



MAJOR GEOFF WEBB
DIVISIONAL COMMANDER, WESTERN VICTORIA DIVISION
AUSTRALIA SOUTHERN TERRITORY

IT'S THE WORK OF A MOMENT, IT'S THE WORK OF A LIFETIME

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 10]

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 unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*It's the work of a moment,
It's the work of a lifetime,
It begins in an instant,
It may take eternity,
But the work of the Spirit,
Of the world changing Spirit,
Can begin at this moment in me, in me!*
(From *Glory*, a musical by John Gowans and John Larsson)

IN THIS Gowans/Larsson song, the writer maintains creative tension between contrasting aspects of holiness. In the Army, we have sometimes wrestled with varying understandings, with many writers contributing helpfully to holiness teaching – each seeking to bring clarity within the context and language of their own time.

Holiness theology developed along differing lines in the North American context from that of Europe. Consequently, there have sometimes been debates around various concepts: Crisis or process? Purity or maturity? Brengle or Coutts? Some key 'themes' within Army

holiness teaching may also have fuelled controversy. Among such themes are those of holiness as *the blessing of a clean heart*, as *growth in Christlikeness*, and as *perfect love*.

THE BLESSING OF A CLEAN HEART

Holiness as *the blessing of a clean heart* is often considered to be 'purity' teaching and associated most closely with 'crisis' (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The instantaneous element encompasses two 'crisis' moments that are restorative in focus:

1. *Justification* – restoring the relationship with God and the believer.
2. *Entire sanctification* – restoring the image of God within the believer.

But the concept of 'second-ness' or 'subsequent-ness' has frequently proven to be a more contentious element within holiness theology. There would appear to be two reasons for this: firstly, the tendency to elevate experience above Scripture as determinative ('If I cannot identify such a crisis in my life, maybe it doesn't exist'); secondly, the problem of 'the language of crisis' itself ('If it is a crisis, it must be dramatic').

GROWTH IN CHRISTLIKENESS

Holiness as *growth in Christlikeness* is often considered 'maturity' teaching associated with 'process' (2 Corinthians 3:18). But this could appear to be like being on a spiritual escalator that moves us inevitably to our destination. Maturity teaching might also suggest that holiness is only attainable for those who have been on the spiritual escalator long enough.

PERFECT LOVE

Holiness as *perfect love* was connected with Jesus' call for us to be perfect (Matthew 5:48) in the context of:

- loving God supremely,
- loving others sacrificially, and
- loving ourselves sincerely (Matthew 22:37-39).

But 'perfect' is often taken to be absolute, and how can anyone be perfect? The New Testament concept of 'perfect' (*telos*) relates more to 'fulfilling its intended purpose' – much like a rosebud may not be absolutely perfect (if viewed under a microscope), but is perfect if a man presents it to his sweetheart indicating his love.

WHOLLY SANCTIFIED

To further complicate matters, a problem presented itself in the mid-20th century: holiness teachers defined sin more narrowly, while the understanding of 'infirmities' – the expression of our human frailties – was broadened. This was important, because if infirmities were considered to be sin, then clearly it was not possible for us to be wholly sanctified, or be kept blameless, in this life. There was a growing realisation, however, that there was an apparent distance between the promise contained within entire sanctification and the actual experience of those who claimed to have received it.

Given the confusion, it is perhaps unsurprising that article 10 became neglected by some, and became the source of tension for others. Are there ways to overcome the differences? How can we understand the concept

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * HOW HAS HOLINESS BEEN DESCRIBED AND EXPLAINED IN YOUR PART OF THE WORLD, OR HAS IT BEEN LARGELY IGNORED?
- * WHICH OF THE HOLINESS THEMES (CLEAN HEART, CHRISTLIKENESS, PERFECT LOVE) HAS BEEN EMPHASISED MORE?
- * HOW MIGHT THE CONCEPT OF 'QUANTA OF HOLINESS' RELATE TO HOLY LIVING INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY?

of being 'wholly sanctified' and being kept *blameless*? The following are some tentative ways forward that will hopefully prompt further discussion.

Holiness could be defined as a work of grace that operates instantaneously (the work of a moment), progressively (the work of a lifetime), and synergistically (a dynamic relationship of cooperation with God who provides the grace needed for holy living). While debate has often centred on the first two, we have not always focused much on the third aspect.

GRACE-MOMENTS AND GRACE-WORK

Part of a possible solution was tentatively suggested by Major Kalie Webb (in Carolyn Knaggs's *In Her Own Words: Candid Conversations on Holy Living*), where she redefined 'crisis' as 'grace-moments' operating within a larger 'grace-work' ('process'). With such terms, progressive and instantaneous elements are embedded within the element of cooperation with God's grace.

The grace-moment associated with being wholly sanctified is intended to give us clean hearts and a life of victory over sin. General Coutts reminded us that 'if this short and simple sentence, "Whosoever abides in him sins not" (1 John 3:6) means anything at all, it means that we are intended to enjoy a life of victory ... [and] continually sinning and repenting is no more normal spiritually than a life of falling ill and getting well again is normal physically' (*The Splendour of Holiness*). However, grace-moments are not necessarily emotionally vivid – they may be moments of quiet dedication that may not be readily recalled subsequently.

But how do grace-moments connect within the larger grace-work? The following analogy may be helpful.

Early in the 20th century, Einstein had explained the photoelectric effect – that light travelled as discrete bundles of energy. Thus light is not continuous, but comes as a stream of elementary particles (quanta) that behave as *both* particles and waves.

QUANTA OF HOLINESS

What if the grace-work of God in the life of a Christian is not simply a continuous process? What if that which appears to be continuous, is actually comprised of a 'stream' of discrete grace-moments? Each discrete grace-moment could be considered a 'quantum of holiness' involving an intervention of God and our cooperative response in grace-enabled obedience. Growth within the grace-work exists only within the continuous stream of quanta of holiness. This returns holiness to the concept of a work of grace operating progressively, instantaneously and synergistically.

In *Authentic "Fair Dinkum" Holiness for Ordinary Christians* (Geoff and Kalie Webb), a habit-track diagram illustrates the possibility of choice when faced with temptation. What is not mentioned there is that people who have been overtaken in significant sin can usually not only identify the triggers, but also can discern where the Spirit of God was at work. There is a kind of 'circuit-breaker' moment of clarity when the Spirit makes the person aware that they are about to embark on a 'slippery slope'; and that, had they responded differently in that circuit-breaker moment, they might not have succumbed to the temptation.

The circuit-breaker moment could be considered as one type of 'quantum of holiness'. John Larsson (*Spiritual Breakthrough*) helpfully describes a variety of moments of spiritual breakthrough, which he categorises

as moments of feeling, perception and reception. Perhaps there needs to be careful consideration given to other types of 'quanta of holiness'.

Each quantum of holiness operating within God's grace-work builds incrementally toward the full renewal of the image of God within the individual; at which point the person can be free from 'besetting sins' – the habitual patterns that result in repeated failure – but can experience victory over temptation, and growth in conformity to Christ. The grace-moment of entire sanctification may be theologically normative, but it may not be experientially distinguished from other grace-moments.

The concept of 'quanta of holiness' relates not only to individuals but to holy living in community, and how we operate corporately. Corporate holiness is an area that has not been widely discussed in the Army (although see Geoff Webb, Rowan Castle and Stephen Court, *Holiness Incorporated: Living and Working Beyond Corporate Integrity*). It is a dimension of holiness that needs further discussion.

The key to holy living involves continued growth in the fullness of salvation, which depends on continued grace-moments of obedient faith in Christ expressed in response to, and cooperation with, divine interventions of grace. It is therefore possible to experience the blessing of a clean heart, growing in Christlikeness expressed in quanta of holiness in which we show perfect love to God, others and ourselves.