

Higher Life Teaching

The good, the bad and the ugly

There is utter confusion regarding this subject in many circles; this is partly because Higher Life teaching is so diverse and evolved within different denominational streams amongst many different teachers. Some good teachers held to aspects of it while others were much more extreme. Various writers are lumped into the movement from many different theological backgrounds: Anglican, American Reformed, Dutch Reformed, Wesleyan Methodist, Dispensational, Holiness Movement, Quaker, Baptist and Brethren. Some Higher Life teachers (e.g. Robert Pearsall Smith) were seriously misled by following Wesleyan or Oberlin perfectionism, while other more moderate teachers (such as HCG Moule) generally held to Reformed truths. Clearly this is a tangled web to unravel.

It is easy, as many Reformed (Covenant Theologians) do, to simply dismiss the whole movement out-of-hand as thoroughly heretical; perhaps this is the safest course. However, there were some helpful emphases that are worthy of note. The early Higher Life Movement opposed the position in many Reformed churches at the time where sanctification was by self-effort following external law with little or no reliance upon the Holy Spirit and faith. The legalism in many Presbyterian and Baptist churches resulted in defeated believers unable to live righteous lives; these were thoroughly dejected and without hope. The better Higher Life teachers had some good things to say to such folk. However, the main thrust of the movement was dangerous in the opposite direction by teaching that sanctification is entirely the result of a crisis and ongoing faith resulting in passivity. This teaching neglected the importance of self-denial and striving against sin in continual repentance leading to a transformed life. Much Higher Life teaching also completely failed to understand the Biblical teaching on justification by faith and its relation to sanctification.

It is important for us to examine this as many Higher Life teachers are still very popular through their many books; also the teaching undergirds a number of presuppositions in modern evangelicalism, especially within Charismaticism.

A short history

Higher Life (also Victorious Life or Abundant Life) teaching arose as an offshoot from the Holiness Movement which developed in 19th century America. In time it became more associated with England, being centred in the Keswick Convention. Having developed further in England, it was repackaged in America in the 20th century where it had a very considerable effect on evangelicalism. The key early teachers were: Robert Pearsall Smith, Hanna Whitall Smith, Evan Hopkins, Bishop HCG Moule and William E Boardman.

The origin is usually claimed to be WE Boardman's book, *The Higher Christian Life* published in 1859. Though popular, critics claimed it was unbiblical. In one of his conventions Boardman met Robert Pearsall Smith and his Quaker wife Hanna Whitall Smith who subsequently became even more prominent spokesmen for the movement. In 1870 Robert wrote, *Holiness Through Faith*, which taught a second blessing crisis experience which led to victory over consciousness of sin (common American Holiness teaching). It was through their work and Hanna's book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (1875) that the Keswick Convention began in 1875. Hanna Whitall Smith taught that one had to progress beyond faith for justification to a second blessing experience where

one developed faith for sanctification which resulted in victory. These latter ideas are clearly unscriptural and mystical.

Robert Pearsall Smith's popularity peaked in his tour of southern England in 1873, which attracted many notable ministers including Evan Hopkins and EW Moore. It split evangelicals, many of whom, such as JC Ryle, criticised the doctrine of immediate deliverance from all known sin.¹ A conference at the aristocratic home Broadlands Park (1874) was followed by conventions in Oxford (1874) and Cheltenham and then a large conference in Brighton (1875) where 8,000 attended. After Brighton, Smith returned to America ostensibly for health reasons, but in fact he was having an affair with a young woman. This however, did not abate the interest in his teaching – though he fell from favour.

The vicar of St John's Keswick (Canon Harford-Battersby) left the Oxford conference in 1874 and decided to hold a similar meeting in 1875; the Keswick Convention grew from this. Early support from Anglicans included Evan Hopkins, HW Webb-Peploe, CA Fox and EW Moore. Evan Hopkins emerged as the leading voice in this period. In 1886 Handley C Moule joined the movement and gave it the necessary theological clout that it needed.

The convention continues today, but with much less influence. In 1938 Watchman Nee was invited to speak and caused quite a stir with his radical, no nonsense approach. Subsequently his books became extremely popular for decades. Nee introduced some other elements emanating from Plymouth Brethren and semi-Pentecostal sources.

Today most people are familiar with Higher Life teachings either from the books of Watchman Nee and Ruth Paxson or from more moderate preachers such as Andrew Murray and AW Tozer. The difficulty is isolating the helpful parts from the downright dangerous and mystical. Books range from the heretical, mystical, Holiness teachings of Pearsall / Whitall Smith, to confused unbiblical ideas of many run-of-the-mill writers, to relative sober evangelical exposition from Griffith Thomas, FB Meyer and HCG Moule (with reservations). For this reason extreme caution must be advised. In general we should say that young believers, who are developing a sound foundation in the truths of practical Christian living based upon sound doctrinal teaching, should avoid these works as they will cause confusion on dealing with sin.

Early representative teachers

- Anglican: Evan Hopkins, HCG Moule, HW Webb-Peploe, HW Griffith Thomas, J Stuart Holden.
- Baptist: FB Meyer.
- Quakers: Hanna Whitall Smith.
- Presbyterian: WE Boardman, Robert Pearsall Smith, AT Pierson, J Elder Cumming, George HC Macgregor.
- Dutch Reformed: Andrew Murray.
- Independent: Watchman Nee, Jessie Penn-Lewis.

Other sympathisers include: CI Scofield (Dispensational), AW Tozer (Christian Missionary Alliance), Alan Redpath, Stephen Olford, Ruth Paxson, Harry Ironside (Brethren), Vance Havner, Theodore Epp (Mennonite), Lewis Sperry Chafer (Dispensational), John Walvord (Dispensational), Kenneth Wuest, Charles Feinberg, Arthur Glasser and Harold J Ockenga (Presbyterian, Fuller Seminary President).

¹ JC Ryle called Smith's teaching, crude, self-contradictory, one-sided and irreconcilable with scripture (letter to the *Record*, 28 May 1865).

Foundational basis of Higher Life ideas

Original Higher Life teaching is chiefly centred upon the doctrine of sanctification, particularly the believer's practical sanctification. The purpose of Keswick was for the 'promotion of holiness' and 'liberty from sin'. This has led to claims of being delivered from all known sins and having endless victory over sin. Key early tenets were:

- Opposition to sanctification being a slow process of change (Pearsall Smith).
- Christians can be dominated by sin, thus they need a second blessing (i.e. a second work of grace – Boardman, Pearsall Smith).
- The experience of sanctification is a distinct work of grace separate from justification. (Boardman, though he distinguished this from Wesleyan perfectionism. He felt that Wesley went too far, but the Reformed did not go far enough.)
- Sanctification is experienced by faith, usually after a crisis post-justification experience (Boardman, Pearsall Smith).
- Holiness is a gift that God gives suddenly (Pearsall Smith).
- Hanna Whitall Smith mixed Quakerism with Wesleyanism to produce the idea of a dramatic crisis with the rest of faith ('stillness'), affirmed in 'Let go and let God'.
- Emphasis upon subjective experiences.
- HCG Moule later warned against emphasising a second blessing and claiming instantaneous victory.
- Early Keswick speeches were less prepared and included many testimonies; later, Keswick endeavoured to be more theological and based on more Biblical themes such as identification with Christ, cleansing from sin, being filled with the Spirit and mission.

The more usual later teaching was an emphasis upon the doctrine of identification in Romans 6. This leads (in their view) to:

- A denial of the Wesleyan idea of sin being eradicated from a believer's life; instead they framed a theology of continuing victory over sin by faith in the identification truths of Romans 6. Sin was not rooted out from the heart but its domination and power was undercut by death and resurrection. [This far was Biblical.]
- Teaching a crisis of surrender or consecration whereby a believer obtains victory. This is followed by faith in the word, particularly of Romans 6. The crisis prepares a believer for surrender; this consecration leads to life on a higher plane. This is lived by faith that one is dead to sin and alive to God. (Boardman, *The Higher Life Doctrine*, piii; Ruth Paxson, *Life on the Highest Plane*, etc.)
- The believer thus depends upon Christ to defeat sin and enable obedience, giving victory. All self-reliance, effort and striving must be avoided; the battle is given to Christ. 'The secret of complete victory is faith: simply believing that Jesus has done and is doing all.' [Charles G. Trumbull, *Victory in Christ*; Christian Literature Crusade, 1959, p84, 48.]

J Packer sums up Keswick teaching as Wesleyanism influenced by Reformed theology in a fourfold modification:

1. The 'second blessing' transformation increases love but does not eradicate sin.
2. The blessing is basically being filled with the Spirit for the battle against sin.
3. The blessing is received by a crisis of self-surrender of faith not feeling.
4. To fight sin one must not strive directly in one's own strength. Rather one should give sinful impulses to Christ to counteract them. (I.e. passivity.)

[*New Dictionary of Theology*, IVP, 1988, art. 'Holiness Mvt. p314.]

Thus the worst of Higher Life teaching is close to Wesleyan perfectionism. The more moderate (later) teaching on faith for holiness can be summarised as:

1. **FAITH** – believing that one is dead to sin and alive to God (Rm 6).
2. **RELIANCE** - on Christ to defeat sin for you and promote righteousness by the Spirit.
3. **DENIAL** – of all forms of self-effort to good and striving to resist sin but trusting that the Spirit will raise one above temptation and empower good works.
4. **RESULT** – total freedom from sin’s power and control; continual victory.

In short this was avoiding all self-reliance (seen as the flesh) in sanctification and trusting that Christ will do all the work for you. Sanctification is by faith just as much as justification is. Thus the answer to temptation is not to resist it but to hand it over to Christ; sinful impulses will be ‘counteracted’ by the Spirit.

Differences between Higher Life and Reformed teaching on holiness.	
Higher Life	Reformed
Believe that one is dead to sin and alive to God.	Believe that one is dead to sin and alive to God.
Inner faith necessary.	Inner faith and walking by faith necessary.
Reliance upon the Spirit is vital.	Reliance upon the Spirit is vital.
Self-effort condemned.	Self-effort encouraged on the basis of truth, faith and prayer, but not fleshly effort.
Striving against sin denied.	Striving against sin affirmed.
Resisting and fighting the devil is fleshly and futile.	Resisting and warring against the devil is demanded.
Christ achieves holiness in the believer who is passive.	The believer works out his salvation in the power of God.
It teaches a possible constant perfection of external acts.	Denies perfection of acts since we have an old nature that weakens us. Though we grow in grace we are never perfect in this life; sin affects us all the time.
The heart is never changed. The old nature has died.	The mind / heart is constantly renewed (Rm 12:2). The old nature is not destroyed but made idle or inoperative (<i>katergeo</i> Rm 6:6). Salvation is complete only in the new man in our spirit as a perfect baby that grows. The inward man is renewed every day (2 Cor 4:16).
A second blessing experience of surrender and consecration is necessary (early form), or at least important (later form). You must enter into victorious life by a specific act of consecration and faith.	Special experiences are not necessary; one must just grow in believing scripture and acting upon it. All Christians have entered resurrection life in Christ. It does not have to be entered into as an experience; though a believer may require teaching on it.
This experience of sanctification delivers a person from conflict; they hand over their lives to Christ who does all the work and automatically counteracts sinful impulses.	There is a constant battle with sinful lusts. The flesh wars against the Spirit (Gal 5:17). Even Paul did not do the things he wished (Rm 7). Thus the need for constant dependence upon Christ day by day to actively defeat sin, and confession / repentance upon failure.
Right living becomes negative – merely not being dominated by sin.	Right living is living in positive righteousness – doing the good works that God predestined us to do to reflect Christ.
Passivity results.	Passivity condemned, self-control demanded.
Believers who do not gain the second blessing of sanctification live as defeated carnal Christians and continue in this for many years, or even all their lives.	A Christian who is sinful is fleshly (carnal) but this is an temporary abnormality. All true Christians will progress in faith and fruit. Those that never make any forward progress must be doubted as having any genuine spiritual life.
Low view of sin, usually as merely external acts.	Biblical view of sin as corruption of thought, word and deed.
Life is happy once this secret is learned.	Life is full of many tribulations in this world.
Attitude of joy, victory and confidence.	Attitude of humility, weakness and dependence upon Christ for cleansing.

Theological roots - Perfectionism

The foundations of perfectionism are the following:

1. **A NECESSARY SECOND WORK OF GRACE:** sanctification is an experience that occurs after justification.
2. **EXTERNALISING OF SIN:** constant victory is possible. Christ's counteracts and subjects the old nature so that it does not express itself in sinful deeds. The measure of victory is of external sinful works not inner motivations or unconscious acts.
3. **OBLIGATION IS MEASURED BY OPPORTUNITY:** i.e. responsibility for holiness is measured by a person's capability. [This particularly emanates from Finney's Pelagianism.]
4. **SUBJECTIVE EVALUATION OF SIN:** the standard of holiness is subjective and conscious (what I think to be sin) rather than Biblical (everything that is not of Christ in thought, word and deed); note the repetition of the phrase, 'any known sin.'

These are all found in forms of Higher Life teaching, but where did it derive from? There are two sources.

Wesleyan perfectionism

Wesleyan theology emphasised a second blessing experience of sanctification that resulted in love to God and man; Higher Life teaching is very similar but emphasises victory over sin. Wesley's Arminianism always led him to focus theology upon a man-ward perspective and not God's.

Wesley's second transforming work of grace ('entire sanctification') is separate from the new birth and conversion through which God roots out all sinful aspirations² leaving only love. Man's inner motivation is thus fully committed to serve God and love others. This love is supernatural, focused and powerful as an inner driving force, even though one may still act foolishly and err.

Thus Wesleyan perfectionism is about a changed heart attitude, 'perfect love', whereas Keswick perfectionism centred on deliverance from sinful acts, 'perfect behaviour'. In both cases there was a poor and unbiblical definition of sin; in both cases a person is perfectly sanctified when they do not consciously commit any known sin ('voluntary transgression of a known law', Wesley). It says nothing about unconscious failures, inward corruption or involuntary failure to conform to God's standard of inner and outward purity. Wesley was also contradictory in saying that a sanctified believer constantly needs pardon every day and yet the higher Christian life is perfect and free from sin.³

John Fletcher, Wesley's favoured successor, developed and popularised this doctrine; indeed Fletcher's writings became more popular in America than Wesley's were for a time, influencing Holiness teachers. It was Fletcher who coined the phrase 'baptism in the Spirit' for this second blessing experience. From Holiness teachers this form of perfectionism was adopted by such popular writers as William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army), Samuel Logan Brengle (Salvationist), Oswald Chambers (Baptist) and supposed Calvinist J. Sidlow Baxter. Salvation became popularly viewed as being in two stages:

- 1) Christ as justifier; our deliverance from the guilt of sin;
- 2) Christ as sanctifier; our deliverance from the power of sin.

² Wesley literally considered that sin was rooted right out of a believer's life in this experience. There was no explanation why sin could continue and the experience be reversed and regained.

³ Much of Wesley's teaching was not only contradictory but unbiblical.

Both arise from faith and Christians can miss out on the second, living a life of defeat as carnal Christians. This view is now widespread in evangelicalism.

Wesleyan perfectionism is an addition to Biblical truth; a rogue development of the Puritan (Reformed) influences of Wesley's youth. He added ideas from early Greek Fathers (e.g. Ephraem Syrus), Anglican mystics (W. Law), Roman Catholic mystics (e.g. F. de Sales), Quietists (e.g. Molinos) and Pietists (e.g. Francke). He admitted that these ideas were received and cemented long before he came to personal faith in 1738 (there is a severe question as to what this faith really was⁴). His personal contribution was that the inner state of purity and love could come instantaneously by faith, instead of at the end of a long mystical ascent of the soul, with a concomitant assurance in the heart – just as in justification. This is why it was a popular idea – a short cut to mystical union with God. It was also sought for its effects in felt blessings, chiefly: vibrant worship and praise, peaceful satisfaction, strong commitment to God and readiness to suffer.

Wesley himself drew short of personal claims to sinless perfection, but foolishly did not deny the term itself.

Much of early Higher Life teaching arose from this Wesleyan perfectionism coming via the Holiness Movement. For instance:

- The need of a second work of grace for sanctification based on a crisis.
- The second blessing results in holiness and perfect love.
- Sinful motives are rooted from the heart. [Later Higher teaching did not claim this rather that sin is constantly overcome in the heart by faith and resting in Christ.]
- This experience is subjective – ‘knowledge of being “sanctified” or without known sin depended upon not being conscious of “breaking any known law”.’ [JI Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*; Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984, p137-139.]
- Sanctification can be lost (after all it is only a subjective experience).

For instance, CG Trumbull typically taught that justification and sanctification are two separate gifts from God both obtained by faith; thus following Holiness teaching mediated through Pearsall Smith. This is virtually Wesleyan perfectionism, which separated sanctification and justification and fragmented the gift of salvation.

Oberlin (Finneyite) perfectionism

Another root was Oberlin theology, the ideas prompted by CG Finney and developed by Asa Mahan, becoming influential in America in the mid 1800s.

‘If Oberlin Perfectionism is dead, it has found its grave not in the abyss of nonexistence, but in the Higher Life Movement, the Keswick movement, the Victorious Life Movement.’ [BB Warfield, *Perfectionism*, p. ix.]

Mahan had moved from the legalism of sanctification by works to sanctification by faith alone. Once there was no place for faith, now there was no place for works. Warfield notes that he didn't understand that we must both work and pray, explaining that the possibility of absolute appropriation is a form of perfectionism. [BB Warfield, *Perfectionism*, p52, 53.] Finney's perfectionism is worse, being founded upon near Pelagian principles of human ability to keep God's law. For Finney both regeneration and holiness are works of man. Oberlin perfection is opposed to Biblical truth and not based upon Reformed truth at all.

⁴ See my paper, *The Problem with John Wesley*.

The good and the bad

Positive features of Higher Life teachings

1. It had a high view of the Bible.
2. It focused believers on the need to live righteously.
3. It focused people upon the victory achieved by Christ on the cross.
4. It focused people on union with Christ.
5. It emphasised grace.
6. It encouraged prayer and faith.
7. It condemned stale legalism.
8. It discouraged pride and self-reliance.
9. It emphasised dependence upon Christ and walking in the Spirit.
10. It emphasised practical Christian living.
11. It encouraged evangelism.

Thus the better Higher Life teaching is a more Biblical expression of Wesleyan perfectionism. While it avoids some Wesleyan extremes and contradictions, it still suffers from the same basic problems (second blessing, tendency to passivity and mysticism, low view of sin, self-delusion about victory, lack of active repentance). However, it at least tended to focus upon Romans 6 instead of a vague subjective experience resulting merely in changed feelings.

Negative features

1. It is mistaken about the basis of individual salvation. It confuses what happens in regeneration, justification, definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification. It particularly divides justification and sanctification by making sanctification a faith-based experience rather than the outcome of regeneration and redemption. It exalts sanctification and ignores justification.
2. It implies that conversion is not enough, one needs a special experience of surrender.
3. It has mistaken views about repentance.
4. The idea of a second blessing ('a second and deeper work of grace', Boardman) is unbiblical. [This was later abandoned in the annual Keswick Convention.]
5. It introduces mystical ideas in its teaching on a second blessing and surrender.
6. It does not do enough justice to apostolic passages encouraging us to discover what is the fulness of the salvation that all receive in conversion.
7. It fails to see that we are active as well as faithful in defeating sin. Instead of following Paul who teaches that the result of union with Christ (Rm 6:1-11) is an active yielding to God and resisting sin (Rm 6:12-13), it emphasised faith and resting (inactivity).
8. It gives no justice to verses speaking about our activity in combating sin, such as Phil 2:12-13, 2 Tim 4:7 or Heb 12:4.

What most Higher Life teachers fail to see

1. **JUSTIFYING FAITH = SANCTIFYING FAITH;** both are found in Christ and are received in conversion (1 Cor 1:30). Sanctification results from justification and adoption.
2. **SANCTIFICATION IS IN TWO PARTS:**
 - a) Definitive sanctification whereby our spirit is saved and we are made fit to sit in heaven with Christ (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 2:6).
 - b) Progressive sanctification, which is the ongoing action of the believer in mortifying the flesh and putting on the new man more and more.
3. **ROMANS 6 IS MISUNDERSTOOD.** Instead of seeing it as the outcome of justification (Rm 4-5) and something to be applied to live right ('consider yourself dead ... therefore do not

yield to sin'), it is viewed something to be appropriated by passive faith ('trust for sanctification').

4. **THIS TEACHING PROMOTES MYSTICISM** through passivity and Quietism ('Let go and let God'). Though some better teachers mean 'trust God and deny yourself' by this, many others are more extreme and affirm the need for passivity (e.g. Boardman & Trumbull). This is why they actively promoted books by Quietist Mme. Guyon. Passivity becomes the means of releasing the Spirit; personal activity and initiative is condemned. An emphasis upon annihilating the self to enable divine life to flow is utterly mystical. Putting off the old man is not destroying the self. This confuses the soul of man (a neutral vehicle) with the old nature of man (the sinful Adamic life).
5. **IT FAILS TO SEE THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN OUR MIND.** Putting on the new man is not abandoning the mind but renewing it. The Spirit uses our mind and will (i.e. soul); he enables us to understand God's will and purpose and inspires us to be active in pursuing it for ourselves. Progressive sanctification is about being conformed in our soul to God's will and this involves rationality. Even our worship is to be rational (Rm 12:1-2); worship is never empty-headed. Obedience stems from a renewed mind and will.
6. **IT FAILS TO UNDERSTAND THAT CHRIST IS NOT JUST THE AUTHOR OF OUR FAITH BUT THE FINISHER OF IT.** In fact the word 'finisher' also means 'perfecter' (Heb 12:2). It also ignored the continual work of the Holy Spirit in us to produce spiritual fruit, which is very practical. The work of Christ and the Spirit in our progressive sanctification teaches and enables us to persevere, watch, pray, deny ourselves and even do the good works that God predestined for us to do (Eph 2:10). Instead of this, Higher Life teachers claim that we see that Christ is our life and that once surrendered to, we just believe that Christ does all the fighting for us, all the wrestling, all the striving. We merely remain peaceful, calm and rested. This is clearly at odds with many Biblical passages.
7. **IT FAILS TO SEE THAT WE MUST WORK OUT OUR SALVATION BY GOD'S GRACE WORKING IT IN US.** God gives us motivation and energy through his grace to do his will (Phil 2:12-13). This is the activity of the self (soul) responding to inner spiritual grace. If this is denied or 'annihilated' then there can be no righteous living.
8. **IT REDUCES THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN DOING RIGHT.** Scripture teaches that we are very involved and responsible in living right (1 Tim 1:18-19). Sin must be resisted; the devil must be resisted (Jm 4:7; 1 Pt 5:8-9). Sin must be fled from and righteousness pursued (1 Cor 6:18, 10:14; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). Holiness must be pursued not rested in (Heb 12:14). Note Rm 6:13 and 1 Cor 9:27.
9. **THEIR IDEA OF RIGHTEOUS LIVING IS ACTUALLY MAN-CENTRED.** Although much stress is placed upon faith in Christ's work, the key first cause of sanctification is the activity of man in letting go, surrendering, and believing. It also results in subjectivism, the believer's inward felt experience is the measure of victorious life.
10. **SIN AND HOLINESS ARE OFTEN REDUCED IN VALUE.** God hates sin perfectly. The doctrine of total depravity enables us to see the depth of sin in our life. God salvation in Christ enables us to deal with this effectively, even taking thoughts captive. However, Higher Life teachers often just focus on external sins, while ignoring sinful thoughts and feelings. Boardman, following Finney's Pelagianism and Oberlin theology, taught a sliding scale of sin based upon ability. God's law never teaches such a thing. Finney even said that a morally incapacitated person was as perfect as God is since he knew no better. Such a statement is blasphemous. [See Warfield, *Perfectionism*, p68-71.] Thus Higher Life has no perfect rule of righteousness. Biblically, God's standard is Christ – absolute perfection of righteousness. This is what we are called to and what we cannot attain in this life. Christ is the rule of God's righteous standard for man in thought, word and deed. Higher Life teaching lowers this standard; victorious life becomes not committing known sins. The moment they say they have total victory over sin, they become liars, and thus sinners (1 Jn 1:9). It was once common to hear Christians state that they had not sinned for several months or even years. This is self-delusion.

11. **THERE IS NO EMPHASIS UPON MOURNING FOR SIN AND BROKENNESS.** Romans 7 is regarded as the sad position of people who fail to follow their teaching; it has no application to them but is a warning for sinners. Often it is explained to be the result of failing to apprehend the truth of Romans 6, thus it denies that we all fall into this state (including the apostle Paul). Perfect sanctification means that you don't experience Romans 7. Some writers talk about brokenness (like Nee) but in the context of self-denial and mysticism resulting in the release of the Spirit in the person.
12. **ANTINOMIANISM OFTEN RESULTS FROM HIGHER LIFE TEACHING.** This is evidenced in history on many occasions, beginning with Robert Pearsall Smith. It is a form of self-deception, mistaking a low standard of sin and personal peace about sins defeated for true holiness.
13. **IT IS A FORM OF NEW GNOSTICISM.** Like the ancient Gnostics it held that learning this special secret taught only by them enabled a person to have a mystical experience that took a believer on to a new and higher plane of divine life. This is pure Gnostic mystery religion. They also proposed that the benefits of sanctification are gained immediately (without means) from Christ by faith and not mediately through God's word. The Bible tells us that faith comes from hearing God in his word (Rm 10:17) and that sanctification is by the word (Jn 17:17; 2 Pt 1:4). It is obeying scripture that keeps us free from mystical ideas of men. Deceit follows ignoring scripture. It also demeans Christ by making him an 'efficient means' of victory rather than our Lord and Saviour who directs and shepherds us. Union with Christ is treated more like a spiritual law of success rather than a relationship with God as a son to a father.
14. **IT ENCOURAGES ELITISM.** This results from elevating experience over doctrine; people who have this experience are first class citizens or overcomers.
15. **IT DISCOURAGES REALISTS.** Those who adopt this teaching, but are troubled by their continuing sins, are left discouraged since they have not gained absolute victory. Clearly we all sin, at least inwardly, all the time. From time-to-time we fall more seriously; we should acknowledge this, confess it to God and truly repent (do right from changed thinking). However, the danger with Higher Life adherents is convincing yourself that you have not sinned, by judging righteousness from a merely subjective view of external behaviour. We sin continually and this requires genuine repentance with fear and trembling. The moral struggle that Paul called a 'fight of faith' is obviated by a single mystical experience that (supposedly) destroys all sin.
16. **IT RESULTS IN POOR PASTORAL COUNSELLING.** Following on from the last point, many folk have struggled to gain this experience only to repeatedly fail. They tried and tried to surrender and get victory but their honesty about personal sin led to disillusionment. Higher Life teachers often counselled people very badly in this area, just demanding that they strive to get the experience of deliverance. It is also noteworthy that it prevailed amongst the middle classes, blue-collar workers and those comfortably off. Unlike Pentecostalism it did not pervade the poor and underprivileged.

Factors that must underlie genuine teaching on holiness

Scripture makes clear that sanctification involves a number of features. Any Holiness teaching that denies any of these items should be immediately suspect. For instance, Paul gives clear instruction that growth in holiness will involve inner conflict; there is a fight for holiness and growth in sanctification. Holiness ideas based upon a mystical one-off crisis resulting in a constant victory and rest thus deny the principle of conflict and cannot be correct.

1. **THE FOUNDATION OF SANCTIFICATION IS JUSTIFICATION.** The peace with God gained through the forgiveness and cleansing from sin by Christ's substitutionary work on the cross, and by receiving his righteousness, enables us to be declared righteous in heaven's court (Rm 4-5). All sanctification and growth in holiness starts with this. Any teaching which emphasises an experience for holiness more than Christ's cross must be rejected.
2. **THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEFINITIVE (POSITIONAL) SANCTIFICATION AND PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION.** The first occurs in our spirit and enables us to commune with God, taste glory and be seated with Christ (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 2:6). This is the past tense of salvation, 'you were saved' (Rm 8:24). Growth in holiness on Earth results from being progressively separated (sanctified) to God for his good pleasure. This occurs as we increasingly put off the old man and put on the new. Scripture calls this the salvation of the soul (Jm 1:21, see later). Many theological systems confuse these things. For instance, Hyper-Calvinism denies progressive sanctification by placing all the blessings of the Christian life in eternity; thus it also confuses election and justification. Other systems deny definitive sanctification and make communion with God dependent upon the believer's work; God can only be communed with if believers are good.
3. **THE RELATIONAL BASIS OF SANCTIFICATION IS BEING CRUCIFIED AND RAISED WITH CHRIST.** (Rm 6:2ff; Gal 2:20; Col 3:1-3). As a result believers are now a new creation (2 Cor 5:17); this new creation is the new man in our spirit, created according to the likeness of Christ (Eph 4:24). Any holiness teaching that is not based upon an understanding of our death and resurrection through union with Christ is wrong.
4. **THE EFFECTIVE BASIS OF SANCTIFICATION IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US.** The reflection of Christ's life in us is called the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Genuine sanctification will result in believers manifesting: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The Spirit works through objective means (truth, prayer, the Lord's Supper, Christian fellowship, and providential suffering) and subjective means (worship, communion with God meditation, thinking, self-examination, self-discipline). The Spirit changes our thinking and empowers our discipline to produce holy habits. Any teaching that denies the Spirit's ongoing work in us, such as by emphasising a one-off experience, is wrong. Any teaching that does not produce the fruit of the Spirit must be false.
5. **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD IS FUNDAMENTAL TO GROWTH.** We learn from God's word how to be righteous (1 Tim 4:3; 2 Tim 3:16; 1 Pt 2:1-2). Righteousness is the other side of the coin to holiness. Righteousness = obedience to God's law, objective holy behaviour; holiness is being separated unto God, inward consecration and heart commitment to God's will (1 Jn 2:3). Obeying the truth purifies our soul by teaching us righteousness, how to do what is right according to God's will (1 Pt 1:22). Any teaching which minimises scripture or conformity to God's law revealed in Christ must be rejected (1 Jn 2:4).
6. **PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION INVOLVES ACTIVE TRANSFORMATION.** Many scriptures show that growth in holiness involves: a renewing of the mind (Rm 12:1-2); the new man being renewed in knowledge (Col 3:10), the understanding being enlightened (Eph 1:18), and our lives being changed from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18). The Christian life is one of continual repentance, turning from sin to follow God resulting from a change of thinking (2 Cor

- 7:9-10). Greater knowledge leads to mourning for sin and change. Any teaching that denies the need for transformation and repentance is wrong.
7. **WE ARE ACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE, IN WORKING OUT HOLINESS.** This is the salvation of the soul (Jm 1:21; 1 Pt 1:9, 22), the present tense of salvation ('we are being saved', 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15). This is working out that which God motivates and enables within (Phil 2:12-13). Any teaching that demands or engenders passivity is wrong.
 8. **GROWTH IN HOLINESS INVOLVES CONSTANT CONFLICT.** There is a war within us between two natures, the old man and the new man (Rm 8:7; Gal 5:17). Holiness involves mortification or self-denial, considering the old man dead and putting it off (Eph 4:22; Rm 8:13; Col 3:5); saying no to fleshly lusts. Any teaching which denies two natures or an inner warfare is wrong. Reckoning the old man (nature) to be dead is not annihilation of the self (or soul – how could we kill off our mind, feelings and will and still function as people?) but rejecting the sinful unregenerate principle of our old life.
 9. **SANCTIFICATION PRODUCES BIBLICAL HUMILITY.** Genuine growth in holiness results in a deeper sense of personal sin and unworthiness. The more holy the believer, the greater their sense of personal moral failure. Thus Paul could call himself the 'chief of sinners' in about 65 AD towards the end of his life (1 Tim 1:15). Any holiness teaching which results in complacency, or claims of living in permanent victory over sin, is false.

Conclusion

The Higher Life Movement is very diverse comprising a wide variety of teachers. Some of these offer valuable insights, having a background in sound theology, but others are superficial, heretical and very mystical. Some of its emphases have value, especially when confronted by dead, formal legalism; indeed its focus upon holiness is a welcome spur to righteous obedience. It is also helpful in its focus upon identification truths, for example in Romans 6, which are often ignored or downplayed by Reformed theologians. However, its tendency towards mystical Quietism, indeed its encouragement of Quietist writings,⁵ is a dangerous and heretical deceit that can only do harm to the undiscerning. Further, its misunderstanding of several important doctrines will complicate the danger of its promotion of a mystical second blessing experience.

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Contact understandingministries@yahoo.com

⁵ Such as the works of Roman Catholic Quietists like Francois Fénelon (1651-1715), Mme. Guyon (1648-1717), Miguel de Molinos (1640-1697) and certain mystics. Typical ideas include suppressing the self to find union with God, 'God-me supplanted self-me' (sic. Guyon, 1680)