

Entire Sanctification

*A personal analysis on the Article of Religion pertaining
to the position held by the Free Methodist Church*

Wesleyan Theology
Jeffrey D. Borden
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~ E N T I R E S A N C T I F I C A T I O N ~

Entire Sanctification

¶119 Entire sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the fully consecrated believers, upon exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ, are cleansed in that moment from all inward sin and empowered for service. The resulting relationship is attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit and is maintained by faith and obedience. Entire sanctification enables believers to love God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and their neighbor as themselves, and it prepares them for greater growth in grace.

2003 Book of Discipline, Free Methodist Church

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the view and position on the Article of Religion titled Entire Sanctification pursuant to the understanding of the Free Methodist Church. Primary reference of the analysis and conclusion will come from documentation provided in the *Book of Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* (2003 Revision), as well as scriptural support from the Holy Bible. One of the articles of reference for this paper is a writing titled “The Goal of the Christian Journey” also found in the *Book of Discipline*. This article provides a number of scriptures that serve to support the position of Entire Sanctification. I will endeavor to use as many references to support my analysis as possible; and in the course of doing so, will inevitably duplicate some of those scriptures. I extend my apologies beforehand for any redundancy. Disclaimers aside, let us begin our analysis with a definition.

The definition, or more aptly, the meaning of entire sanctification can be summed up in the statement “having the mind of Christ”.¹ Having the “mind of Christ” provides the believer with ability to perform good works² that glorify God³, and essentially, walk as Jesus walked.⁴ Of course, that very summation may be subject to loose interpretation, and therefore in need of clarification. When does one get the “mind of Christ” or better yet, how does one get the mind of Christ? Is receiving and living in accordance with a

mind like Christ a real and attainable proposition? It is my belief that the answer is yes, it is attainable. Not only is it attainable, but it is expected and promised. John Wesley, a champion of this position stated the following:

“In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion. Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having "the mind which was in Christ," and of "walking as Christ also walked;" even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him; and of walking as he walked, not only in many or in most respects, but in all things. And this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an uniform following of Christ, an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master. Nor was I afraid of anything more, than of bending this rule to the experience of myself; or of other men; of allowing myself in any the least disconformity to our grand Exemplar.”⁵

Let us search for our answers from the Bible, “the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion” as we develop a case and our support for this position. The first layer of support that serves as a foundation for our belief is the absolute character of God. For the purposes of this paper, we shall assume that there is agreement with the characteristics or attributes of God. The attributes of God being; He is Spirit, Life, Infinite, Immutable, Truth, Love, Eternal, Holy, Immortal, Invisible, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent.⁶ I am sure there are other descriptive attributes that attest to the character of God, but for our needs we will settle on those listed above. So, understanding and agreeing on some of the attributes of God, let us look to the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

The Book of Genesis, chapter one, provides us with the cornerstone of our foundation with this word from God; “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our

likeness’’.⁷ Now, if we consider the attributes and character of God, is it not logical to deduce that the creation fashioned after the Creator will share characteristics and attributes that resemble (if not mirror) those of the Creator? Consider also that the very attributes that reveal God to us are attributes that determine the manner and fullness of our creation. For instance, God is perfect⁸; would He then create something that was faulty or imperfect? The response may be that “man sinned” and that is why he is imperfect...and to some degree, this is true...in his sin, man is imperfect. However, that was not the plan of God...sin is a result of the first Adam’s disobedience and not of any imperfection. Imperfections, as they are perceived, are consequences of sin permitted (or allowed) to exist by God, but not designed by Him. Therefore, we can say that it was, and is the intent of God for man to be without sin. More appropriate for our purposes, we can say it is God’s desire for man to be *sanctified*. (Merriam-Webster defines sanctify as; “to set apart to a sacred purpose or to religious use; to free from sin”). We know that God created man to be sinless and perfect, but we also know Adam’s disobedience resulted in the fall of man and consequently the curse of sin and death. How then do we reconcile God’s plan and desire for man, man’s disobedience, and the doctrine of entire sanctification? Let us continue with scripture. Generations pass following Adam and we eventually meet with Moses as the spokesman for God. The book of Exodus reveals God’s continuing plan for His creation with these words; “I am the LORD, who makes you holy”.⁹ This reminder is followed with a commandment to follow suit; “I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy”.¹⁰ Again, Merriam-Webster defines holy as; “exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one *perfect* in *goodness* and *righteousness*” (perfect...sinless as is our God).

We must understand that these are statements made by God, to man, whilst man is yet in a fallen state. With this understanding, we must conclude that the expectation of God is for man to comply with His commands. Once more, we can reference the attributes and character of God to discern that with His expectation of our compliance, there is provision to comply...for it to be otherwise would imply God has set man up for failure and that implication would contradict the person and character of how God has described (revealed) Himself to man. If this were to be so, it would in fact, reveal God to be unjust and a liar (which we know is impossible).¹¹ Our evidence thus far supports that God designed and created man to be without sin. We also have convincing support for the argument that even in the sinful and fallen state of man, God still directs man to be sanctified and holy unto Him; as such, there can be agreement according to the attributes of God that there must be (has to be) provision for man to act in accordance with God's commandments and will. The question that remains is; "what is the provision," "how does one obtain it," and "when might the provision be obtained"?

The provision for entire sanctification comes and is fulfilled in the promise and delivery of a savior...the Savior, Jesus Christ. The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus provides the means of reconciliation to God, and also empowers man to overcome the bondage of sin so that he may no longer be subject to enslavement to it on this earth (*Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin*).¹² Just as sin and death entered the world by the trespass of one man it was the act of righteousness and obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, that set men free from that bondage and allows them to live righteous and holy before the LORD.¹³

Having answered the question of what the “provision” is, we can move on to the question of *how* the provision is obtained. As much as the provision is provided by the work of Jesus, it is also obtained through him as well. Listen then to the words of Jesus, "...If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".¹⁴ Jesus also states, "...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."¹⁵ Taken from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus also says, "Come to me, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest. Become my servants and learn from me. I am gentle and free of pride. You will find rest for your souls".¹⁶ Clearly, Jesus is extending an offer to man to be free from sin. In order to obtain this provision, it is incumbent that we choose to make Jesus our Lord...through Him and by Him is the provision to obtain sanctification; *entire sanctification*. Let us examine a few more evidences from scripture to ensure that our interpretation is accurate. Again, taking our text from the Gospel of John, Jesus states; "My doctrine is not Mine, but His (God) who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority".¹⁷ For any man to know the teaching of Jesus, there must be a heart open to the teaching with a desire toward obedience...acceptance alone is not sufficient to mediate the change, there must be action that exercises and evidences the truth that has been realized and received. In other words, the man that truly receives will be “reborn,” “renewed,” and visibly “changed”.

To escape the bondage of sin, enter into a place of sanctification, and be fit for service for our God, it is absolutely incumbent upon man to recognize his state of sinfulness.

Subsequent to this “awakening,” he must believe that Jesus truly is the Son of God and the only one capable of saving him from his sin. Jesus told his hearers, “That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins.”¹⁸ Once man believes, trusts, and is willing to act on Jesus’ words, then he must repent (turn away from the former self). The direction that Jesus gives is, “...unless you repent, you too will all perish.”¹⁹ Repentance and regeneration are necessary components for sanctification, without the “awakening” and subsequent “rebirthing” man is still dead in his sin and under the wrath of God. As such, there can be no hope of living a “sanctified” life.²⁰ To summarize the answers to our first two questions; Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God and Savior of all men, is the provision for the entirely sanctified life. Jesus is also the means, or the “how” by which entire sanctification is received. It is through the knowledge and saving power of Jesus that enables the man to be entirely sanctified. Finally, we will now answer the question of *when* this event takes place.

Ideally, the event of entire sanctification can (and should) take place at the moment of regeneration. At the moment of regeneration, the believer is made holy and righteous by the atoning sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ. This moment and event provides the means of reconciliation for the relationship between God and man.²¹ As such, the gift and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God is available to the regenerated man should he desire to receive it. Certainly, the power of Almighty God is sufficient to overcome sin and guide the reborn man in the ways of righteousness. The answer then, to when entire sanctification takes place in the life of the believer is two-fold. The truth is that it can take

place immediately subsequent to the act of repentance and regeneration.²² Experientially, most often, it does not. However, this truth is in no way perpetrated by God. Man is the determining factor that mitigates entire sanctification from an event to a process. The actual defining point of when entire sanctification takes place is in the level of consecration of the believer. Although there is a general understanding of what it means to be “consecrated,” for the sake of definition, several English dictionaries define consecration in the following way:

[...to make or declare sacred; *especially*: to devote irrevocably to the worship of God.]²³

A quote by Evangelist W. B. Walker serves as a good example of the purpose of consecration in the life of the believer and the reason for it.

“...the consecration of the believer is the loving act of a royal subject intelligently and deliberately committing himself and all his resources to the God of his salvation. This is also a sacred consecration. The little qualifying word "holy" describes the blessed objective and character of the consecration. Aimless consecration has given rise to endless reconsecrations that are seen in church circles today. What is needed is a searching experience of the soul in which, under the light and leading of the Holy Spirit, we yield ourselves entirely and eternally to the cleansing blood of Christ and the doing of God's blessed will. Paul informs us that this is a sacrificial presentation. Our offering is described as a "living sacrifice," in contrast with the dead sacrifices of the Jewish altars. It should be the living body as the tool and vehicle of the living soul -- God wants it. He wants people who will sacrificially live for Him. It is conceivable that death might be courted as an escape. Are we willing to live for Him the poured-out life? This is the real test of our consecration -- it means obedience at any cost --and how few of us know its full meaning!”²⁴

The key to consecration is the absolute submission of a man's will to God. Jesus said; "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"²⁵ I particularly like the way that Eugene Peterson in his work entitled, *The Message* states this passage; Jesus told them (his disciples), "*Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat--I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?*"²⁶ The path to entire sanctification is paved with "consecration" the Bible refers to this as "dying to self." Taking up one's cross to follow Jesus, implies that death to self. Listen to the words of Paul, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."²⁷ Writing to the Romans; Paul states, "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*."²⁸ [Emphasis is mine...remember the definition earlier of consecration?] To be totally "sold-out" for Jesus is the invitation for becoming entirely sanctified. It allows the believer to live completely for the glorification of God, fit for service according to His good will.

In conclusion, entire sanctification is a real and very needful experience. As we have investigated and determined, it is expected and mandated by God. As creatures of free-will we have the ability to choose the depth of our relationship with our Savior. If we

determine to holdfast to vestiges of our former self, the relationship will be tenuous as the battle rages inside between the “spiritual” man and the “flesh” man.²⁹ We must come to the same conclusions in our own heart as the apostle Paul, “...But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”³⁰ When we are able to speak from the depths of our heart this sentiment, we can then say, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”³¹ This unifies the believer as one with Christ and one with God, and within the context of that unification lies all the fulfillment of what entire sanctification is and all that entire sanctification is about (*this can be found in the Gospel of John 15-17*).³² Jesus is the model...the divine and holy Son of God come in the flesh. He overcame so that we can overcome too.³³ He came strictly to do only the will of the Father and through his obedience, God is glorified.³⁴ As adopted sons of God and disciples of Christ, this is our purpose too...entire sanctification provides us the means to do so.³⁵ As much as our great high priest is able to save completely, He is also able to sanctify completely...if we (man) are willing to allow Him to do so.³⁶ After all, we must remember that we were indeed made in His image...in Christ, we can live accordingly.

ENDNOTES ~ ANNOTATIONS ~ SCRIPTURES

***All scripture references are quoted from the New International Version unless noted otherwise.*

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:16

² Ephesians 2:10

³ Philippians 2:13

⁴ 1 John 2:6

⁵ The Works of John Wesley (1872 ed. by Thomas Jackson), vol. 11, pp. 366-446

⁶ **Attributes of God**

John 4:24

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Joshua 3:10

And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you...

Psalms 145:3

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Deuteronomy 32:4

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

I John 4:8

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

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Psalms 145:17

The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

I Timothy 1:17

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Colossians 1:15

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

Jeremiah 23:23,24

Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

Psalms 33:13

The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men.

Revelation 19:6

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

⁷ Genesis 1:26

⁸ Deuteronomy 32:4

⁹ Exodus 31:13

¹⁰ Leviticus 11:45

¹¹ Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18

¹² Romans 6:6

¹³ Romans 5:12-19

¹⁴ John 8:31, 32 [NKJV]

¹⁵ John 14:6

¹⁶ Matthew 11:28, 29 [NIRV]

¹⁷ John 7:17 [NKJV]

¹⁸ John 8:24 [NLT]

¹⁹ Luke 13:3

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- ²⁰ Romans 1:18 – 3:19
²¹ Romans 5:10
²² 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17
²³ Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary; Oxford English Dictionary
²⁴ The More Excellent Way, W. B. Walker (date of publication unknown)
²⁵ Luke 9:23-25
²⁶ Luke 9:23-25 [MSG]
²⁷ Galatians 5:24
²⁸ Romans 12:1
²⁹ Romans 7
³⁰ Philippians 3:7-11
³¹ Galatians 2:20
³² John 15-17
³³ John 16:33
³⁴ John 5:17-30
³⁵ John 14:15-18
³⁶ Hebrews 7:24-26

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Student – Jeffrey D Borden