

PHOEBE PALMER

AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENTECOSTAL PNEUMATOLOGY

by Charles Edward White

Note: Do not be confused. Neither Palmer nor Wesley were ever baptized in the Spirit as we are. This phenomenon did not re-emerge until Azusa Street in 1910, but Palmer used the same words to refer to a rare work of grace that they did both enjoy: entire sanctification.

More than one hundred million of the world's one billion Christians call themselves "Pentecostals" or "charismatics."¹ Most of them share the belief that believers should experience a work of grace subsequent to justification in which they receive a baptism of the Holy Spirit similar to the experience of the first Christians on the day of Pentecost. This Spirit baptism cleanses their hearts from sin and empowers them to witness.² Although many Pentecostals feel that their pneumatology arose simply from an unbiased reading of the Bible, others see a more complex combination of causes. Historians of doctrine generally agree that the origin of modern Pentecostal teaching about the Holy Spirit lies in the thinking of John Wesley, but they do not agree on the process by which his thought was transformed into it.³ One universally neglected area is the influence of Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist laywoman. Mrs. Palmer's speaking and writing played a decisive role in that transformation and thus make her arguably the most influential female theologian in Christian history.

Phoebe Palmer was born in New York City in 1807 and died there in 1874. Besides her contributions as a theologian, she also significantly influenced the course of American religion as a revivalist, feminist, and humanitarian.⁴ As a theologian she provided the link between John Wesley and the Pentecostals by modifying (ie: twisting into a dysfunctional shape) his theology of Christian perfection.

Phoebe Palmer simplified and popularized John Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification, modifying it in six different ways.

- First, she followed John Fletcher in his identification of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- Second, she developed Adam Clarke's suggestion and linked holiness with power.
- Third, like Clarke, she stressed the instantaneous elements of sanctification to the exclusion of the gradual.
- Fourth, again following Clarke, she taught that entire sanctification is not really the goal of the Christian life, but rather its beginning.
- Fifth, through her "altar theology" she reduced the attainment of sanctification to a simple three-stage process of entire consecration, faith, and testimony.
- Sixth, she held that one needed no evidence other than the Biblical text to be assured of entire sanctification.

Each of these changes was later incorporated into the pneumatology of the Pentecostal movement.

The How Her Ideas Were Popularized

Although Phoebe Palmer did not think of herself as a theologian, the eighteen books she published and the "Guide to Holiness", which she edited from 1864 to 1874, constantly expounded her theological ideas. Some male Methodist leaders refused to take her seriously as a theologian, but to the bishops, professors, and editors who came to weekly meetings in her home, to the thirty-seven thousand who subscribed to her magazine, and to the hundreds of thousands who read her books, she was an important teacher of theological truth.⁵

Like John Wesley, Phoebe Palmer taught that entire sanctification is a second distinct work of grace in which God cleanses the believer's heart of sin, and fills it wholly with His love. Such heart holiness is a requirement for entry into heaven. Because God commands it, He must also supply the ability to attain it, and He gives that ability in response to the Christian's faith.⁶

John Fletcher, Wesley's lieutenant, was the first theologian to **erroneously** equate the experience of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost.⁷ Phoebe Palmer adopted this identification and in her first theological book compared the instantaneous sanctification of a friend to the events of Pentecost, and added "many others were baptized as suddenly at the same time [as he was]."⁸ This **confusing** idea continued to occur in her other early works, and received fuller explanation in "Promise of the Father", published one year after the revival of 1857-58.⁹ Even before the revival, Phoebe Palmer urged her hearers at a camp meeting to receive the "Pentecostal baptism."¹⁰ With the coming of the revival, the frequency of Mrs. Palmer's use of Pentecostal language began to increase. *During a four-year trip to promote the revival in England, (during which time she encouraged a certain young lady towards ministry -Mrs. Catherine Booth)* Mrs. Palmer and her husband developed an order of service based on Pentecost which later became their standard pattern. They would start by leading a hymn about Pentecost, then have Dr. Palmer read and comment upon Acts 2. Next Mrs. Palmer would exhort those present to be baptized with "an inward baptism of pure fire." Those wishing to receive the blessing would then come forward for a prayer service around the altar, after which they would be urged to bear testimony about what the Lord had done for them.¹¹

Not only did Mrs. Palmer begin to preach more about Pentecost after the beginning of the revival of 1857-58, but she also began to report the results of her meetings in Pentecostal terms. She reported the results of her first week in Hamilton, Ontario not by listing the number of saved and sanctified, but by saying "twenty-one souls were blessed with pardon, and several others, I trust with the full baptism of the Holy Ghost." She went on to equate the revival with Pentecost itself: "It is that which was foretold by the prophet Joel, and of which the apostle Peter spoke, . . . furnishing a marked demonstration that the same power still continues in the church that was in the apostolic church...."¹² Her use of Pentecostal language characterized her reports from England, and continued after she returned to America.¹³

Donald Dayton has pointed out that the revival of 1857-58 led to an increased interest in Pentecost in the whole Evangelical movement; Mrs. Palmer's increasing use of Pentecostal language was paralleled by the practice of Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and other Methodists.¹⁴ He attributes the shift to *a variety of cultural and theological factors*. Most persuasive of his cultural arguments is his observation that the culture of the late 1850s was not as optimistic as the culture of the late 1830s had been. Immigration, urbanization, and industrialization made American society more complex, and the powers of evil, especially that of slavery, seemed more deeply entrenched than ever. Perfectionistic language (from Wesley) was optimistic and future-oriented. It looked forward to the day when humans, by obeying God perfectly, would usher in the new age. It seemed appropriate in the heyday of Jacksonian democracy, when everyone was founding a utopia. With the dissolution of the cultural supports for the language of Christian perfection, those who held the doctrine were open to a new way to express their belief. Unlike the forward-looking perfectionist language, Pentecostal language looked back. It called to mind a time when God had miraculously intervened to give His followers purity and power, and then enabled them to turn the world upside down. Such restorationist language was more suited to a time when people felt powerless in the face of complex social problems and institutionalized evil.¹⁵

Besides this cultural reason for a shift to Pentecostal imagery, Dayton has also suggested a theological reason. As an interest in holiness spread beyond the Methodists, it became easier to present the doctrine in Pentecostal terms than in perfectionistic. Perfectionistic language had always been subject to misunderstanding: John Wesley himself felt constrained to spend almost as much time explaining what Christian perfection was not as he did explaining what it was.¹⁶

This confusion that Wesley faced is still here today. People still want the blameless souls find in His Rest to equate with "absolute perfection", when it cannot. The man God calls blameless will always have things he needs to learn. He is still human, even though he stays far from further sin! Earnest Seeker

Perfectionism was particularly distasteful to those in the Reformed tradition because Luther and Calvin had explicitly taught that no one achieves perfection in this life. Thus when speaking among their spiritual heirs, it was helpful to adopt another vocabulary. In addition to this longstanding aversion to speaking of perfection, recent American events had placed the word in even worse odor. In 1848 John Humphrey Noyes moved his "community" to Oneida, New York. Its well-publicized activities in the name of perfectionism caused the word to stand for heterodoxy, communism, and adultery. In order to avoid confusion, another term was expedient.¹⁷

It is possible that there was another factor in Phoebe Palmer's increasing use of Pentecostal language. In 1856 an English Methodist, William Arthur, published a book in New York called "The Tongue of Fire"; or "The True Power of Christianity". In this immensely popular book, Arthur hints at the equation of entire sanctification with the Pentecost experience, and states that if Christians would allow themselves to be baptized in the Holy Ghost the whole world could be won for Christ.¹⁸ Because this latter idea appears in Mrs. Palmer's writings after 1856, it is possible she was influenced by Arthur's work.¹⁹

The Idea Develops

An even more likely cause of Phoebe Palmer's increasing use of Pentecostal language was her study of Acts 2 in preparation for her book on women in the church. In December of 1856 she realized that the baptism of the Spirit given at Pentecost empowered and impelled its recipients to speak for Christ. Realizing that the Spirit was poured out on women as well as men, she came to see that women had the power and obligation to testify about the Lord. Over the next two years she developed this insight into a *four-hundred-page book*. These were the years of the revival, and the years in which she began to speak more frequently about Pentecost. Evidently her own study of Scripture combined with the external influences to lead her to a greater use of Pentecostal terminology.²⁰

Closely tied to Pentecostal imagery is the linkage of entire sanctification with divine power. The Scriptural account of the events previous to Pentecost equates "power from on high" with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. John Fletcher noticed this connection, but did not develop its significance. In listing nine benefits of entire sanctification, he never mentioned a greater influx of God's power.²¹ Adam Clarke devoted one sentence to the idea, but Phoebe Palmer made it a central element of her teaching.²²

Even prior to her increasing use of Pentecostal language, Mrs. Palmer had understood the connection between entire sanctification and energy in the Lord's service. Those who have been sanctified need not worry about their internal state, but may give themselves wholly to the Lord's service.

This is true. Not only have the inward parts been made to be entirely in harmony with one another, but also in supernatural harmony with their always active Maker. Now no more prayers need to be spent on your own inward state. Earnest Seeker

This message became more explicit after Mrs. Palmer adopted Pentecostal imagery; she often declared, "Holiness is power."²³ She went on to say that entire sanctification was "the promised ordination of power" and that "heart holiness and the gift of power should ever be regarded as identical."²⁴ She told ministers that holiness was exactly the power needed "to raise low churches," and blamed their failures on a lack of sanctification. What Peter accomplished for the Lord in five hours after Pentecost would probably have taken him five years without the baptism, she averred.²⁵

I would debate the above paragraph, since it is not consistent with the previous one. His Rest certainly fits us to easily obtain and to steward His power as a worthy servant. But being capable is not synonymous with being endued. The servant must still ask -and not all sanctified souls know to ask for power; and after the asking He still must do the enduing! The "gift of power" is often linked with His Rest, but it is not "identical". That would be incorrect. Earnest Seeker

Once again historical events and cultural factors may have played a role in Phoebe Palmer's increasing emphasis on the connection between holiness and power. The event was the revival. Mrs. Palmer believed that God had released His Pentecostal power in the revival because Christians had been seeking holiness: wherever she went preaching holiness she saw **the power (of souls transformed by entire sanctification) poured out.**²⁶

Conversely, the cultural factor was the declining influence of Evangelicals in the second half of the century. Despite the revival of the late 1850s, the nation was torn by war, the immigrants kept coming, and the cities grew. Even worse, many of those who thought the end of slavery would bring on "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb" lived to see that event turned into "The Great Barbecue" with most Americans left out.²⁷ The cultural pessimism of the late 1850s became despair in the next decades. Perhaps this sense of powerlessness made people especially hungry for

Mrs. Palmer's explanation of how to get power. Thus *she was eager to preach about power because she had found it, while her listeners were eager to hear about power because they had lost it.*²⁸

The third change Phoebe Palmer made in the Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification was to disrupt the balance between the instantaneous and the gradual elements. In Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection there is a tension between sanctification as a gradual process and sanctification as an instantaneous blessing. Repeatedly Wesley said that entire sanctification comes as the result of a gradual process and an instantaneous crisis. More specifically, he taught that a gradual process of growth both precedes and follows the instantaneous crisis.²⁹

Phoebe Palmer uncoupled this tension between gradual and instantaneous sanctification in Wesley's thought, placing all her emphasis on the instantaneous. As with the idea of holiness and power, she again developed a brief comment of Adam Clarke into a fundamental doctrine.³⁰ The thesis of her first theological book is that there is a shorter way to holiness; "long waiting and struggling with the powers of darkness is not necessary" because "THERE IS A SHORTER WAY!" In fact, the shorter way is the only way.³¹ She reiterated this idea in all her works, arguing for its truth from her own experience and from the Scripture. She told how she had lingered just shy of holiness, waiting for deeper convictions which would enable her to ask for this grace confidently, only to find that she had been wasting her time. God did not require her to wait for the blessing. In fact, He had commanded her to possess it.³²

In addition to citing her own experience, Mrs. Palmer strengthened her case by quoting Scripture. She used the analogy of the Exodus, pointing out that just as the Jews could have made the trip to Canaan in forty days instead of forty years, so the Christian need not wander aimlessly for years outside the promised land of holiness.³³ She quoted Matthew 11:12 about the kingdom of heaven being taken by violence, urging her readers to be bold in their quest for sanctification.³⁴ Most often she cited 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Now is the day of salvation" to prove her point.³⁵

I agree with her lofty sentiments, but not her facts. The shorter way still would have taken forty days! In that shorter time there is still a process of coming to grips with any slippery inward things of double-mindedness and laying them all in His Hand before being enabled to make that bold claim in faith. The step of completing your consecration fully cannot be omitted, even though it can be very brief if you are in the right place.

With this idea Palmer caused innumerable souls great loss. A believer cannot just "name and claim His Rest" any more than a sinner can just come and claim his salvation without first repenting! Not even nearly. One must first be wholly qualified. He will only touch the wholly prepared soul. Is salvation not a mere mockery without repentance?

And is not a completed sanctification an empty mockery if the believer has not bothered to separate himself from his prior evil ways?

Away with it! This is cold soup without meat, vegetables or broth!!!

The work of the Holy Spirit is not to repent or consecrate for us. It is to fix and accept our prior repentance or consecration so that it is made real and lasting before Him. It is our work to prepare our hearts before Him, while it is His work to save!!!

This was Palmer's most destructive error. This muddle-mindedness created scores who claimed to enjoy entire sanctification while they did not even know what it was -filling the "Holiness Associations" with pretenders rather than substance – a Cuckoo bird filling the nests of other birds with her eggs. These unwitting fifth columnists helped destroy these essential associations from within. Earnest Seeker

The fourth modification Phoebe Palmer made in the doctrine of Christian perfection was to shift the place of entire sanctification in the chronology of the Christian life. Because entire sanctification is available to every believer at this very instant, and because each Christian ought to receive all the blessing that God wants to bestow, no believer should tarry long at the point of justification, but should quickly move on to entire sanctification. John Wesley believed the same thing, but his emphasis was different. As early as 1739 John Wesley came to believe that Christian perfection was not the unreachable goal of the Christian life, but a present possibility. He admitted that there was no reason why one may not be sanctified soon after justification, and urged his hearers to expect it immediately.³⁶ Nevertheless, in his later writings sanctification was often presented as the goal of the Christian life.³⁷ Wesley wrote of sanctification as a gift usually given shortly before death as preparation for heaven³⁸ In addition, Wesley asked his preachers not, "Are you perfect?" but, "Are you going on to perfection?" despite his

insistence that God could sanctify the believer this instant as easily as He could in the next thousand years.³⁹

Wesley's views (both early and late) are entirely consistent with reality as we find it. The lost receive the same treatment. Salvation is available to all -this instant! But always it is only a minority who will avail themselves of this opportunity -unless there is a remarkable revival in progress where God Himself reaches down to convict the soul that is afar off. But short of that we and the Holy Spirit just keep quietly witnessing before their blank faces. It is the same with believers and His Rest. Many believers did not obtain a healthy conversion experience in the first place, and so go through their lives only halfhearted in their faith. They may give verbal assent to holiness, but in fact, they would rather they were just left alone.

Entire sanctification is whole-hearted religion. Not everybody wants to purify their heart. Most want their heaven to be earthly and now -like a big Lottery win with minimal outlay for unending rewards. Wesley's hymns wisely woo that majority -as they ought. Earnest Seeker

Exemplary are the verses of the hymns John Wesley prints to illustrate his teaching on sanctification. All of them speak of aspiring after holiness, but none of them speaks of having attained it. They long for the benefits of full salvation, but do not testify of having received them yet.⁴⁰ Thus while John Wesley believed that sanctification could occur early in a believer's Christian life, in most of his writings and his brother's hymns sanctification is presented as something not yet attained, giving the impression that it is the goal of the Christian life. Perhaps the clearest example of change in emphasis from sanctification as the goal of the Christian life to sanctification as its beginning can be seen in the differences between the hymns John Wesley directed the Methodists to use and those Phoebe Palmer wrote. John Wesley published this hymn written by his brother Charles. It is typical of those the Methodists sang about entire sanctification:

Jesus, at Thy feet we wait Till Thou shalt bid us rise Restored to our unsinning state, To love's sweet paradise.

Savior from sin we thee receive, From all indwelling sin Thy blood, we steadfastly believe, Shall make us thoroughly clean.

Since Thou wouldst have us free from sin And pure as those above Make haste to bring Thy nature in, And perfect us in love.

The counsel of they love fulfil, Come quickly, gracious Lord! Be it according to Thy will, According to Thy word.

According to our faith in Thee Let it to us be done O that we all Thy face might see, And know as we are known!

O that the perfect grace were given, The love diffused abroad! O that our hearts were all a heaven Forever filled with God!⁴¹

Note Wesley's use of the future tense, the confession that the singers are waiting to be sanctified, and the prayer that God would finish the work. In this and most other of Wesley's hymns, sanctification is a goal that the singers are still seeking, not a present attainment. Compare Wesley's hymn to the most famous of Phoebe Palmer's songs:

O now I see the crimson wave, The fountain deep and wide; Jesus, my Lord, mighty to save, Point to His wounded side.

Refrain: The cleansing stream I see, I see! I plunge, and O it cleanseth me; O praise the Lord, it cleanseth me, It cleanseth me, yes, cleanseth me.

I see the new creation rise I hear the speaking blood; It speaks! polluted nature die, sink 'neath the crimson flood.

Refrain

I rise to walk in heav'n's own light, Above the world and sin, With heart made pure and garments white, And Christ enthroned within.

Refrain

Amazing grace! 'tis heav'n below, To feel the blood applied, And Jesus, only Jesus know, My Jesus crucified.

Refrain⁴²

Here there is no prayer for cleansing, and no waiting for holiness. There is no future tense in the song; everything is past or present. Now the cleansing stream is available, and now the singer is plunging and being cleansed. By the third verse sanctification is an accomplished fact. The believer can testify to a pure heart and a sinless walk.

This light treatment encourages presumption and the multiplication of souls who claim this costly blessing, but who do not quite have it. They may live excellent and clean lives, but their inward heart is the same heart they were born with. Their peace is their own, not His greater supernatural peace. Conventional evangelists often make this same error. In their misguided attempt to convert all they dilute the requirement of a whole-hearted repentance with their pleas (while the soft music plays) of "do I see a hand?". Such converts are usually ersatz converts that go on to fill a pew -but little else. Earnest Seeker

Melvin Dieter argues that Mrs. Palmer's change in Wesley's doctrine shows the application of "all that was America

in the nineteenth century" to the preaching of the eighteenth-century divine. He points out that her upsetting of the Wesleyan balance between the gradual and the instantaneous, and her shifting of sanctification from the goal of the Christian life to its beginning exactly parallel the transformations Jonathan Edwards and others effected in the Puritan doctrine of conversion.⁴³ While John Cotton and other early American Puritans preached as if regeneration were the goal of the believer's life and minutely described the stages in the conversion process, Edwards preached that one had an "immediate duty" to repent, and Finney telescoped the stages of conversion into a single event.⁴⁴

As correct as Dieter is to see the influence of American optimism and impatience in Phoebe Palmer's treatment of Wesleyan doctrines, there may be another explanation of the data. Not only was Phoebe Palmer applying "all that was America in the nineteenth century" to Wesley, but she was also carrying Wesleyan doctrines to their natural conclusion; she was working out their inner logic. If it is true that all Christians will eventually be sanctified, and if it is true that it is better to be sanctified than merely justified, and if it is true that God can sanctify the believer now just as easily as a thousand years from now, and if it is true that God gives sanctification in response to the believer's faith, then every Christian should be sanctified now. Wesley preached each of the **protases**, and he admitted the truth of the **apodoses**, but, as he said of others, *Non persuadebis, etiamsi persuaseris* (You will not persuade me even though you do persuade me): he was not confident of the conclusion, no matter how logical it seemed.⁴⁵ "Plain matter of fact" had convinced him that people could not merely believe and be sanctified whenever they wanted, yet the logic of his theology told him that all could be sanctified if they wanted to. He expressed the problem this way: "That every man may believe if he will earnestly maintain, and yet that he can believe when he will I totally deny." Not knowing how to resolve the dilemma, in the end Wesley remained content to leave it a paradox: "But there will be always something in the matter which we cannot well comprehend or explain."⁴⁶

Phoebe Palmer's experience was different from Wesley's. Leading up to her own experience of entire sanctification she followed his reasoning to its logical conclusion, and then found the blessing she had been seeking. "Plain matter of fact," that is, her own experience, had convinced her that people could be sanctified not only if they willed but when they willed. That conviction was strengthened when she preached holiness to others and saw them find full salvation before they left the meeting. Thus both Phoebe Palmer and John Wesley agreed on two sides of the Wesleyan quadrilateral: both Scripture and reason led them to expect instantaneous entire sanctification not long after the beginning of the Christian life. But they disagreed about the third side, experience. Wesley's experience led him to pull back from the logic of his conclusions; Palmer's led her to preach Wesley's logical conclusions vigorously.

Yes, but in both instances these souls are required to be whole-hearted converts already. Many are those who profess that they are so when they are not. Many claim to be seeking entire sanctification when they are actually seeking something else, like vast spiritual power while retaining the existing self-centered heart that can enjoy the prestige that goes with it. Both Wesley and Palmer were laboring under doctrines of sanctification that were yet poorly understood. So also was the depth of the double-mindedness in the regular believer which later theologians expounded in great detail. (These sources fill my materials) Earnest Seeker

The fifth change Mrs. Palmer made in Wesley's theology was to systematize the way to seek sanctification. Once again she unhitched two contradictory elements in Wesley's thought, putting all her emphasis on the simpler, quicker element. John Wesley urged his hearers to expect instantaneous entire sanctification by faith: "Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith."⁴⁷ He had also, however, advised those seeking sanctification to "wait" for God's action in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily; as well as in earnest prayer and fasting, and a close attendance upon all the ordinances of God. And if a man dream of attaining it any other way (yea, or of keeping it when it is attained, . . .), he deceiveth his own soul. It is true, we receive it by simple faith; but God does not, will not, give that faith unless we seek it with all diligence, in the way which He hath ordained.⁴⁸

In other words, by living the normal life of a Methodist. In place of believing in instantaneous entire sanctification, and waiting for it by practicing Wesley's generalized Christian discipline, Phoebe Palmer substituted a "shorter way" to holiness. All one needed to do was follow this simple three-step process for being sanctified: (1) entire consecration, (2) faith, and (3) testimony.⁴⁹

The first step to entire sanctification is entire consecration, "a perfect and entire yielding up of all to Christ, an entire trust in Christ, and a continuous reliance on Christ, for all needed grace under every diversity of circumstance

or experience."⁵⁰ It is a once-and-for-all surrender of "body, soul, and spirit; time, talents, and influence; and also of the dearest ties of nature, . . ." which must be reaffirmed daily.⁵¹ It is a determination that "we give ourselves at once wholly and for ever away to [God's] service, in order that we may be unto him a peculiar people, zealous of good works, not living to ourselves. . ."⁵²

The second step to entire sanctification is to exercise faith. According to Mrs. Palmer, in 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 God promises to receive the offering of those who separate themselves from all evil through entire consecration.⁵³ If believers entirely consecrate themselves to the Lord, they have God's word that He sanctifies them. Whether or not one feels any different after devoting every area of one's life to the Lord, one must not question whether God has sanctified the heart. To doubt that one is entirely sanctified is to doubt God's word.⁵⁴ One must not trust feelings; one must trust the written word of God.⁵⁵

Here Palmer makes another huge error. It was bad enough to expect believers to merely "name it and claim it" -but now that error is compounded by asking those same naïve believers to just presume they are sanctified afterwards! This may work for some honest souls in the short term, but regrettably most of us are only too glad to deceive ourselves.

The fact is that in a minority initial signs of the new heart may be muted, but over time a vast sea change is noticed by these souls also. But if there is no sea change that comes after a few days -well -obviously there is no new heart yet and the time of believing must continue until He supplies it! Earnest Seeker

The third step in the sanctification process is testimony. The work has already occurred, but it must be ratified as believers publicly bears witness to what, on the basis of the Scripture, they know God has done in the heart. While John Wesley had opined that those who received the blessing should tell other believers, Phoebe Palmer asserted the "binding nature of the obligation to profess the blessing."⁵⁶ Mrs. Palmer taught that Romans 10:9-10, which speaks of believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth, requires public profession as well as heart faith for God's work to be effective. Not to tell others is to withhold the honor due to Christ; in addition, simple gratitude requires the Christian to acknowledge what the Lord has done in the heart.⁵⁷

So important is this third step that Mrs. Palmer warns those who do not confess the blessing that they will not retain it.⁵⁸ Citing the case of John Fletcher who lost holiness five times because he refused to testify to it, and quoting John Wesley's words she told those who were unwilling to profess entire sanctification publicly that they would not be able to keep the blessing.⁵⁹

Well! This just takes the cake! Now those who are not sure whether they have something new or not are asked to testify about what they hope they have. Hmmm!?! Do you smell something fishy here?

So they are faced with a catch-22. They either profess the heart-change before they are sure they have it -or they will lose it for sure (if they had it). And if they find they are wrong afterwards, they will have to lose face and eat humble pie before those they professed it to. Most who find they still have an unchanged and impure heart, will instead feel forced to gild the lily and do the best they can with what they have -and not let on. And why should they do anything else? To their knowledge they have fulfilled all of God's requirements to the letter, and so it logically stands that they must have what she is proclaiming! Besides all that consecrating makes one feel somewhat closer to God, so why quibble?? What a jungle. It takes a thousand lies to cover a lie...

Mrs. Palmer developed her three-step plan for achieving entire sanctification in conjunction with her "altar theology." She was seeking for some Scriptural basis for applying 2 Corinthians 6:17, "I will receive you," to herself. She found this assurance by arguing from a list of passages containing sacrificial imagery. In Romans 12:1-2 she read that Christians are commanded to offer themselves as sacrifices to God, in Matthew 23:19 that the altar sanctifies the gift, in Exodus 29:37 that whatever touches the altar is holy, and in Hebrews 13:10 that Christians have an altar which is more sacred than the one in the tabernacle. Following Adam Clarke, she believed that this greater altar is Christ Himself.⁶⁰ From these passages Mrs. Palmer deduced that Christians who entirely consecrate themselves to Christ are presenting their bodies as living sacrifices. Christ Himself is the altar upon which the offering is made and so as long as believers rest themselves entirely on Him, their all is on the altar. Because whatever touches the altar is holy, the believers themselves are holy. Thus entire consecration guarantees entire sanctification.⁶¹

There is still no guarantee at this point because a completed consecration (if it is indeed complete) is only the end of what man can do. There still remains the larger and more problematic matter of actually trusting Him (with a completed trust) to do the saving. Earnest Seeker

Phoebe Palmer's sixth change in the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification was to insist that the witness of the Spirit, giving assurance of full salvation, was not some subjective experience, but was the objective word of Scripture. In the Plain Account of Christian Perfection Wesley had said that believers ought not to consider themselves sanctified until they had the unmistakable inner witness of the Spirit: "None therefore ought to believe that the work is done, till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, as clearly as his justification."⁶² In the same work, however, he said that "the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first," that it is "sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter," and that one needs no inner witness if he has no doubt.⁶³

In contrast to Wesley's equivocal view was Phoebe Palmer's teaching about the evidence of sanctification. She believed that to demand the inner witness is to question God. The Lord has said "I will receive you" to all who offer everything to Him. Those who refuse to believe His plain word dishonor God. They cannot be sanctified, and are *rightly sent to hell* if they persist in their unbelief.⁶⁴ Mrs. Palmer based her argument on the reasoning which led to her own sanctification. When she sought assurance that she was sanctified she remembered the Scripture, "I will receive you." When she wondered if she should believe it without any other evidence, she realized that if she had heard a voice from heaven speaking to her she would believe it. How much more then should she believe the Bible!⁶⁵

Can you believe that this circus of the absurd continued? Now it has gone beyond just "name it and claim it" to arrive at "read it and you have it"! One thing you have to say about Palmer: she was sure gung-ho!

That Phoebe Palmer shaped the pneumatology of the holiness movement is generally agreed. The changes she made in Wesley's theology were institutionalized by the establishment of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness in 1867, and by the founding of the holiness denominations in the next three decades. These holiness groups, many of which later merged to form the Church of the Nazarene in 1907 and 1908, adopted all six of her changes in the Wesleyan idea of Christian perfection. Her three steps to sanctification became one of the main ways to receive the second blessing, and her altar imagery helped to shape their preaching and singing.⁶⁶

And so they sang their way to virtual oblivion....

Although most historians trace the pneumatology of the holiness movement back to Phoebe Palmer, the connection between her and the Holiness Movement has been overlooked. Most often the credit for the reshaping of Wesley's theology has gone to Charles Finney, and to his colleagues at Oberlin, Asa Mahan and John Morgan.⁶⁷ While it is true that the Oberlin theologians identified entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and said it could be received in an instant, the center of attention of their teaching was that a person could receive the power *to will what was right*. This right willing, or perfect submission to the will of God, was available as a free gift from the Lord. The gift did not guarantee perfect obedience, but it did secure consistent right intention.⁶⁸ Missing from their doctrine is the strong emphasis on power, the initiatory nature of sanctification, and the simple three-step process for attaining sanctification. All these elements later became important parts of Pentecostal pneumatology.⁶⁹

The authour here is getting us pretty confused. Does he mean the Pentecostal Movement as we know it today? No, that was many years in the future yet. This supposition would be inconsistent with all the sanctification language he uses about it. And yet he is talking about tongues.... for sure the Great Awakening was a time when many different streams of belief on the topic of sanctification were available to choose from. Did your forebears choose a nickel or a wooden nickel?

Today Mrs. Palmer's influence on the Holiness Movement is seen most clearly in the three steps commonly taught as a means of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Seekers for [full sanctification](#) in [the Holiness Movement](#) are usually told: (1) be converted, (2) obey God fully, and (3) believe. The first step, conversion, is implicit in the teaching of Phoebe Palmer. The second step, obey, is a renunciation of all sinful practices and attitudes, and promise future commitment. It is exactly what Mrs. Palmer meant by entire consecration. Faith, the third step, means believing that God will fulfill His promise. Pentecostals teach that when faith is sufficient, God sends the baptism. Similarly, Phoebe Palmer said that God sanctifies the believer when the gift is apprehended by faith. Many Pentecostals do not explicitly mention Mrs. Palmer's third step, testimony, but the public speaking in tongues that occurs in the "tarrying meeting" serves the same function.⁷⁰

A major difference between Mrs. Palmer and most modern Pentecostals is that they differ about assurance. Many scorn the idea that one could receive the baptism and not feel any different. For them glossolalia and strong emotions give the assurance; without them one has not yet received the baptism.⁷¹ Nevertheless, there are some

Pentecostal teachers who tell their incompletely consecrated hearers that God has baptized them, even if they do not feel any different. These newly-baptized people are then told to express their faith in what God has done by beginning to make glossolalic sounds. In response to their naked faith shown by their obedience, God will give the sign of tongues.⁷² The affinities of this doctrine with Mrs. Palmer's are clear.

The make-believe continues!!! If there are no mighty signs and wonders, fake them!! (But tell nobody -not even yourself.)

While it is unlikely that many in the Pentecostal movement today know about Phoebe Palmer, the situation of their theological forebears was different. They were only a generation removed from Mrs. Palmer herself, and her ideas were still being publicized through her books, through various Tuesday Meetings, and through the "Guide to Holiness" which for three years at the turn of the century bore the title, "Guide to Holiness and Pentecostal Life". Even if they had no direct contact with Phoebe Palmer, they certainly could have imbibed her ideas from the preaching and singing of the Holiness Movement.

Thus Phoebe Palmer **prepared the way for the modern Pentecostal movement (as well as modern confusion and backslidings)** by modifying John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection in six ways. In the next generation people who accepted her pneumatology added the expectation that the sanctified would evidence the fact by speaking in tongues. When that expectation was fulfilled, the Pentecostal Movement was born. Although Phoebe Palmer was not really the mother of the movement, she may lay claim to the title of grandmother. As such today she has one hundred million spiritual descendants and may thus be the most influential female theologian the Church has yet produced.

She also may lay claim to be the mother or grandmother of quite a heritage of confusion ... Let me speak clearly: one may be both a Pentecostal who speaks in tongues, as well as entirely sanctified. This is my case. In practice, they are quite different things that are obtained quite differently. This is discussed elsewhere. Earnest Seeker

NOTES

- 1David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 838. Although "Pentecostal" usually refers to separate denominations espousing Pentecostal beliefs while "charismatic" refers to those who hold Pentecostal belief while belonging to non-Pentecostal denominations, I will use the term "Pentecostal" to refer to both groups.
- 2Ibid.; Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience the New Testament Witness* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 21.
- 3Ibid., pp. 43-44; Donald W. Dayton, "Theological Roots of Pentecostalism," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978; Vincent Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 13-32.
- 4The full story of Mrs. Palmer's career and thought may be found in the author's *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).
- 5Guide to Holiness 29 (1856): 155; 57 (1870): 186; 82 (1882) 64. [Hereafter the Guide to Holiness will be GTH.]
- 6John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection in The Works of John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson, ed., 3rd ed., 14 vols. London: The Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 11:366-445; Phoebe Palmer, *Incidental Illustrations of the Economy of Salvation* (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1855), pp. 38, 283; Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness with Notes by the Way*, 2nd ed., (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1845), pp. 32, 118; Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects* (New York: Joseph Longking, 1852), p.349. Hereafter *Incidental Illustrations* will be II, *The Way of Holiness* will be WOH, and *Faith and Its Effects* will be F&E.]
- 7John Fletcher, *Third Check to Antinomianism and Last Check to Antinomianism in The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley*, 4 vols. (New York: Carlton & Porter, n.d.), 1:160, 2:630-31; Timothy L. Smith, "How John Fletcher Became the Theologian of Wesleyan Perfectionism, 1770-1776," *Wesleyan*

- Theological Journal 15/1 (Spring 1980): 70; and Dayton, pp. 56-67.
- 8WOH, p. 185 9II, p. 75; F~E, p. 256; GTH 6 (1844): 27-28, 8 (1845): 94, 23 (1853~: 176, 30 (1856): 112; and Phoebe Palmer, *Promise of the Father* (Boston: H. V. Degen, 1859; reprint ed., Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, 1981) *passim*. Elereafter PF.]
- 10Mrs. Palmer made the statement at the camp meeting in Millbrook Ontario on September 13, 1856. See GTH 32 (1857): 24-25.
- 11GTH 44 (1863): 162; George Hughes, "Letter from England," *New York Christian Advocate and Journal* 23 July 1863, p.233. See also GTH 55 (1869): 90, (1871):154, and 61 (1872): 58.
- 12PF, pp. 252, 257-58.
- 13See, for example, Phoebe Palmer, *Four Years in the Old World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1866), p. 416 and GTH 50 (1866): 59ff.
- 14Dayton, pp. 86-89.
- 15Ibid., pp. 91-93.
- 16 See, for example, John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Works, 11:374-75.
- 17Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom 's Ferment* (New York: Harper & Row,1962), pp. 184-195; Dayton, p. 99.
- 18William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire; or the True Power of Christianity*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), pp. 48-56, 321-337; Dayton, p. 89.
- 19GTH 56 (1866): 151.
- 20Phoebe Palmer, *Diary*, December,1856, in Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), pp. 496-97.
- 21Fletcher, "Last Check," 2:630-32, 619-25.
- 22Clarke, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851), pp. 202.
- 23See, for example, GTH 33 (1858):11 and[Phoebe Palmer], *The Parting Gift to Fellow Laborers and Young Converts* (New York: Walter C. Palmer 1869)], p. 7.
- 24GTH 50 (1866): 189; 64 (1873): 24.
- 25aTH 39 (1861): 149, 68 (1875): 43, and 33 (1858): 39.
- 26Phoebe Palmer to Sarah Lankford, 10 October 1857, in Wheatley, p 329; GTH 33 (1858): 11-12; 42 (1862): 178.
- 27 Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*,3 vols (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 3:23-24; Timothy Smith *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), p. 7.
- 28Dayton, pp. 91-97.
- 29John Wesley, *A Plain Account o f Christian Perfection*, Works 11 :402. See also John Wesley to "John Smith," 30 December 1745, and John Wesley to Charles Wesley, September 1762; both in John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Nehemiah Curnock, ed., st. ed., 8 vols.* (London: Epworth Press, 1906-1916), 2:62, 4:187. [Hereafter Letters.]
- 30Clarke, pp. 207-208.
- 31WOH, pp. 17-18. Emphasis original.
- 32Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- 33Ibid., p. 100.
- 34Ibid., p. 231.
- 35II, pp. 15, 80; GTH 46 (1864): 103.

- 36 Timothy Smith, "George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19/1 (Spring 1984): 67-68; Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *Works*, 6:54.
- 37 David L. Cubie, "Perfection in Wesley and Fletcher: Inaugural or Teleological?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11 (Spring 1976): 22-37.
- 38 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *Works*, 11:387, 423.
- 39 Wesley, "The Scripture Way to Salvation," and "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others from the year 1744, to the year 1789," in *Works*, 6:52, 8:325.
- 40 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *Works*, 11:369-70, 382, 385-87, 392-93, and Charles Wesley, "The Promise of Sanctification," printed in *Works*, 6:20-22.
- 41 Charles Wesley, "O Jesus, At Thy Feet We Wait," t~378 in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 7: *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, ed. by Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge with the assistance of James Dale (Oxford: Clarendon Press of the Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 551.
- 42 "The Cleansing Wave," *GTH* 59 (1871): 192.
- 43 Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), pp. 18-21.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 18; Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spirituality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 86-141; Charles Grandison Finney, *Revival Lectures*, ([Old Tappan, N. J.]: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), pp. 180-81, 193.
- 45 Wesley, "On Patience," in *Works* 6:490.
- 46 John Wesley to Mr. -. 9 November 1777, in *Letters*, 6:287.
- 47 Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *Works*, 6:53.
- 48 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *Works*, 11:402-3.
- 49 *II*, p. 320.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- 51 *WOH*, pp. 86, 126.
- 52 *F&E*, p. 15
- 53 *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 343; *GTH* 32 (1857): 77, 48 (1865): 159.
- 54 Phoebe Palmer, afterword to J. Boynton, *Sanctification Practical* (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1867) pp. 119-22. [Hereafter *SP*.]
- 55 *WOH*, p. 38; *II*, p. 151
- 56 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *Works*, 11:397-98; *F&E*, p. 83.
- 57 *II*, p. 114; *GTH* 33 (1858): 121, 46 (1864): 104; *SP*, p. 128
- 58 *II* pp, 141, 191.
- 59 *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
- 60 *GTH* 4 (1842-3): 81; Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1837), 6:787.
- 61 *WOH*, pp. 62-67; *GTH* 46 (1864): 102-3; *GTH* 82 (1882): 136-37.
- 62 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *Works*, 11:398-99, ~01-2.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 420

64WOH, p. 67.

65Diary, 27 July 1837, in Wheatley, pp. 40-41.

66Dieter, pp.98-119; Peters, pp.133-50; J. Wesley Corbin, "Christian Perfection and the Evangelical Association through 1875," Methodist History 7 (January 1969): 28-44. One example of Mrs. Palmer's influence on holiness hymnody is Elisha Hoffman's invitation song, "Is Your All on the Altar of Sacrifice Laid?" which clearly articulates her teaching. The song still appeared in the hymnals of the Nazarene, Wesleyan, and Free Methodist Churches through 1960. Hoffman's song is number 280 in the Nazarene hymnal, Worship in Song (Kansas City, Mo.: Lillenas Publishing Company, (1972) and number 280 in Hymns of the Living Faith (Winona Lake, Ind.: Light and Life Press, 1951).

67Dayton, pp. 85-88, 204; Bruner, pp. 43-44; Synan, pp. 13-32; Timothy L. Smith, "The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney's Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology," Wesleyan Theological Journal 13 (Spring 1978): 103-6, and Timothy L. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900," American Quarterly 31/1 (Spring 1979): 25, 35-36.

68Asa Mahan, Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection, 7th ed. (Boston: Waite, Pierce, & Co., 1844), p. 188; Charles G. Finney, Autobiography, pp. 350-51; John Morgan, "The Gift of the Holy Ghost," Oberlin Quarterly Review 1 (1845): 90-116; Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Asa Mahan and Oberlin Perfectionism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1969), pp. 112-28.

69A general discussion of Pentecostal pneumatology may be found in Walter J. Hollenweger, The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), pp. 330-347.

70Bruner, pp. 92-111.

71Ibid.

72Dennis and Rita Bennett, The Holy Spirit and You: A Study-Guide to the Spirit-filled Life (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1971), pp.69-70.

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