1766.

⁷ Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, Lecture 8 "Christian Perfection Part 1 (1837).

America. It was a time of revival and renewed interest in God and spiritual matters. It saw the revival meetings that birthed the Restoration Movement (See lessons 87 and 88). It also focused the nation on necessary reforms related to slavery, and treatment of women. It gave birth to the temperance movement as well.

Slavery as an issue was a strong point for northern churches before the Civil War. Especially within the Methodist denomination⁸, these churches were laying the moral demands that the country change its slavery laws. In 1844, the Methodist church divided into a northern and southern division over this issue. It was in the northern division that revival swept through the Methodist churches in 1858. The hallmark of these revivals was the call for an end to slavery and for Christian perfection.⁹

Following the Civil War, morality in general in America saw a serious decline. As Synan puts it, “The years that followed the Civil War were characterized by a moral depression in America. Returning soldiers with ‘battlefield ethics’ entered not only the houses of business, but also the halls of government and the sanctuaries of the churches.”¹⁰

Concerned Christians saw the need for a moral turnaround in America. This need prompted a number of Christians to seek a new wave of camp meetings as a means of encouraging and spreading “the special work of holiness.” A Methodist minister, Alfred Cookman, called for Christians irrespective of denomination to come to a camp meeting calling on the Holy Spirit to descend on the participants, the church, the nation and the world. This meeting was set in Vineland, New Jersey July 17 -26, 1867.

The name given to the Camp was the “National Camp Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.” Wildly successful, the camp was dominated by Methodists, but was clearly interdenominational. A committee was set up at the end of the camp to plan for follow up camps. The committee took its name from the meeting calling itself the “National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness.” It would later shorten its name to simply the “National Holiness Association.” It changed its name in 1997 to the “Christian Holiness Partnership” and today it is made up of 21 denominations with 48 colleges and seminaries and still holds over 2,000 camp meetings around the world.

⁸ Wesley was an outspoken opponent of slavery, teaching, and writing graphically and unequivocally on the history and evils of slavery.

⁹ Synan, Vinson *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Eerdmans 1997) p. 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* at 23.

While not all associated with the camp meetings believed in Christian perfectionism, more and more it became a teaching associated with the holiness movement. As the teaching grew in prominence, it also grew in controversy. A number of Methodists and others would not agree that perfection was achievable for Christians in this life. The controversy was great enough in the Methodist churches that a number of preachers broke off from their Methodist moorings and set up their own independent churches.

The Los Angeles Methodist Phineas Bresee withdrew from his ministry in the Methodist church in 1894 and, together with Methodist Dr. J. P. Widney (former President of U.S.C.!) in 1895 organized a new church congregation and called it the “Church of the Nazarene.” This church would seed other Nazarene churches and eventually become the largest Holiness denomination in America with over 1.6 million members in over 18,000 churches throughout the world.

The Church of the Nazarene was not the only denomination to grow out of the holiness movement. As the 1800’s were ending, there were many holiness churches springing up and establishing themselves as separate denominations. Synan notes that 23 holiness denominations started in just the seven-year time stretch between 1893 and 1900!¹¹ These churches emphasized the need for holy living, more often than not asserting that Christian perfection in life is achievable and expected for the committed believer as a second work of grace from the Holy Spirit. It was this distinct doctrine that would give rise to the Pentecostal Movement.

SOCIAL GOSPEL

Hand in hand with the Holiness churches’ teachings on perfectionism for the Christian was the arrival in the late 1800’s of the social gospel. While that is not the thrust of today’s lesson, it is worth an insertion because of its relation to the Holiness Movement both in time and in thought.

While the Holiness Movement sought to change Christians by helping them find the second work of grace that would give them perfection in their lives, the “Social Gospel” advocates thought that Christianity could and should serve to perfect not just the individual but also society. Baptist minister and teacher Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) grew to reject the idea that Jesus died as a substitute for sinners to restore a relationship with God. Instead, Rauschenbusch believed that the death of Jesus had value in substituting love for selfishness as the basis of a human society. For Rauschenbusch, the kingdom of God was not in the fruition

¹¹ Synan at 43.

of getting people into heaven, but rather a matter of transforming earth “into the harmony of heaven.”

We should carefully note that not all the advocates of the “social Gospel” held the unorthodox views of Rauschenbusch. Although Rauschenbusch is generally credited with starting the Social Gospel Movement, the movement gained great momentum and support from a number of staunch Christians who readily understood and believed in the Bible’s inerrancy and the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. So, for example, in its Book of Order, the Presbyterian Church set out in 1910 the six great ends of the Church as,

1. The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
2. The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
3. The maintenance of divine worship
4. The preservation of the truth
5. The promotion of social righteousness, and
6. The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Without a doubt, the “promotion of social righteousness” echoed the need for a social gospel, but not at the expense of the personal gospel!

The Social Gospel call sought to enforce schooling, abolish child labor, regulate working hours, assisting the poor and immigrants, developing public health measures, and similar social ills perceived at odds with the gospel. This call to a perfect society contrasted with its cousin the Holiness Movement that called individuals to perfection, often by asking the individual to withdraw from society. While the Social Gospel advocates were pushing a public agenda to disassemble the slums, the Holiness Movement sought a private agenda to stop the evil effects of personal sin.

One can read sermons from this era in social gospel settings that decry the social ills of monopolies and business practices that capture wealth at the expense and to the detriment of many in society. One can also find many holiness sermons that decry the personal effects of alcohol, dancing, ball games, gambling, and even lipstick!

Next week our goal is to expand on this religious awakening in the Holiness Movement and see it give rise to the Pentecostal Movement and the modern Charismatic Movement.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Why does holiness matter? God called Israel to be a “holy nation” (Ex. 19:6) made up of “holy people” (Ex. 22:31). Why? We can certainly find a strong clue to the answer in 1 Peter. Peter quoted Leviticus when he wrote, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). So from the mouth of God, as quoted in Leviticus and from the pen of Peter we see that our God is holy and in like manner we should be holy. So at least part of the “Why?” question is answered by understanding that God made us in his image (Gen. 1:26-27). So as God is holy, it makes sense we were made to be holy. Holiness is never to be confused with what makes us right before God. As we have emphasized throughout our lessons, a right relationship with God is established by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-10). But the Christian who believes in God, who understands the creation and purpose of man, would be insensible not to realize that we should live consistent with our purpose and creation. We were made in God’s image, we were called into his holiness and that is where we can best experience his peace, his purpose, and his blessing.
2. So does holiness matter just for us as individuals or is there a place for the Christian to seek putting holiness into society? As we noted in Point for Home one, God called the Israelites to be holy both individually and as a nation. It is right and just for the Christian faithful to seek to alleviate social ills through active involvement in society. Issues ranging from pollution (remember our first charge as humans was to work and take care of the earth!) to treatment of people, poverty, education, and the right to life are some of the many different issues that can rightly capture the attention and efforts of Christians. When Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” he was calling us to be the preservers of our earth and culture. “If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” (Mat. 5:13). Heaven forbid we ever lose our desire or ability to impact our world for God’s good.
3. Yet in the midst of a call to holiness and a call to shine our light into a darkened society, what do we make of the perfectionist doctrine? Is there a second blessing of grace that brings perfection to us humans? With respect to my brothers and sisters who disagree with me, I suggest not. I believe that Paul wrote his Romans 8:1-2 passage (“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”) to show that we can have victory over sin, but not in the sense that we sin no more. Sin is the struggle Paul described one chapter earlier in the very same letter setting Romans 8 into context: “I do not understand what I

do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.... So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! (Romans 7:15-24). It is with a wary eye that we should ever consider ourselves beyond sin! Similarly one might consider 1 John 1:8, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."