

Holiness and the World

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The Wesleyan Church

Personal Holiness and Global Holiness belong together. (N.T. Wright)

There are two elements of Holiness that are necessary for lasting transformation personally and globally. I am inviting you to sing a few lines of some hymns, gospel songs and those more recently written. In this I am sure you will be able to detect the key words.

(Sing songs regarding Pure in Heart) *I will ask the audience to “name the word”* ---- Pure in Heart will then be placed on the screen.
(Sing songs regarding Power) *I will ask the audience to “name the word”*
– Power will then be placed on the screen.

Pure in Heart

Jesus said – “Blessed are the Pure in Heart for they shall see God .” There is the initial cleansing when the Holy Spirit comes in fullness - but as we live in the immediate presence of God he continues to reveal new things that bring repentance for more purity and more of the spirit. This is growth.

John says it well --- “As we walk in the Light as He is in the Light we have fellowship with one another and blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

Steve Brown a successful businessman and WHI board member recently exemplified the issues of allowing God to shine light on his heart for further purity and being God's person in the global context. He writes in a recent publication of World Hope.

Though I come from a modest background and try to live a life that demonstrates my faith in Christ – it is all too easy for me to get caught up in the lies of self-importance that our society bestows upon people who have succeeded in business.

For my work, I travel internationally; I enjoy effortless transition from business class flights to 5 star hotels. Everyone seems eager to assist me and is very interested in what I say. I know this is an executive bubble and that there is a real world that isn't so comfortable. In fact, I know that the real world teems with people suffering absolute poverty. I also know that Christ has commanded that we share his compassion for the poor, to transform our thoughts and desires from ourselves to them. The question is, how can I make it not about me? How can I gain an understanding of the world in which the poor exist and to really make a difference for them?

As we walk with God we have his eyes and see the suffering world through those eyes - He changes our desires - (Personal experience in Ethiopia)

Perhaps one of the reasons preaching and teaching on heart purity has declined in the last quarter century has been some of the resulting diversions.

- Obsessive introspection that brings a paralysis of action
- A criteria determined beyond scripture of what heart purity “looks like” thereby resulting in legalism and judgmentalism.

A recent by-product regarding heart purity has been much teaching on sexual purity. But sexual purity cannot exist without heart purity. Recently in our HIV/AIDS prevention work in Southern Africa the youth have said “This is more than just abstaining from sex outside of marriage – we want to live Holy Lives.’

At Pentecost the images of fire reflected the cleansing – the new life – The beginning of the church - God's people gathered!!

Holiness is POWER for Redemption personally and globally

Peter preaching at Pentecost with boldness and courage is an immediate result of the prophetic words of Jesus when he told his disciples.. “Greater things will you do because I go to the Father.” (John 14:12) Prior to Pentecost Peter was paralyzed in his starts and stops.

(Example – Washington Times reporter)

If power is not connected with heart purity – there is disaster personally and for entire nations. We have many examples in scripture, history and contemporary society both within and without the church. This is the only way we can experience the results of Jesus’ prayer in John 17 – “ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

Jesus’ message was not a theocratic Christendom, it was a different kind of revolution in which the power of God is demonstrated through weakness, love, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The kingdom operates subversively and sacrificially – not through power and prestige.

In John Wesley’s sermon entitled “ The Way of Salvation” he states that justification leads naturally and necessarily in this life to sanctification – to doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8) Sanctification has corporate and social dimensions thereby becoming part of the church with a mission to overcome the unholiness, alienation and hopelessness of the present world.

In 1968 at the merging General Conference of The Wesleyan Church ---the United States was experiencing significant social crises – - Martin Luther King Jr. had been murdered, Robert Kennedy then murdered – Our cities burned – Racism was flagrant – we were tangled in an unpopular war in Southeast Asia – Youth were desperately turning to drugs because of hopelessness - Africa was emerging from colonialism and all the issues that arose with that – Radical Liberation Theology was making its statements of revolution in Latin America - The Cold War was dividing the world –

Dangerous nuclear build-up was beginning Yet at our merging conference we were buried in our constitutions and made no reference to the world around us. Before his recent death, Dr Virgil Mitchell, Church Statesman and former General Supt. was challenged by this omission from a student doing research -- – Dr. Mitchell in his ever learning spirit recognized the omission and said with great passion, “may God forgive us and may we never be that removed from society again.”

The 21st Century world desperately needs purity and power... the hope of life before death...God’s future kingdom invading the present. Wesley emphasized that the Holy Spirit is the bond of unity in the church – as we draw near to God, we draw near to one another. Resulting in God’s sanctifying love that moves us out to the world.

Many times God’s power looks impotent in the face of worldly power!! But the power of God works in a totally different realm.

Nearly 2 decades ago we witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolizing freedom to millions of oppressed. A few years prior to this time an acquaintance of mine visited Moscow and went to one of the large Russian Orthodox churches – here he joined 5 babushkas (old women). Their wrinkled skin reflected the difficult life they were experiencing. He asked them why they were even bothering to come to pray with the resistance all around. With cheerful spirits they responded, “ We believe in a God who has power to deliver us from evil.” He continued to pray with them but as he left and made his way to Red Square – their praying seemed hopeless. The display of worldly power overwhelmed him to the point of any thread of faith and hope he had vanished. Then he sensed God almost laughing and said to him, “ Don’t you think I have the power to deliver these people through 5 old women?”

On the night of the Soviet crackdown in Poland , December 11, 1981 it is reported that Lech Walesa cried into the teeth of the tanks: “ Right at this moment you have lost; the last nails are being driven into your coffin.”

We have all admired William Wilberforce and Hannah Moore for their courage to fight the slave trade – they are excellent models of purity and the power of God to overcome evil and oppression.

Today billions are crying for release from evil.

I believe one of the most difficult areas in our global community in which to overcome evil is that of consumerism and selfishness...fulfilling personal pleasure and gain at any cost.

We see this resulting in

- 1.1 billion who have never heard the name of Jesus,
- human trafficking, (27 million slaves in the world today)
- rebel wars,
- economic inequities, (3 billion living on less than \$2 a day) Recently World Bank President Robert Zoellick said, “ While many are worrying about filling their gas tanks, many others around the world are struggling to fill their stomachs.”
- abortion,
- same-sex marriage,
- HIV/AIDS (14 million AIDS orphans)
- racism,
- tribalism,
- pornography in all its forms – print, internet, film etc. ,
- domestic violence ,
- drug and alcohol abuse and the list goes on –

sheer hopelessness – nothing to live for.

The recent barrage of books extolling atheism represents this emptiness.

Many of you sitting here tonight from the developing world do not need to be informed – you are living some of these statistics.

(Example – Michael Pepe case)

Isaac Mwase a Biblical Scholar from Zimbabwe observes. “ Churches in both the developed and developing world need to take seriously Jesus’ prayer that they may be one. What is needed is a way of partnering across cultural and economic differences that affirms Christian solidarity, the interdependency of the Body of Christ. “

Recently, there have been books and articles written by policy people regarding the need for the church to intervene in these issues. Here the secular intellectuals of our world are seeing something that is beyond their comprehension but also a hope they are ready to engage. Walter Russell Meade (Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations) wrote a compelling article in Sept. 2006 Foreign Affairs Journal. In this article he argues that thoughtful Evangelicals are “ likely to provide something now sadly lacking in the world of U.S. Foreign Policy.” He goes on to discuss how Evangelicals realize we are in a fallen world and yet have optimism for redemption.

Would not the power of Holiness with pure hearts be welcomed at these tables?

The power of Holiness lived through God’s people has been at the tables as well as the streets in the past. It was said of Catherine Booth that she lobbied Queen Victoria on behalf of the poor and would also walk the streets with the poor.

The Resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of the New Creation of victory over sin and death and continues through us.

Jesus’ resurrection calls us to dangerous and difficult tasks on earth and the power of Holiness gives us the necessary tools for the task.

We cannot leave the world as it is and allow evil to proceed unchecked.

May it be said of The Wesleyan Church of the 21st century – they plunged into the world, restoring God’s Kingdom and were kept from the evil one.

