

# < Call to Holiness >

**We call Salvationists worldwide to restate and live out the doctrine of holiness in all its dimensions –personal, relational, social and political – in the context of our cultures and in the idioms of our day while allowing for, and indeed prizing, such diversity of experience and expression as is in accord with the Scriptures.**

We affirm that God continues to desire and to command that his people be holy. For this Christ died, for this Christ rose again, for this the Spirit was given. We therefore determine to claim as God's gracious gift that holiness which is ours in Christ. We confess that at times we have failed to realize the practical consequences of the call to holiness within our relationships, within our communities and within our Movement. We resolve to make every effort to embrace holiness of life, knowing that this is only possible by means of the power of the Holy Spirit producing his fruit in us.

THE Army's tenth doctrine boldly declares: 'We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless till the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The doctrine is a direct quotation from 1 Thessalonians 5:23. In the Hebrew language, words used to describe the holiness of God speak of him as being 'set apart'. In the Greek New Testament the words *hagios* or *haggiasmos* have the same religious meaning: the separateness of God. There was no holiness apart from God. People or things only became holy when they participated in the life of God. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is presented as a model of the selfless and devoted life, and the work of Jesus and his Spirit are the means by which the Church and the individual are sanctified. Most of Paul's references to holiness or sanctification have a specific moral application.

Following Wesley's emphasis of the doctrine of holiness, William Booth made it a 'fundamental truth' of The Salvation Army. 'It stands in the front rank of our doctrines,' he said. 'We inscribe it upon our banners. Any officer who did not hold and proclaim the ability of Jesus Christ to save his people to the uttermost from sin and sinning, I should consider out of place amongst us' (1880).

Commissioner Samuel Logan Brengle wrote and preached prolifically on holiness. In 'The Holiness Standard of The Salvation Army' (which is included in Commissioner John Waldron's anthology *The Privilege of all Believers*) he wrote: 'It is this holiness – the doctrines, the experience, the action – that we Salvationists must maintain, else we shall betray our trust; we shall lose our birthright; we shall cease to be a spiritual power in the earth; we shall have a name to live and yet be dead; our glory will depart; and we, like Samson shorn of his locks, shall become as other men.' In this statement of belief in holy living there was a warning to recognize what could happen to the Army if holiness were to be neglected.

Brengle's prophetic words speak of the need for doctrine and experience to go hand in hand: 'Without the doctrine, the standard, the teaching, we shall never find the experience, or having found it, we shall be likely to lose it. Without the experience we shall neglect the teaching, we shall doubt or despise the doctrine, we shall lower the standard.' The Army's holiness meetings have highlighted the integral part this doctrine has played in the lives of its soldiers through the years. In countries the world over, Sunday morning holiness meetings have marked the call to worship for Salvationists, but Brengle has more to say: 'When officers lose the experience, the holiness meetings languish, and when they languish, the spiritual life of the corps droops and falls, and all manner of substitutes and expedients are introduced to cover up the ghastly facts of spiritual loss, disease and death.'

Phil Needham reminds us that holiness encompasses all the attributes of God, including his love. 'A true holiness meeting is grounded in who God the Holy One is, and invites his people to respond to him by becoming like him, and living as his holy people in the world.' He continues: 'In the presence of God we see ourselves for who we really are and the values by which we live, for what they really are. There is no room for deception, no allowance for escapism. The holiness of God invites us to look honestly at our lives, to see where transformation is needed, and by his sanctifying grace actually to make those changes.'

The importance of teaching holiness is outlined in *Orders and Regulations for Officers of The Salvation Army (Volume II)*: 'It is the responsibility of an officer to teach holiness intelligently yet simply. He should not bewilder his people with theological terms which they cannot understand, but use every opportunity, as God shall help him, to lead them to yield their forgiven lives completely to the will of God so that his Spirit may possess them fully.'

To assist understanding of holiness, its nature and outworking, libraries of songs have been written. Countless Salvationists have best understood their holiness doctrine through songs. Major Cecil Waters (R), speaking at William Booth College, London, reasoned: 'I suspect that *pro-rata* more Salvationists own a song book than do Christians of other persuasions their hymnaries. Our song book has long been seen as an essential aid to our devotion, and indeed our spiritual progress.'

Holiness songs have played a defining role in the life of Salvationists everywhere, some songs having been penned by Salvationists and some borrowed from other Christian poets. Charles Wesley's songs clearly and challengingly point us to the essence of holiness:

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart,  
Come quickly from above;  
Write thy new name upon my heart,  
Thy new best name of love.

General Frederick Cou tts has described holiness as 'Christlikeness' – seeking to be like Christ, growing in him and he in us. In *Essentials of Christian Experience*, he wrote: 'Christlikeness is holiness. Where Christ is enthroned, there is holiness. Yet holiness is never an "imitation" of Christ, if by that is meant a self-conscious external patterning. Christian holiness will spring from the inward possession of that same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus. . . The blessing of holiness is never an "it". No one should say: "I've got it!", for the experience is personal and the source of the experience is personal. . . The work of the Spirit was perfectly exemplified in Jesus and he can make us like him, not through any outward conformity but by the workings of inward grace.' Salvationist songwriter Lieut-Colonel Colin Fairclough describes the hope as a prayer:

Christ of Glory, Prince of Peace,  
Let thy life in mine increase;  
Though I live may it be shown  
'Tis thy life and not my own.  
Dwell within, that men may see  
Christ, the living Christ, in me.

Leslie Taylor-Hunt's much-used song reveals a prayer which has motivated so much selfless Salvation Army service:

Give me a holy life,  
Spotless and free,  
Cleansed by the crystal flow  
Coming from thee.  
Purge the dark halls of thought,  
Here let thy work be wrought,  
Each wish and feeling brought  
Captive to thee.

Through the years the terms 'sinless perfection' and 'Christian perfection' have been used to describe the holy life, not always with success and sometimes creating confusion. John Wesley went to great lengths at the 1759 Methodist Conference to define 'Christian perfection', which he read as being synonymous with 'entire sanctification' or 'holiness'. The stated definition was 'loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength'. It continued: 'This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are covered by pure love.'

In *Earthen Vessels* Lt. Colonel Milton Agnew summed the matter up this way: 'Man's perfection lies not in accomplishment, but in spirit; not in performance, but in purpose. It is to Christian perfection that God calls us, not to sinless perfection. Sinless perfection says that one is not able to sin. Christian perfection declares that he is able not to sin. And therein lies a world of difference. Sinless perfection would lift a person out of the world of reality, out of his normal human nature, out of a world of decision and responsibility. That God would never do. But the ability both to sin and not to sin puts upon the believer a challenging responsibility of choice, together with a divinely given provision.'

Helpful or unhelpful as definitions may be, the call to holiness in all its dimensions reminds us that the holy life necessarily involves personal, relational, social and political attitudes. The experience of holiness isn't merely a very blessed spiritual feeling on a Sunday morning. If it is anything at all, it has its outworking in everyday life, seven days a week. Holiness demands that we get our hands dirty while asking God to keep our hearts clean. It must make a defining difference as to how we live and to the people we are.

It shouldn't be overlooked that holiness is linked with wholeness and health. Writing in *Health, Healing and Wholeness*, Phil Needham says: 'If we, the Church, are to have a mission in the world that facilitates real healing, we must have a ministry to ourselves which brings us toward wholeness . . . In order to do this, we must pay attention to that which keeps the Church from health.'

Wholeness is an expression of holiness. In response to the example and command of Christ, and the presence and prompting of his Spirit, we are called to wholeness in all areas of life. We are called to so live that body, mind and soul are dedicated to God.

At the risk of stating the obvious, holiness of life does not occur by accident. This gracious gift is not received by those who fail to seek it, or by those who are casual about their own spirituality. Jesus told his disciples that those who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' would be filled, not those who simply take

what comes along. This is why the Commission looks to Salvationists everywhere to ‘resolve to make every effort to embrace holiness of life, knowing that this is only possible by means of the power of the Holy Spirit producing his fruit in us’.

When research was undertaken among Salvationists to ascertain which aspects of our life together were felt to be integral to the life of the Army, holiness was emphasized again and again. Acceptance of a spiritual ‘second best’ is not worthy of Christ’s followers. It doesn’t work. It isn’t satisfying.

Writing to the Romans, the apostle Paul urges his fellow Christians to offer their bodies as living sacrifices ‘holy and pleasing to God’ (12:1). He warns against conforming to the pattern of the world and urges transformation by allowing God to renew our thinking. As the chapter proceeds he highlights some of the practical outworking of the Christian life. It will not be easy. It will not necessarily come naturally. But it is the only way to ensure that evil is overcome. There is no sitting on the fence, no compromise. ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’ (v 21). Be holy!

## ❖ Questions

1. What makes God’s people holy?
2. What are the personal practical implications of embracing holiness of life?
3. What are the practical implications for our corps of embracing holiness of life?
4. How can we ensure that holiness teaching is given its needful place in our corps?

## ❖ *Scripture to read:*

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, Romans 12:1-21, Ephesians 1:4, Hebrews 12:10, 1 Peter 1:16