# “Our Holiness Heritage”

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*“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (Hebrews 12:14, 15a. ESV).*

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:15, 16).*

*“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27).*

## We Were Holiness Before We Were Pentecostal

Three streams flowed together in the second decade of the 20th century to form the Pentecostal Holiness Church. The Fire-Baptized Holiness Church and the Pentecostal Holiness of North Carolina merged at Falcon, North Carolina in 1911, and the Tabernacle Pentecostal Church (formerly the Brewerton Presbyterian Church) joined four years later at Canon, Georgia. Each of these three groups formed in the closing years of the 19th century as part of the burgeoning Holiness movement, and each later embraced the Pentecostal message of the Asuza Street Revival that exploded across the world from Los Angeles beginning in late 1906. Almost overnight the preaching and demonstration of a “third blessing” called the Baptism of the Holy Ghost—accompanied by the “initial evidence” of speaking in tongues—became the primary marker of all three of these young denominations in the eyes of their neighbors.

Yet by the time G. B. Cashwell returned from Los Angeles to North Carolina at the end of 1906 and began spreading the Asuza Revival across the Southeast, sanctification of heart and life was already well established at the core of all three groups that would soon come together as the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Naming is always a significant decision, whether the name is for a child or a church, and our founders’ choice demonstrates that they highly valued holiness. Every time we make the extra effort to type “Pentecostal Holiness Church” or annunciate all three words in conversation or when answering the church telephone, we are reminded that holiness is as central to our heritage and identity as Pentecostals. We were Holiness before we were Pentecostal, and acceptance of Spirit baptism as a “third blessing” did not diminish in any way our commitment to the necessity of sanctification. Rather, it further empowered our preexisting commitment to purity of heart and life.

## The Wesleyan Roots of the Holiness Movement

The Holiness Movement reached the height of its influence in the 1890s, when our founders first organized their fledgling denominations. We find its origins in the Methodist quest—by then more than a century old—for a solution to what they called the “sin problem.” At the moment of salvation believers are justified, declared righteous, but eventually sinful urgings or habits begin to war against their “new creation” desires. This virtually assures that converts will soon begin to accumulate a record of sinful acts all over again.

In the eighteenth century John Wesley preached about a “double cure”—that justification is the “first blessing” in which past sins are forgiven, and sanctification is an available “second blessing” in which the blood of Jesus provides a way to deal with the "inbred sin" that still afflicts the justified. During the century that followed, the most popular Methodist metaphor for this remaining rebellious nature was "the root of sin." At a moment of great conviction and consecration, Jesus sanctifies believers by reaching into their hearts and pulling out this evil root. The experience is typically described as "waves of love washing over" someone or "a pot of honey poured out in [one's] soul." Sanctified believers, though, are not perfect. They can still choose to sin because the weak tendencies of human nature stay with them. But the point is that they can choose to live in victory over sin once the rebellious root is excised by faith-appropriated grace.

During the second half of the 19th century Methodist writers and evangelists like J. A. Wood, Henry Clay Morrison, G. D. Watson, Martin Wells Knapp, W. B. Godbey, and Beverly Carradine spread the Holiness message with increasing success. Through the publication of periodicals and books, the organization of state and local "Holiness Associations," and the establishment of annual Holiness Camp Meetings, the Holiness Movement gained momentum. The preaching and writing of Watson, Godbey, and Carradine were particulary influential on the spiritual formation of many of the ministers who would later form our denomination, and in the mid-1890s Knapp began to publicize in his Cincinnati paper *God's Revivalist* a powerful practice of sanctified living that he called "Pentecostal Holiness." He formed, for example, an interdenominational "Pentecostal Holiness Prayer League" and offered quarterly subscriptions to receive a package of the best new Holiness books that he called the "Pentecostal Holiness Library." Within two years A. B. Crumpler set in order a local congregation called the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

### The Quest for Holiness Spreads

By the mid-19th century, the Wesleyan quest for holiness began to spill into other streams of evangelical Protestantism. Many in the more Calvinist-oriented Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Baptist denominations, for example, taught that a "higher life" experience was available to all sincere Christians. Although the texture of their piety bore a striking resemblence to that of the Wesleyans, Higher Life advocates viewed sanctification as a lifelong process, beginning at salvation and finding practical expression as believers discipline themselves according to the Word and the leading of the Spirit.

Higher Life preachers like Charles Finney and William Boardman did, however, encourage their followers to seek a "second blessing." Some began to describe this experience as a "Baptism of the Holy Spirit," by which they meant a divine infusion of "power for service" rather than an instantaneous eradication of the remaining rebellious spirit. The metaphor they used is also instructive. Instead of a root of sin, they often compared holiness living to the flight of a hot-air balloon. Inbred sin is like an ever-present ballast dragging the balloon downward. When believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, God breathes such victory into their balloons that the weight of sin is easily overcome. But the minute they grieve the Spirit, they once more feel the drag of our own inbred sin, and victory is lost.

The Higher Life movement taught that Spirit baptism made holy living possible, but more importantly it gave believers a supernatural power to carry out the work of the ministry in the last days. After the Civil War, many of the movement's popular writers stressed the novel idea that Jesus would return to rapture His bride before the onset of a terrible period of tribulation. Before the war, most Holiness people assumed the nearly-continual waves of revival in America would eventually usher in a thousand years of Christian peace, culminating in Christ's return. But the war shattered this optimism, and afterwards the pre-millennial model found fertile ground among Higher Life teachers.

## Our Birthplace: The 1890s

By the mid-1890s this rapture teaching had won over most of the leaders of the Wesleyan wing of the movement as well, and the two understandings of holiness enjoyed an unprecendented season of mutual respect and influence. Wesleyan Holiness preachers, for example, began to sense the weight of living in the "eleventh hour." Whether at home or abroad, the lost must be reached at once. As a result, Watson, Knapp, and other Methodists began to speak of the sanctification experience as both a "negative emptying" of inbred sin and a "positive infilling" of Holy Ghost power—often comparing the latter to an explosive encounter with "fire," "dynamite," "lightening bolts," or "electric shocks." And they began to read and associate with Quakers like Seth Rees and Presbyterians like A. B. Simpson. During this decade Rees joined forces with Knapp, a union that would ultimately birth the Pilgrim Holiness Church, and Simpson formed the interdenominational Christian & Missionary Alliance for the urgent promotion of end-time evangelization. According to Simpson, this rapid spread of Christianity would be empowered by an abnegation of the "self life" so thorough that it made room for the Holy Spirit to manifest the gifts of the Spirit in the lives of sanctified believers. By the end of the century, these more radical promoters of the Wesleyan and Higher Life branches of the Holiness Movement could inspire each other and even work together across traditional theological barriers because they had come to share the same passion: The purity and power of the "second blessing" of sanctification that equips believers to meet their soon-coming King with both arms full of precious sheaves.

By 1898, this radical valuation of a cleansing, empowering holiness led to the formation of the three groups who would later merge to form our denomination. In that year the Methodist Crumpler planted an independent congregation in Goldsboro whose name was their doctrine: "The Pentecostal Holiness Church." That same year, B. H. Irwin brought together the representatives from the interdenominational Fire-Baptized Holiness Associations he had recently organized across the South and Midwest to form the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church. This new denomination uniquely advocated both the "second blessing" of sanctification as an instantaneous experience of radical purity and a subsequent baptism of fire, evidenced by one of several sensational physical manifestations, as an available "third blessing" of supernatural power. Also in 1898, two former Presbyterian ministers from South Carolina who had connected with A. B. Simpson and the Christian & Missonary Allianace, launched the Altamont Bible & Missionary Training School (now Holmes Bible College). This school became the hub of the Holiness-oriented Brewerton Presbyterian Church (later called the Tabernacle Pentecostal Church). In the opening days of 1900, A. B. Crumpler organized several congregations into the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina. In 1907 all three of these young denominations embraced the Asuza Street Revival, and grafted Pentecostal onto their pre-existing identity as Holiness churches. For without holiness, "no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

## The Challege of Living Holy

Like all Holiness chuches, the three organizations that eventually formed the IPHC each stressed the need to "keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). Each had its list of prohibited behaviors—banned dress, foods, recreational activities, etc.—even as they acknowledged that serious sins as pride and jealousy were more difficult to quantify and discipline. Some of the prohibited items in these "holiness codes" we would identify as unhealthy for any Christian today—such as gossiping, drunkeness, and promiscuity. Other prohibitions reflecting that particular time and culture have faded from our preaching and practice over the years. We no longer, for example, ban the consumption of pork products or the wearing of neckties, as the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church did. In fact, one might argue that by the mid-20th century eating pork and wearing a tie had become unofficial requirements for pastoring a Pentecostal Holiness congregation. At heart, these lists were intended to prevent "worldly" behavior that would drive the presence of the Holy Spirit from their churches and rob them of the resources necessary to send the gospel around the world before Jesus returned. This impulse continues to be reflected in our IPHC Covenant of Commitments and in the thrust of our discipleship efforts.

But holiness was never just about what one does not do. And our founders took seriously the scriptural admonitions to love justice, walk humbly, and practice mercy. The first part of James 1:27 captured their imagination as much as the last: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." And all three streams that flowed into the IPHC funded schools, orphanages, and homes for unwed mothers with the same passion with which they gave up "worldly ornamentation" and tobacco products.

A good example is the ministry of a Methodist woman named Mattie Perry, a recent graduate of the Christian & Missionary Allianace training school in New York who preached holiness and raised money for missionaries all across the Carolinas. In 1898, she purchased an abandoned hotel in Marion, North Carolina and dubbed it the Elhanan Institute. Her vision was to open a school and orphanage for needy children in that part of the North Carolina mountains—and to run it strictly "on the faith principle." Mattie Perry would teach the children about Jesus, about sanctified living, about healing, and about God's faithfulness to supply their needs. And she would pray that God would call some of these rescued children into full-time Christian service as pastors, teachers, and missionaries. Her innovative and daring holiness strategy would save children in America out of their physical and spiritual poverty and deploy them all around the world as advance agents of the kingdom of God. Her friend N. J. Holmes supported Elhanan by sending his Altamont graduates as teachers and by accepting the students Mattie Perry recommended as students in his Bible school. For example, early Pentecostal Holiness mssionaries to China W. H. Turner and Pearl Lofton were students at Elhanan, as were Marvin Shirlen and Charlie Stroud, pioneer Pentecostal Holiness pastors in western North Carolina. By the time the building burned to the ground in the 1920s, over 1,200 children had passed through Elhanan.

This pattern of Holiness activism was not isolated to Marion. It characterized our entire movement both before and after our founders embrace of the Azusa Revival in 1907. Mattie Perry was only one among many such visionary Holiness heroes then and now. Holiness teaches us to shun the empty promises of satisfaction that the world offers—" the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions" (1 John 2:16)—but it also demands expression in the active practice of godliness. If we value holiness, it will show in what we run toward as much as what we run from.

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