

Holiness and How to Get It!

by Andrew Bale

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*"If you want holiness, cling to the cross,
Counting the riches of earth as dross;
Down at his feet you'll be cleansed and made free;
Enjoying a full salvation."*

George Phippen Ewens

There will inevitably come a time in the life of any serious believer when the demand of holiness or 'entire sanctification' will cling to the mind of a believer, refusing to leave until the soul either surrenders or retreats. It is possible to be a Christian without being entirely sanctified but it is impossible to remain one for any length of time without successfully negotiating this 'stumbling block'

For Jesus this struggle was ultimately settled in Gethsemane and centred on the complete surrender of his free will in exchange for total obedience to God.

1 John 2:6 says:

'Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did'

This verse makes it quite clear that the challenge that beset Christ will eventually come our way for we cannot crucify self without first passing through Gethsemane. The minimum requirement of proper biblical Christianity is holiness or 'entire sanctification'. Sanctification means to 'set apart' to reserve for a special purpose (in the case of holiness it means set apart for God's exclusive use). The word entire when attached to sanctification means that everything is set apart in absolute surrender with nothing whatsoever held back. Such a transaction can be summed up in the simple yet profound prayer:

'Thy will not mine be done.'

Jesus referred to this transaction by way of the greatest commandment:

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38)

It is only when the Christian obeys this 'greatest commandment' that they become truly effective and fruitful. Nominal or half hearted Christianity can appear to be relatively successful simply because God in his passion for the lost is sometimes prepared to work in spite of our shortcomings. However it is only when Christians collectively participate in the act of entire sanctification that we experience revival:

- holiness was at the heart of Pentecost,

- holiness was at the heart of 'The Great Awakening',
- holiness was at the heart of the Methodist revival in 18th century England,
- holiness was at the heart of the American revival in the mid 19th century,
- holiness was at the heart of the birth of The Salvation Army (and the global revival its foundation spawned)
- holiness will be at the heart of any future revival!

Personal holiness or entire sanctification like most biblical promises or blessings is conditional. Entire sanctification as its name suggests requires a contribution from both man and God.

What are the conditions which if met will enable God to establish holiness in our lives?

Conviction:

The only people who can possibly hope to complete this transaction are those who are convinced that holiness is both a requirement and a possibility. It may take time for a believer to become convinced that holiness is plausible – it took John Wesley 10 years! However, once a Christian finds they are being badgered by thoughts about holiness they should seek to close the deal as quickly as possible.

Conviction may come in several ways, scripture, the example of others, the history of revival, the lives of the saints etc. Although conviction may have many different routes it only ever has one source. The call to holiness always comes from God.

"Therefore prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 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 Peter 1:13-16)

Holiness is not possible without conviction because conviction comes from God. Like a parent watching their child in a football game God stands at the touchline urging us on – "go on you can do it, you can be holy!" However, unlike a parent watching his child God has a realistic perception of our ability. Conviction happens only when God can see that we are ready to move forward. Conviction is in itself a blessing for it is God verbalising his confidence in us. If we are being convicted to give up sin and to surrender our all then that is because God thinks we are ready to do both! When conviction appears a believer must take advantage as soon as possible, to delay would simply compound the sin we are being encouraged to do away with.

Renunciation.

In Matthew 7: 21-23 we read

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day,

‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

In 1 John 1:15-17 we read

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires will pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever’

In 1 John 2:3-6 we read

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”

It is abundantly clear from the bible that giving up sin and freedom from a constant desire to sin is a basic requirement of Christianity. Holiness must start with a willingness to comprehensively identify and renounce sin. Holiness cannot and will not progress beyond conviction without us making a thorough inventory of those things in our lives that are both sinful and doubtful followed by the giving up of everything identified. Conviction is God's way of pushing us towards renunciation, he wants us to be pure and he is ready to make purity possible.

To fulfil this condition thoroughly will require prayerful attention to detail and a willingness to eradicate even the smallest compromise. Many things once considered sinful by the church have now been relegated to doubtful – for example worldliness. It is only in the last few decades that worldliness has become acceptable in Christian circles. Love of the world and confirmation to its standards is anti-Christian - materialistic consumers will never possess holiness!

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Matthew 6:24)

Our inability (or refusal) to recognise and eradicate even the small compromises (that have all too often become part and parcel of our lives) is the area in the pursuit of holiness where we are most likely to fail. It is always unwise to give examples (for failure to list all things doubtful can generate a false sense of security) nevertheless we should consider surrendering anything that is either non essential to, or a distraction from, our mission (with the exception of those things which are obviously moral such as devoting proper time and resources to our civil, legal and domestic responsibilities)

Be assured that if even the slightest compromise remains un-renounced holiness will not happen. Whilst we may be prepared to rationalise and justify compromise, the spirit of God will hold back until the issue - however small - is resolved.

We must pray the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting"

We must continue to pray this prayer until we can confidently repeat the prayer of David in Psalm 17:3

"Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin."

Charles Finney used to teach that a Christian who surrendered 95% of their lives to God but knowingly held back 5% was in deliberate sin and consequently their salvation was in doubt. We might be tempted to think that Finney is being a bit harsh yet he is only reiterating what Jesus told the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-23

"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. (95%)

"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (100%)

Consecration

The third condition of holiness after conviction and renunciation is consecration.

In Romans 12 we read

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his pleasing and perfect will."

In Romans 6:22 we read

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

In Romans 8:12 we read

"Therefore, brothers we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it."

In Matthew 13:44-46 we read

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

It is crystal clear that the bible requires the entire surrender of our whole being to God. Our 'whole being' comprises our time, money, influence, leisure, ambitions, personality—literally everything that we have and are.

Again whilst it is dangerous to give illustrations (lest something is left out) we should carefully and prayerfully consider how we spend our time and money:

- What kinds of things make us passionate?
- What kinds of thing make us excited?
- What is our number one interest in life?
- What commands most of our attention prayer or television, sport or bible study?
- How much time do we spend on our personal appearance before going to the Army, compared to how much time we spend on preparing ourselves spiritually?

As Paul tells the Corinthians:

"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others... So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved." (Corinthians 10: 23-33)

In our eagerness to surrender all we must remember that 'rest' is a commandment. I am absolutely certain that God made rest a commandment because he knew that our response to Christ would drive us on to extreme commitment. Sabbath rest is essential and placed by God before murder, adultery and theft in his list of commandments. 'Rest' is a command that was not cancelled out by Christ's death, it is a command for our benefit, and a command that we disobey at our absolute peril! The Command to rest is explicit in both the Old and New Testaments. To disobey this command would be 'to disobey a known law of God' and that as Wesley would be quick to point out is sin!

A quote from Railton to at least keep the idea of rest in a Salvationist context!

"But our soldiers must take holiday sometimes perforce; and then they look to the Army to provide them with such holy entertainment as their souls delight in. Services all day long, or, at any rate, during the afternoon, open-air demonstrations, camp-meetings, expeditions to other stations, or to mission some new neighbourhood, watch nights, all nights of prayer, are some of the entertainments to which Army people treat themselves upon extraordinary occasions." (Heathen England Chapter 8)

In summary absolute surrender is not extreme or unreasonable but it is the minimum requirement made by God upon those who dare to call themselves Christian.

Obedient Faith

The final condition of holiness is obedient faith.

"But Purifying Faith sees Jesus Christ to be the altogether lovely, His service to be infinitely desirable, and the privilege of joining with Him in the work of saving and

blessing men so honourable and desirable that the soul controlled by it leaps forward to lay itself at the Master's feet, willing to be used in any way He thinks best, and so gladly offers a consecration which knows no hesitation, has no reservation, the limits of which being only bounded by its ability." (William Booth, *Purity of Heart*.)

If I "Love the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my soul and with my entire mind' then my devotion will be proven by the way I obey the second greatest commandment which is to 'Love my neighbour as myself.'

Whilst renunciation might be complicated obedience is relatively simple, for all the commandments are summed up in these two.

How do I please God?

In John 15:16-17 Jesus says:

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other."

When Jesus reinstated Peter he only had one issue to settle:

"Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." (John 21:16)

Paul tells the Romans:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10)

He also reminds the Corinthians that even spectacular and apparently anointed Christian service without love is nothing.

Love is the hallmark of Christianity:

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

James says:

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:14-17)

It should be remembered, as the old doctrine book says, that "Consecration, although a condition of sanctification, must not be mistaken for sanctification itself. Consecration is

an act done by man before God sanctifies him; sanctification is a work done by God within man after man has done his part.” This is true of all these conditions:

- they originate with God,
- are made possible by God,
- are encouraged by God,
- are empowered by God,
- are realised by God,
- are maintained by God.

The outcome of holiness

“In short, to be pure in soul; signifies deliverance from all and everything which the Lord shows you to be opposed to His Holy Will. It means that you not only possess the ability to live the kind of life that He desires, but that you actually do live it.” (William Booth, *Purity of Heart*.)

Entirely sanctified people will sense an immediate and practical benefit within their lives which will include:

- Perfect inward peace— as their will is perfectly surrendered to God’s there will be no cause for inner conflict.
- perfect happiness and joy – man’s ideal goal is to do God’s will and will therefore deliver maximum happiness – our ‘joy will be complete’
- An unshakeable belief that ‘all things’ are working ‘together for good’, a constant trust in God.
- A willingness (even an eagerness) to suffer anything and everything that comes our way as a result of obedience to God’s will.
- Perfect love for God and humanity
- Fruit – holiness makes us effective in ministry
- Devotion to God’s service that leaves no room for selfish ambition or worldly pleasure.
- The complete eradication of the desire to sin.

It should be noted that the last of these bullet points is the one that most people stumble over perhaps because they feel it delivers a level of expectation that they can’t meet. Remember holiness is about what God does through us and not about what we do for him. If we follow the conditions set out above there will be no room for sin in our lives.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:7-8)

Sin requires resources – if all of my resources are ‘set apart’ exclusively for God’s use then I do not have any resources with which to sin. In addition if my renunciation and consecration is motivated by love then I will have no desire to sin. My only desire will

be to please God. Add to this the immeasurable grace of God and the unlimited power of God and the transforming nature of the new covenant and it is the thought of disobedience that seems farfetched.

In Summary

- Holiness is both possible and essential ('without holiness none shall see the Lord!')
- Holiness makes Christians fruitful and effective
- Holiness leads to revival
- Holiness is conditional upon
 - Conviction
 - Renunciation of all that is sinful *and* doubtful
 - Consecration (absolute surrender)
 - Obedient faith
- Holiness is the work of God not man
- Holiness brings about complete and instant deliverance from sin (Holy people **do not** sin)
- A holy life is exemplified by a love for God expresses in practical love for others

When Kate Booth was asked the secret of her power she answered "First, it is love; second, love; third, love. And if you ask me how to get it, I answer first, by sacrifice; second, by sacrifice; third, by sacrifice." One would be hard pressed to find a more concise definition of holiness.

Finally, if the above conditions are met then holiness can and should be instant. If you are reading this because you have been beset with thoughts about holiness then **now** is the time to make the sacrifice and claim the blessing. Why be continually pestered by the hampering annoyance of habitual sin when you can be free? Why waste another moment on pretend Christianity? Why not go for the real thing now?

"My Comrades, I want to ask you the question, When shall this Purity come into your hearts? Do you say tomorrow? I answer, "Perhaps it may be tomorrow. I do not know whether it may." Do you say, "When I am dying"? I answer, "Perhaps it may be when you are dying, but I do not know whether it will be possible then." Do you say NOW? I answer "YES, IT CAN BE NOW," for "Now is the accepted time, and **Now is the day of Salvation.**" (William Booth, *Purity of Heart*.)

"O thou God of every nation,
We now for thy blessing call;
Fit us for full consecration,
Let the fire from Heaven fall.
Bless our Army! Bless our Army!
With thy power baptize us all.
Fill us with thy Holy Spirit;
Make our soldiers white as snow;

Save the world through Jesus' merit,
Satan's kingdom overthrow.
Bless our Army! Bless our Army!
Send us where we ought to go.

Give us all more holy living,
Fill us with abundant power;
Give the Army more thanksgiving,
Greater victories every hour.
Bless our Army! Bless our Army!
Be our rock, our shield, our tower.
Bless our General, bless our leaders,
Bless our officers as well.
Bless our converts, bless our soldiers;
Speed the war 'gainst sin and Hell.
Bless our Army! Bless our Army!
We will all thy goodness tell.

If you would like to discuss holiness in more depth or even better would like to be led into the blessing then please email me at abale@ntlworld.com and by God's grace you will discover the most liberating and empowering experience that God has to offer his children.

Yours thoroughly set apart by Christ, for the lost, in the Army