

Christian Holiness in the Chin Context

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Background of Christianity in Chin Hill

In this paper, I am writing about the background of Christianity in Chin Hill and a bit about Myanmar as well. I will mention some cultural observations or traditions that we have been practicing since Chin began. The purpose of this paper is to understand what biblical holiness and cultural holiness mean for Chin people. This paper will mostly compare holiness in Chin culture and holiness in the Bible. I interviewed one of my friends who said that we Chin people must understand the difference between holiness in culture and biblical holiness. This paper will help many Chin people understand holiness more deeply, and it will correct and lead them to the Lord.

Myanmar is one of the Buddhist countries of the world. Myanmar (Burma) has a population of over 50 million.¹ Close to 90% of the people in Myanmar today are Buddhist, and virtually all of them practice Theravada Buddhism. There are eight major tribes in Myanmar: Kachin, Kaya, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Barma, Rhahkaing, and Shan. Among them, the Kachin, Chin, and Kayin tribal people are mostly Christians.

In 1554, Catholic missionaries entered Burma for the very first time. Not until 1613, however, was there a permanent presence with churches with about three hundred Roman Catholic believers in Rangoon. But growth was so significantly disrupted by the wars between Burma and Siam (Thailand) in the next two centuries that total membership of five thousand in 1800 had fallen to about three thousand in 1832. In 1813, the famous American missionary, Adoniram Judson, arrived in the country to serve

¹ World Council of Churches, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/myanmar-baptist-convention> (accessed 5/1/21).

there for nearly 40 years. He translated the Bible into Burmese in 1834.² This was the greatest gift for us. He was a precious gift from God for our nation. However, Judson did not physically go to the Chin State when he was serving the Lord in Myanmar.

In Myanmar, we Chin people are a minority tribe known as the Asho and Chin people. We call ourselves Mizo, Lai mi referring to Hakha, Falam, and Than Tlang. Zo mi refers to Ti Dim, Kuki refers to Kangpalet and others, Asho and Bawm. Even though we belong to the same race, our homeland has been divided into three parts. These parts mainly live around the borders of the three countries: Myanmar (formerly Burma, in the Chin state and areas in lower parts), India (in Mizoram and a few other bordering states), and Bangladesh (in the Chittagong Hill Tracts).³

On March 15, 1899, American missionaries Arthur and Laura Carson arrived in Chin Hill (Hakha) and saw Chin people for the first time. The Carsons wrote about the Chin, “They were very drunken, exceedingly savage, being head-hunters fierce savage-looking, dirty and filthy beyond description, wild, savage, pagan and heathen.”⁴ So, the Carsons did not know what to do or how to evangelize these people. Arthur’s wife could not even think they could live there. “Arthur, I cannot do it. I cannot stay on and live out my life in this awful place, among these loathsome people.” Arthur answered in a most gentle manner: “Do not talk that way. Things will look brighter in the morning. Do not think any more about it tonight. Just try to go to sleep, with the thought that you do not have to stay. Unless you want to . . . Laura, remember our motto, I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me.”⁵ They started learning the language and sharing the gospel with the people. After a year, in 1904, Pau Suan and Thuam Hang were

² Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 2 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 330-331.

³ K. Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity* (Brussels: The Euro Burma Office, 2009), 187.

⁴ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History* (Falam: Zomi Theological College, 2007), 49.

⁵ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 50.

converted to Christianity from Animism. While the Carsons were serving in Chin Hill, some Karen teachers and evangelists came to Chin Hill to help them. The Karen people especially worked in the Falam areas. These are the names of the Karen people who came to Chin Hill to help the missionaries: 1) Thra San Win in 1900 at Hakha, 2) Thra Shwe Zan in 1920 at Khuasak (Tedim), 3) Thra Po Ku in 1901 at Tedim, 4) Thra Maung Gone in 1906 at Laizo (Falam), 5) Thra Po Aye in 1906 at Lungbang (Falam), 6) Thra MaungLun in 1906 at Zokhua (Hakha), 7) Thra Maung Kya in 1904 at Than Tlang, 8) Samo Gyi Ghine in 1902 at Hakha, 9) Thra Aung Dwe in 1915 at Hakha, Falam, and 10) Thra San Tun in 1920 at Laizo, Falam.⁶

Traditional Music/Songs

We Chin people like to dance and sing, whether we are happy or sad, and basically on any occasion. I believe that this is one of the most beautiful parts of our culture. “Many tribes show variations in songs, dances, music, and even different musical instruments are employed.”⁷ We have many different songs, depending on the situation, such as lullabies, children’s songs, war songs, and hunter’s victories songs known as Vawr Hla, songs of cultivation, drinking songs, love songs, and funeral songs. Almost every song is accompanied by a musical instrument.⁸

Speech Tone Songs: These songs are sung when someone dies as an expression showing our sadness for him or her. “The (Thuthmun Zai) songs were composed around AD 1400.”⁹

Thuthmun Zai: In Chin language, this is A mi an than nan e Vuitum lian lu a tlun, Keini kan than nan e. ka hrai Rihsang a kai. In English, it is, “For a man’s fame, a Gayal’s head was brought into the house, but our news

⁶ Zomi Theological College, *Chin Church History*, 53.

⁷ Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity*, 69.

⁸ Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity*, 70.

⁹ Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity*, 72.

is that my child is dead, and his spirit went to the Rih Lake.”¹⁰

Lamentation: This song is normally sung by women; I did not hear many men sing this, but there may be some. Women sit directly next to the grave and sing it. For example, in English, “Oh, Khap khap mother what a pity. You just left us, and we will not see you anymore.”

Hunter’s Victorious Song: These songs are still sung in many places in Chin State. I will not write the words in Chin but only in English because they are too long in Chin. The English is, “Go and tell my parents, their son is nursing lovingly, A Swiss lady in his arms, Sewed together with his clothes (married).”¹¹

Christianization Period: Before 1899-1959, it seems that there were no Christian songs in Chin Hill. Most songs were traditional songs. Then missionaries introduced Western hymns and instruments. They taught Christian themes, such as the birth of Christ, crucifixion, resurrection, and heaven.¹²

Dances: Dances also played an important part in the lives of Chin people. We perform for festivals and ceremonies, such as happy occasions and funeral rituals, national days, etc. We have many dances, but the bamboo dance is the most popular in Chin State.

The Holiness Movement in Chin State

By 1973, many denominations had separated from the Baptist church. In Chin State, Baptist was the only denomination in the early years because Chin State missionaries were sent by the Baptist church in the United States. It seemed that Chin Christians did not have any problem with the doctrine of the Baptist church or the teaching of Baptists in those days. According to Bishop No Chum, in 1973, some evangelists began to preach the gospel, and revivals were seen in many places in Chin State.¹³ Mostly,

¹⁰ Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity*, 73.

¹¹ Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity*, 72-73.

¹² Robin, *Chin History, Culture and Identity*, 72.

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=no+chum+interview (accessed,

they preached about salvation or the importance of being born again because, as Rev Hoi Cung Tum, who was one of the best preachers and theologians, said, “Chin State missionary did not tell Chin people about being born again; they just told them about Christian living or life. You should not drink alcohol or smoke, but you should go to Church and sing a song, etc.”¹⁴

Evangelists started to preach about salvation, holiness, love, and other topics. One of the gospel themes many Chin Christians loved and were inspired by was “holiness.” They preached and emphasized that no one can go to heaven unless they are holy. We Christians are called to be holy and love each other, they said. But the way they explained holiness was not really biblical, I think, because it seemed to me that they tried to be holy by their effort and ability, not by the Holy Spirit. They said that the Holy Spirit could not live in us as long as we are unholy because the Holy Spirit is so pure and so clean. We should clean ourselves first, and after that, the Holy Spirit will come and live in us so that we can live a holy life.

Many Chin Christians were trying to live a holy life. Some even said that pork is unholy, and we should not eat it if we want the Holy Spirit to come in us. Many people started to fast and pray every day and night in order to get the Holy Spirit. Some women left their husbands in order to live a holy life. When they saw someone who had colored hairstyles, lipstick, and other adornments, they judged them because they thought these were unholy. Their holiness did not bring glory to God but became their weapon to destroy other people. They left the Baptist churches and started new churches. After some years, Reformed doctrine became popular in Chin State. Some Bible students, who graduated from India, preached about holiness in different ways compared to 1973. They preached that we cannot be holy unless the Holy Spirit is living in us because we are sinners, and we cannot do any good thing. We become holy in the eyes of God when we receive the Holy Spirit and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is a short summary of the holiness movement in Chin State.

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¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilOHC-yIirU> (accessed, 5/3/2021).

Interview

In order to find out more about how holiness is thought and taught in Chin State, Myanmar, I interviewed five prominent Chin leaders.

Bishop Tin Hmung: I had a chance to interview Bishop Tin Hmung. He is the current Bishop of Than Han district of the Believer Church. Before He became Bishop, he served the Lord in many different places: Kangpalet where Christians are persecuted, Khampet, Hakha, and Kalay. He has a wife, Tin Zing, and God gave them two sons. Why I chose Bishop Tin Hmung, even though he is not well educated compared with others whom I interviewed, is that he is one of the most honest and open persons. He is faithful to the Lord and the Believers Church as well. His daily life is a good example for his members.

Dr. Robert Ro Uk Cung: Dr. Robert was one of my professors while I was studying at Judson Bible College. He is not only my professor but also my very close relative as well. He did not even want me to call him a teacher or professor. I called him Ka Pu, which means my mother's brother. He is graduated from Asia Theological Seminary, International Graduate School of Leadership, and Manila Theological College. He is a Professor of Judson Bible College, Myanmar Evangelical Holiness College, One Mission One Million Bible College, and Reaching the World Bible College. He is Presbyterian and lives in Yangon. He is married to Siang, but they do not have children yet. They have a children's ministry. They adopted many children and support them in school and help in other ways. I chose him because he is from a different denomination, is a very good person, and knows many things about Chin.

Rev. Dr. Lian Bik: Dr. Bik is a relative of mine, and I stay in his house whenever I go to Yangon. Their home is my second home. They give me a private room, and we are so close to them. Dr. Bik is a professor and academic dean of Myanmar Evangelical Holiness College. He is a translator of books and is very much involved in the Myanmar Evangelical Holiness Church. He graduated with a B.Th. from Gospel for Asia Bible College (Believers Bible College), an M.Th. from Asia Theological Seminary (Manila), and a doctorate from India Bible College. He married Easter, and God gave them two boys and one girl. I chose him because he is a representative of

the holiness church in Myanmar, and not only did he graduate from a Bible school but also his wife, who graduated with a master's degree from Yangon Dagon University.

Rev. Dr. Thawng Ling: Dr. Thawng Ling is a senior pastor and founder of Chin Evangelical Baptist Church in Indianapolis, USA. He is the very first one who started the Myanmar Christian community in the USA. He is from the same village as me, and we know each other well. He served the Lord in Chin State many years ago and then went to the USA to study and did not return due to the political situation. The Lord called him to be a pastor in the USA. He graduated from Yangon University (BSC), Myanmar Institute of Theology (MDiv), Sioux Falls Theological Seminary (MRI) (USA) and finished his doctorate in Newburgh Theological Seminary (USA). He was formerly president of Union Theological Seminary (Matupi, Chin State) and pastor of many villages in Chin state. I chose him to interview because his father was one of the very first Christians in my village, and he has a lot of experiences related to my topic (holiness in the Chin context). He represents the Myanmar Baptist Church. He has also written sermon books with more than 100 sermons. He is a great man, and the Lord is using him amazingly. He has three children.

Rev. Dr. Paul Za Tlung Lian: Dr. Paul is president of Myanmar One Mission One Million Bible College and was formerly of the Holiness Church. He graduated with his doctorate from India. He will be representing the local Holiness Church. I chose him because he knows much about Chin history and reads many books. He also has a children's ministry and has adopted many children. He supports them to study and helps them in other ways. He has four children, lives in Yangon, and serves the Lord in many different ways.

I asked each of these men many questions about holiness in the Chin context, including the following:

How do you understand Holiness?

Bishop Tin Hmung: Holiness is one of the most important things to do in our Christian life. Our God is the holiest, and he loves holy people when we look at the Bible. Likewise, we believers are called to be holy as we are Christian. We have to be holy in flesh, spirit, and soul, and we need to be

holy in the way we wear our clothes and cut our hair. He gave an example: Buddhist people take off their slippers or sandals before entering their temple, which is a good thing to do. We Christians should learn from them as well, even though this will not lead to heaven. Christian holiness is not a thing that we can earn by ourselves, but holiness comes from the blood of Jesus Christ. We can be holy only when we are washed by Christ's blood.

Dr. Robert: Holiness has two different meanings or two different perspectives: Christian holiness and cultural holiness. Christian holiness comes from the blood of Christ; our sins can be washed only by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2: 25). We are justified by his blood; we Christians are set apart through his blood. We cannot do holiness by ourselves but only by Christ, grace, and faith. Holiness is called solar grace in Romans 6. This holiness helps us to grow in our Christian journey. Only Christians can be holy in the eyes of God. These three things are important in our holiness life: first, discipline (spiritual); second, self-discipline (goodness, taking care); and third, progressive holiness (1 Thessalonian 4: 7-8). We cannot be holy only one single time, but we need to continue to be holy until we die.

Rev. Thawng Ling: Cultural holiness is ethical and moral living. We call holy people those who do not drink alcohol, smoke, and others. Basically, cultural holiness is good and evil, pure and not pure, good and bad. For example, when someone gets married, if the man's parents say to their son's wife, "Holy," it means that she is a virgin, and they really respect her. Therefore, in Chin culture, when someone is called a holy man or woman, it means that they deserve respect from others and are something special.

This is the same response among the five I interviewed: We Chin did not copy from anyone; therefore, many people said Chin culture is so beautiful.

Rev. Lian Bik: Yes, I think that this is really important because holiness is the identity of Christianity. Holiness has two different meanings: Christian holiness and non-Christian holiness or culture holiness. Christian holiness is when Christ died for our sins, and all our sins are washed by his blood. It is impossible to be holy without the blood of Jesus Christ because animal blood is not enough to wash our sins. That is why God sent his only

Son. Culture holiness is when we try something requested by our law or culture. For example, our culture says that when someone dies from a falling tree, we think that the tree becomes unholy, and we cannot eat the fruit of it. Those who follow these kinds of things become holy people according to our culture. Basically, we consider them holy people who follow outward holiness. This is the difference between Christian holiness and cultural holiness or traditional holiness.

Rev. Paul: Holiness has two different meanings: Christian holiness or culture holiness. Christian holiness comes from God; it is impossible to be holy without the blood of Christ. God calls us to be holy because he is holy; his name is holy (Isaiah 6). Culture holiness is doing good things or living for others. Especially in Chin culture, love and care are highly valuable because this is the seed of our culture. In our culture, people do not kill each other, steal from others, or disrespect others. Our culture has love towards others, care, and sharing what we have. And Chin people love to connect with others. Our culture is not individual but a community. Chin people want to live with Chin people. Much of our culture is similar to the Bible: love, care, respect, sharing, and others. "Love your neighbor as yourself." We Chin people practice this Bible verse deeply because this is our culture. Our culture encourages us to love others as we love ourselves.

What is cultural or traditional holiness?

Rev. Thin Hmung: Our grandfathers thought that holiness is following the laws such as not stealing, not fighting, not telling lies, and others. Rev. Thin Hmung said that no one stole things from others in the early years. We do not have any stealing from others. Basically, we can say that cultural holiness is honest living and not doing bad things to others. Even when people fight each other, they never use weapons to hurt someone. After the fight, they still can have fellowship. Cultural holiness is outward holiness. And I asked Rev. Thin Hmung, is it kind of similar to the Bible, or did we get this culture from someone? He said no, this culture is originally from Chin.

How did the early missionaries teach them about holiness?

Rev. Thin Hmung: The early missionaries taught them very well, I

think, because we Chin people did not know anything. We did not wear clothes; we just did not know anything. But when the missionaries came to Chin State, they changed almost everything. Rev. Tin Hmung believed that the missionaries taught them about both inside holiness and outside holiness. He said that when Chin people accepted Jesus, the missionaries cut their hair. This is one of the pieces of evidence that they were Christian. Rev. Tin Hmung gave an example: when Christians drank or smoked, they were not allowed to go to the pulpit and had to sit in the back chair of the church for three months. I can say that this penance really helped early Christians to grow spirituality. Rev. Thin Mung believed that the missionaries taught them first outside holiness, and after that, they taught them inside holiness. Missionaries were the best gift from God, I can say.

Dr. Robert: The early missionaries taught them about outward holiness and not inward holiness. The way they taught holiness was not to drink, smoke, or make traditional alcohol, and if you did any of these, they would not go to heaven but go hell. The missionaries did not teach them that we are holy by the blood of Christ. I asked Dr. Robert why this happened. He said that this was because it was one of the doctrines of the Baptist church and also that Chin people were not ready to hear other things. I asked him if the missionaries had taught them that we are holy by the blood of Christ. Do you think Chin people could understand? He said yes because the missionaries taught them to read the Bible and understand. What are the benefits of outward Holiness, I asked? He said education, health, buildings, and relationship with others.

Rev. Lian Bik: According to my understanding, the early missionaries did not preach about holiness nor tell people about Christian holiness. They taught them outside holiness because Chin Christians did not understand Christian holiness and about being born again until 1971. That was when That Nuai, who was one of the greatest revival preachers in Chin History, preached about holiness and being born again. Chin Christians began to understand and said to him that they had never heard these things. We clearly see that, based on the revival movement, early missionaries did not teach them about holiness according to the Bible. Early missionaries taught them about outward holiness, which was great because, although we only knew about outward holiness and not inward holiness, this helped Chin

people's physical health and care of their bodies.

Rev. Thawng Ling: The early missionaries taught them outward holiness but not really inward holiness. They abolished or destroyed much of our culture. For example, Chin culture plays the drum called the *Kuang*, and this *kuang* is played in festivals and ceremonies. But when the missionary arrived in Chin State, they suggested that Chin people not use those traditional things for any occasion. The missionaries said that it was unholy for Christians to do so. When someone becomes a Christian, he or she needs to leave many aspects of Chin culture, such as dancing, playing *kuang*, hairstyle, and others. Then missionaries introduced the guitar. We Chin people cannot pronounce "guitar," so we called it *ting tang*. Basically, the missionaries did not teach them about holiness that comes from Christ's blood. We did not have any music when we were worshiping the Lord because the missionaries did not allow us to use the *kuang* because they considered it unholy. But in 1960-70, the Mizoram (India) revival arrived in Chin State, and the *kuang* and other traditional music were back and used in churches. This is one reason that some denominations spread out from the Baptist church.

In the early years, our ancestors sacrificed to their gods. Was this for holiness?

Rev. Thin Hmung: No, this was not for holiness, but they sacrificed because they were afraid that their gods would curse them if they did not sacrifice. When they sacrificed, they used black chickens, which they cooked first and then gave to their gods. They were not allowed to eat even a little. One of the customs that most amazed me was that they believed the soup of the chicken was holy. He described how he had experienced this when he was 13, and his father showered him with the sacrifice soup because they believed that by this, a person is healed from the disease. People will be blessed if they are washed by sacrifice soup. This is similar to the idea that all our sins are washed by the blood of Christ. Unhealthy animals are not allowed to be used for sacrifice. While people sacrificed with the soup, they said these words: "Do not curse our mighty ones, bless our farm, save us from diseases; you are our gods." And no one was allowed to go to the sacrifice place, only the priest. We have the tradition that we are not allowed

to drink at water island on the top of the mountain because they believe that this water is for their gods. They believed “Letsi” won this island. Letsi is the most beautiful goddess, and she has everything they still believed in. Here is a short story on Letsi: when someone captures Letsi, she can become a big snake, a big tiger, or a big lion, but she cannot bite or eat anyone. If she is not released, she will say to them, “What do you want from me?” They can ask one thing, whatever they want, and she will give it to them. This Letsi appears only a very few times in a year. Many Chin still believe and wait for the appearance of Letsi.

Dr. Robert: No, they did not sacrifice for holiness at all because holiness is not from their gods but only from themselves. They had three kinds of sacrifices. One was when they did something wrong. They sacrificed and asked for forgiveness from their gods. A second was a “happiness sacrifice” when they were blessed: for example, if none of their animals died for a whole year or their rice field was blessed. They assumed that this was from our gods; therefore, they offered a “happiness sacrifice.” A third was a sacrifice of blessing for all. Only the priest could sacrifice for all people. For example, in one family, their son had an illness. His father could sacrifice not only for him but for everyone, and only the priest could do it. Normally, they used black chickens for the sacrifice. I think that the black color represented evil or the devil. In 1991, one of the Jewish authors said that the Chin people are the race of Ephraim because of the ways they sacrifice, and their culture is quite similar to the people of Israel. Especially, the Mizo think of themselves as more Hebrew people than Chin.

Rev. Lian Bik: Yes, they did sacrifice because it was our culture before. They sacrificed to big trees and rocks, symbols of their gods, because they wanted a blessing from them, and as well, they were afraid. For Christians, we understand God as a loving Father, but early Chin people understood their gods as very dangerous. Therefore, they had to make their gods always happy. They had no idea about holiness related to their gods. For example, if someone killed somebody accidentally or intentionally, they forgave that person by killing animals and eating together. They did not ask for holiness from their gods but asked the gods not to hurt them. Simply, they sacrificed for blessing and not to suffer from the gods, but not for holiness.

Rev. Thawng Ling: Yes, they did sacrifice a lot. Sacrificing had two

meanings. First, they were afraid of their gods (big tree, big rock, mountain) because their gods were dangerous rather than loving. Second, they believed that their gods gave blessings. If they sacrificed more, they got more benefit from their gods. They could not use every animal but had to use the animal according to their gods' prophet. Their gods had prophets called Kua Vang, who appeared among people. Their gods did not directly talk to people but talked through Kua Vang and Kua Vang. Normally, their prophets (Kua Vang were women) told people what animal should be used for a sacrifice and how to offer it. Many people think that this idea of sacrifice came from where we were (China) before we arrived in Chin State.

What is the same culture or tradition that we have with the Bible?

Rev. Thin Hmung: We have pretty much the same with the Bible, especially in the Old Testament in Exodus 20, which said not to steal or lie, respect one's parents, love one's neighbor, and other commands. These are all the same with our culture. Our culture does not allow a person to steal or lie, and we have much respect for our parents. Rev. Hmung even said that a neighbor is one of the essential people in our culture. When we have something, we share it with our neighbors. If my parent hunts an animal, we have to share it with our neighbors, and if we do not have salt or chili, we just go to our neighbor and get it. We are like just one family. Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church believed that we are descendants of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, because we have many similarities with them, such as the way we sacrifice, we do not steal, and we love our neighbor.

Dr. Robert: We have many of the same customs as the Bible. For example, we do not steal, we respect parents, do not tell lies, and others. We can see these things in the Bible. Therefore, no one can say that on the judgment day, I did not know about God because no one told me about these things. According to Romans 1, God showed himself to people in culture in order for them to understand him. God showed himself to Chin people through our culture. Therefore, when missionaries preached the gospel, Chin people accepted it easily because our culture had Christ already.

Dr. Lian Bik: We have several of the same customs compared with the Bible. I believe that Chin Culture has so much love and care for others. This is what the Bible teaches us. I visited more than ten countries and have

many friends from different cultures. I did see some cultures with love and care, but we cannot compare this with Chin culture because other cultures do not have as much loving care for their neighbor and others. In Chin culture, when someone suffers or dies, we bear the suffering with the family. We leave our homes and stay in their house for two to three weeks because we do not want them to be lonely. We want them to forget their loss. We eat with them and sleep with them, just like one family. Other cultures do not do this, as far as I know. I believe that this is what the Bible encourages us to do as Christians. Mourn with those who mourn and be happy with those who are happy.

How important is holiness?

Rev. Tin Hmung: Without holiness, we cannot go to heaven because God is holy, and we are called to be holy. Hebrews 12 said that no one will enter the kingdom of God unless they are holy. Rev. Hmung said that one of the identity markers of Christianity is holiness. We all are born with a sinful nature, and we need someone who can wash all our sins away from us, which happens by Jesus Christ's blood. I asked him, where will you put holiness like 1, 2, 3 in our Christian life? He said that he puts it in number 2, and number 1 would be faith.

Dr. Robert: Since we are Christian, holiness is essential in our life. Our holiness should preach the gospel to Buddhist people. Unfortunately, many Christians live the same as unbelievers. They drink, smoke, and do other behaviors like what non-believers do. As Hebrews 12 says, without holiness, we cannot get to heaven because God is so holy. We should try to live a blameless life before others. Our holiness should continue day by day. Holiness is a gift from Jesus Christ while we are still sinners. He bears our unholiness and shares his holiness with sinful human beings. Therefore, holiness is so important in our Christian life.

Dr. Thawng Ling: As I mentioned above, holiness is the identity of Christianity. For example, you buy a car, but you do not have the ownership title, which means it does not belong to you officially. Just the same, we are Christian, but without holiness, we are not truly Christian. As Hebrews 12 says, no one will see the kingdom of God without holiness. Holiness should

be our daily food; we cannot do something without eating any food. Likewise, our holiness should shine before unbelievers. Christian holiness should start first from ourselves, family, church members, and Christian society. We should bear Christ's holiness in our daily life.

Do you think evangelists and pastors preach about holiness like in the early years?

Rev. Tin Hmung: Yes, we even need to preach about holiness more than before because nowadays, people are wise and do many bad things. Christianity seems to be influenced by the social world. We seem to be the same as unbelievers. Therefore, we need to preach a lot. I asked him, in the early years, how many people changed when they heard about holiness, and why not now? He said that people are "wise" now and do not really care about the sermon anymore, but in the early years, people were eager to hear the gospel. Therefore, even though we preach the same, they do not change easily. He also said that this is one of the symbols of the second coming. People do not want to hear the gospel and do not care when the time is near. But we still need to preach whether they want it or not.

Dr. Robert: Yes, they still preach holiness like the early years. Especially, Evangelicals and Pentecostals preach about holiness more than any others. For example, Thawng Hluai's family went to villages and bought all the unholy things sold in stores. They burned all of them because only preaching was not enough. We need action, they believed. The Tluang Za Uk group and Evangelist Tha Neih Fine are two teams that preach a lot about holiness wherever they go. Unfortunately, people do not change like before because the listeners are different now. Especially, young people do not like it because it affects their social life.

Dr. Paul: Yes, many evangelists and pastors preached about holiness, but of course, not all of them did. Some evangelists and pastors focused on propriety more than holiness. In the early years, when someone preached about the gospel or holiness, the audience took it very seriously and applied it in their daily life. But nowadays, we doubt many things and do not really want to hear about holiness. And people think of themselves as wise and do not care about holiness because they want to live free lifestyles. They do not want anybody to care about them. For example, in Chin state, when the

pastor preached about holiness in the morning service, they applied it directly. In the afternoon, members asked each other how effective their lives were by following the teaching of their pastor. But nowadays, pastors and evangelists preach many times, but it is so difficult for people to change. We need a holiness revival in Chin state because people are dying by their unholy life. We lost the beautiful message of holiness in Chin State. He also added that people do not like holiness anymore because some pastors and evangelists preach that we cannot be holy or have no need to be holy because we have Christ in our life. He is the one who makes us holy in the eyes of God. We do not need to be holy by ourselves.

What is the best way to teach holiness to Chin people?

Rev. Tin Hmung: For me, the best way to share holiness is by our own examples. If a preacher himself or herself is not holy, there is no way we can teach others about holiness. We have to show them holiness by our actions and lifestyles.

Dr. Robert: We should not scare them. For example, do not scare them with, if you drink alcohol, you will never go to heaven. But we should teach them according to the Bible. The Bible should be the foundation of our teaching. Christ died for us, and when we believe in him, we become holy. We are not holy by ourselves but only through his blood. His holiness will lead us to do good works and be holy in our daily life. And we should teach them about holiness from a different perspective. First, the religious perspective is based on the Bible. The second is the health perspective. The third is the economics perspective. Last is the social perspective and self-discipline.

Dr. Paul: We Chin people need to understand the Bible, not the preacher. Many times, we obey the preacher's ideas more than the Bible. This can lead us to be unholy. The Bible should not be number two in our life but must be number one. Pastors and evangelists really need to study the Bible deeply rather than only teaching their members about ideas. For example, some evangelists preached that we cannot be holy, or we do not need to be holy because we have Christ in our lives, and he is the holy one for us. Holiness is not our responsibility but the responsibility of God. We can live freely because we are holy and loved by God, whether our love is

holy or not. When the Bible is not number one in our Christian life, we follow and practice so wrongly. Therefore, in Chin State, we should teach them about holiness according to the Bible. And also, we should teach them that we can only be holy through the blood of Christ and not by our good work.

Dr. Thawng Ling: Firstly, we cannot teach them about holiness unless they understand being born again (John 3:16) because it is impossible to be holy unless Christ is living in us. So, we have to teach them first about being born again, and then holiness will follow. Secondly, it is important to be a good example for others. Many pastors and evangelists preach about holiness, but there is no holiness in their lives. So, people cannot believe what they say. Our action should show our sermon. Therefore, people can understand biblical holiness through a preacher's life. And we have to have patience because normally, Chin people are not educated and cannot understand the Bible well. They believe things very easily, and they can also change their minds easily as well. Therefore, we cannot quickly teach them but have to teach them patiently and show them what we teach by our actions. Without action, they cannot understand what holiness is.

Bible Verses

I asked those being interviewed to tell me what the Bible verses are that relate to Chin Holiness.

Rev. Thin Hmung: Leviticus, Psalm, Gospel, Exodus 20, Leviticus 11: 44, 19:2.

Dr. Robert: Psalm 96:9; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Dr. Lian Bik: 1 Peter 1: 15-16, 2:9; 2 Timothy 1:9, 2.

Dr. Thawng Ling: Philippians 2: 5; 1 Corinthians 3: 16-17; Exodus 19, 20; Roman 6.

Dr. Paul: John 3; Hebrews 12, 11; and Galatian 2.

They felt that these Bible verses are related to Christian holiness in the Chin context.

Assessment

I believe that the Chin Christian leaders whom I interviewed deeply understand holiness. They answered most of the questions biblically. Firstly, most of them said that Christian holiness is not possible by our own goodness or our own effort. Holiness only comes from God, and when we receive the Holy Spirit in our life, we share his holiness in our daily life. No one can be holy by good work or ability. We are washed by Jesus Christ's blood. There is no holiness without having Jesus in our life. I expected that someone might say that the blood of Christ is not enough to be able to be completely holy because this is the teaching of many evangelists and pastors. But fortunately, no one answered it that way.

Secondly, they focused more on biblical than cultural holiness. They all said that cultural holiness is important because this is very similar to the Bible in many ways, and we should keep those things. But this culture will not lead to heaven because only the blood of Christ can wash away our sins. When they said those things, they had full confidence, and I believe that they told me in truth what they thought. One of my questions was whether or not they knew very well about holiness and why their members did not understand it. However, they all believed that the Bible should be the foundation of our holiness. I am surprised that one of the interviewees said that the early missionaries destroyed some of our culture instead of keeping it. For example, they did not allow us to play the drum called *kuang*; but for me, I think that the missionaries did the right thing because those customs led us away from Christianity and returned to idolatry. They played the *kuang* and danced all night, drank, and did other bad activities.

Finally, they understand well what cultural holiness and Christian holiness are. The good thing is that they all support very much Christian holiness and also believe that our members should know those things in order to mature in their spiritual life. They believe holiness is love, care, mercy, passion, kindness, and humbleness. I like what they all said that we are called to be holy like our heavenly Father is holy. No one will see the kingdom without holiness, and this holiness only comes from God. I am very glad to have had a chance to interview them and gained a lot from them. It is like reading books. Many of them have experiences and shared with me

very openly. I strongly believe that they understand holiness very well. Likewise, Chin people need to understand what holiness is. We all have a responsibility to preach the truth about holiness. We should not be afraid to teach them. Some pastors are afraid because they do not want to lose their members. This does not lead to a healthy church. Everyone deserves the truth about holiness.

Biblical Resources: Hebrews 12, Roman 6, and John 3 from a China Point of View

Hebrews 12:14-17

I believe that Hebrews 12 will help Chin people to understand more about holiness in our daily lives. The situation of writing was almost the same for Chin people who considered themselves to be the holiest men and women. I would like to write briefly about the background of Hebrews. No one exactly knows who the author of Hebrews was because the author did not write his or her name. But many scholars believe that the author could be the Apostle Paul because some of the words are similar to the letters of Paul. In particular, the Alexandrian church believed that Paul was the author, and this influenced the judgment of Eastern Christianity and ultimately Western Christianity from the middle of the fourth century. F. F. Bruce notes that for Alexandrians, “Hebrews was written by Paul for Hebrews in the Hebrew language, but that Luke translated it and published it for the Greeks. Thus, Alexandrians endeavored to account for the similarity in style between Hebrews and the Lukan writings.”¹⁵

However, though we do not know who the real author was, we know surely that the author was one who knew the Old Testament very well because he quoted many times from the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews assumed that his audience had extensive knowledge of the Old Testament. Of all the writings of the New Testament, says George Guthrie, none is more “saturated with overt references to the Old Testament. The author so filled his discourse with Old Testament thoughts and passages

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 15.

that they permeate every chapter.”¹⁶ One of the purposes is that the receivers or the audience seemed to consider that we are holy when we follow the teaching of Moses or the law. They thought to themselves that they were special in the eyes of themselves and others as well. Bruce wrote, “The whole argument is conducted against a background of Old Testament allusion; considerable familiarity with the Levitical ritual and interest in it are presupposed.”¹⁷ These people sacrificed to God and asked forgiveness through the sacrifice of animals’ blood. The book of Leviticus and the law of Moses were the most crucial texts for these people. I might say that these people tried to please God by their good works and tried to be holy by their effort and ability. Chapter 11 of Hebrews talked about the importance of having faith in God and that it is impossible to please God without having faith in him.

We should ask ourselves, then, why did the author of Hebrews encourage the audience to live holy lives while they thought themselves to be the holiest people? This question is the same with Chin people, who consider themselves holy or perfect.

Hebrews 12:2 says, “Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” I like what George Guthrie said, “We are called to fix our eyes on Jesus. Looking to a king or leader as a model, or to God for inspiration was a common motif in various rhetorical literatures of the ancient world.”¹⁸ Jesus should be the model for Chin people, and we should not have a model like a priest. When I interviewed Chin leaders, they said that in Chin culture, the priests or village leaders were their models according to what they did to them. Their followers copied them whether it was bad or not. They looked upon them as their gods. And they considered them holy or perfect. When they did sacrifice, only their priest could offer the sacrifice for all people.

¹⁶ George Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 18-19.

¹⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 16.

¹⁸ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 398.

Hebrews 12:14 says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and women and to be holy, without holiness no one will see the Lord.” The word “holiness” has two meanings in this specific verse. Firstly, Guthrie said, “Holiness has a profound impact on our relationships with other people. Secondly, it is clear that holiness is indispensable for an authentic Christian life. The person who chooses to live an unholy life can be offered no assurance of seeing the Lord.”¹⁹ In Chin culture, what we call “phun” means “clan,” which refers to someone of the same or a different clan among us. This is so essential, especially in the early years. For example, my father’s clan is Mangpa. When two people of the same clan meet each other, they become like true brothers or sisters. And also, even in marriage, the clan is very crucial, with some people finding a wife according to the clan. Likewise, other Chin have different clans and are at peace with their own clan but do not really like others. If they are of a different clan, there is no peace. This custom, I could say, disappeared when the missionaries went to Chin state because they taught them that we all are the same and are one in Christ. But, sadly, nowadays, people started to follow this custom again. For example, on their Facebook name, they added their clan’s name. It did not bring peace, but instead, people could care less about those who were not of their clan. A peaceful life is a part of being the family of holiness. We should live peacefully with others even though we are of a different clan in Chin State.

Secondly, Christians should live a holy life that is from God, not from ourselves. We cannot be holy by ourselves but only by the blood of Christ. F. F. Bruce says, “Apart from sanctification, no one will see the Lord. The words themselves make plain that this means that sanctification is not an optional extra in the Christian life but something which belongs to its essence.”²⁰

I really like what the *Enduring Bible Commentary* explained about Hebrews 12: “The *Pharisee*: confident in outward ceremonies instead of true holiness. The *moralist*: feels no need for holiness because his life is so good.

¹⁹ Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 348.

²⁰ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 346.

The *experimentalist*: their entire Christian life is lived inward, never looking to outward conduct but only to feelings.”²¹ This is exactly how Chin people understand holiness. They think holiness is doing things outwardly. But Christian holiness should start inwardly and be shown by our actions. I hope that Hebrews 12 will help Chin people see that no one can be holy by themselves but only through God.

Next, Romans 6:1-14 is similar to Hebrews 12 because they both talk about the law or tradition. According to Romans 1:1, the author of Romans is the Apostle Paul. Paul himself wanted to visit Rome physically when he was living in the world. But before he had a chance to visit there, he wrote this letter to the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Christian receivers or the audience of this letter in Rome was mixed. Some were Jewish and had believed in Christ, and some were Gentiles. Some authors said that the Roman Christians were led by the Apostle Peter because he was the one who preached the gospel to them and converted them to Christ.²² F. Watson said, “Paul writes specifically to convert the Jewish Christians in the community to his view of a ‘law-free’ gospel so that they will separate completely from Judaism and join the Gentile Christians in forming one Pauline congregation.”²³ As they were newly converted Christians, they still had the concept of following the law, or the law of Moses specifically. They believed that Christ died for us and was raised again, but at the same time, they also believed that we still need to follow the law of Moses in order to be free from our sins. Therefore, this is one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to them. He encouraged them and let them know that we cannot be free from sin by ourselves but only through Christ.

“Death to sin” through union with Christ is the theme of Romans 6:1-14. Verses 1-3 talk about being baptized into his death. The theology of baptism in these verses refers to our death with Christ and life with Christ again. Douglas Moo said that “dying and rising with Christ refers to the

²¹ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/hebrews> (accessed /5/5/2021).

²² Douglas Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle of Roman* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 18-19.

²³ Moo, *The Epistle of Roman*, 19.

participation of the believer in the redemptive events themselves; and the ultimate basis for Paul's appeal in this chapter is not what happened when we were baptized, but what happened when Christ died and rose again."²⁴ He also added that Christ himself is raised in order to show Christians that the gospel of grace, properly interpreted, leads not to licentiousness but to righteousness, now understood as godly living.²⁵ Verses 4-14 mostly talk about death to sin and rising to new life. In verse 6, our old man refers to the first Adam who sinned. But our second Adam refers to Christ who died for all and frees those under the law. In this passage, the word "sin" refers to "a habitual practice of sin such that one's life could be said to be characterized by that sin rather than by the righteousness God requires."²⁶ We cannot be free from sin by ourselves but only by the resurrection of Christ.

I chose this passage because I saw that this is related to Chin culture when I interviewed our leaders. In our culture, good work is necessary to define that we are Chin people. At the same time, good work is part of our Christian life. Many Chin Christians think that the blood of Christ is not enough for our holiness. We still need to do good and follow cultural holiness in order to become holy to God. In a sense, I can say that we are under our culture or tradition because we value cultural holiness more than biblical holiness or Christian holiness.

For example, when I interviewed our leaders, one person said that in Chin culture, we believe that when we have a farm or rice field (in Chin State, the rice fields are on the mountains), before we plant rice, we have to cut all the trees, but we do not cut the *ri rang kung* tree because we believe that demons are in it. We have to take care of that tree very well in order for us not to suffer. We cannot urinate around that tree; we can say that the specific tree is one of our gods. This is like the Roman Christians who followed the law, but the law could not give them freedom from sin. The law should not reign or be our master but Christ alone because we are crucified with Christ and are raised with Christ again. We Chin people believe that

²⁴ Moo, *The Epistle of Roman*, 355.

²⁵ Moo, *The Epistle of Roman*, 356.

²⁶ Moo, *The Epistle of Roman*, 358.

if we take care of that tree very well, our farm will produce lots of things. This is our kind of cultural holiness.

I believe that we should not be under corrupt cultural laws because these laws will not make us holy. Instead, we Chin people must believe that the death of Christ makes us free from sins. Cultural laws come from the devil. Culture and sins should not reign but Christ. Christ is our righteousness and our holiness. There is no holiness and righteousness beyond or outside of Christ. We cannot be holy and righteous by following cultural laws, but we are holy through the blood of Christ. Romans 6 reminds us that we need to honor Christ as our Master by the way we live, not cultural things. We need to make sure that when it comes to our Christian faith, our talk matches our walk. We must ensure consistency between what we affirm with our mouth and what we do with our hands. We need to demonstrate that Christ is our master by refusing to let anything, including culture or tradition in the world, master us.²⁷ We must resist the powers of sin and self (the flesh) that would enslave us to unworthy lords. We can serve only one sovereign.²⁸ I strongly believe that Roman 6 will really help Chin people who still believe and practice unbiblical culture and ritual. Culture should not reign over us but only Christ as our Master.

Next, I believe that John 3 will really help Chin people who do not know about being born again. Many scholars believe that the Gospel of John was written by the Apostle John, one of Jesus' disciples. Likewise, some scholars believe that this was not written by John but Lazarus because the book said that this book is written by the one whom Jesus loved (21:20-24). The Bible mentioned that Lazarus was loved by Jesus. However, the power of the word of God does not change due to the author. The Gospel of John is different from the Gospels of Luke, Mark, and Matthew. John sees Jesus as a Savior and Lord for all people, not only for Jews but Gentiles also. I will focus on the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus and compare this with Chin

²⁷ William Greathouse and George Lyons, *Roman 1-8: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2008), 187.

²⁸ Michael Bird, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 207.

culture.

In John 3:1-13, Nicodemus is described as a Pharisee and ruler or leader of the Jews. He was also a member of the ruling council or Sanhedrin and a teacher of the law.²⁹ He went to Jesus at night. Andrew Lincoln said that “at night suggests that although he is attracted to Jesus, he does not wish this to be known openly and his attempt to understand Jesus has as its contest the potential disapproval of other members of the Sanhedrin.”³⁰ But Ramsey Michaels believes that night in this Gospel has a negative association. Night was when Judas departed (13:30). Night was when the disciples caught no fish (21:3). Night is when no one can work (9:4).³¹ This suggests that Nicodemus was trying to test Jesus or attempting to know Jesus’ opinion because Jesus had done some miracles (chapter 2), and Nicodemus knew it. Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher.” The word “Rabbi” literally means “teacher.” This name was used by Jesus’ disciples. And Jesus replied, “Truly, truly I say to you, without being born from above, a person cannot see the kingdom of God” (v. 4). In Greek, “Truly, truly” is translated from “Amen, Amen.” A literal translation is, “Unless a man be born anew, he cannot see God’s rule.”³² Nicodemus had no idea about being born again or born anew because the Jews had no law about being born again.

In a similar way, we Chin people have many customs, traditions, and rules that we follow and practice every day. But unfortunately, we have no idea about being born again. Like the Jews of Jesus’ day who followed the laws of Moses, we think that we are the holiest people in the world. One of the best revival preachers, That Nuai, said, “Chin people never heard about

²⁹ Andrew Lincoln, *Black’s New Testament Commentary the Gospel According to Saint John* (London: Hendrickson, 2005), 149.

³⁰ Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 149.

³¹ Ramsey Michaels, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 179.

³² Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 135.

being born again until 1970. Missionaries never taught them about the importance of being born again. When I preached John 3, pastors, deacons, and a lot of members came to me after the service ended and told me that they had never heard this kind of sermon. One member asked, “Where did you get this sermon? Our pastor never preached like this.”³³ We Chin people did not know about being born again, and it is sad to say that they were Christian in name only and did not know the importance of being born again. According to John 3, unless they are born in the Holy Spirit, they will not see the kingdom of God. We Chin people should know that being a Christian does not mean we are going to heaven. Unless we are born again in the Spirit, we will not be going to heaven even though we follow the law.

Pastors and evangelists should preach more about holiness and the essential importance of being born again to our members. As the Logos Bible Commentary says, the phrase “born again” literally means “born from above.” Nicodemus had a real need. He needed a change of his heart—a spiritual transformation. New birth, being born again, is an act of God whereby eternal life is imparted to the person who believes (2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1-4, 18). John 1:12, 13 indicates that being “born again” also carries the idea of “becoming children of God” through trust in the name of Jesus Christ.³⁴ We need to be born again by the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus was a pure Jew who was highly respected by people and followed the law of Moses, but he could not go to heaven without being born again. We Chin people should know that our cultural and traditional holiness cannot lead us to heaven, but we can go to heaven only if we are born again by the Holy Spirit. I hope that John chapter 3 will help Chin people understand the importance of being born again and that they will realize that our good works cannot lead to heaven.

Theological Resources: John Wesley, John Calvin, and Theodore Beza

I believe that these three theologians will help Chin people understand what

³³ That Nuai, Lai Ram Au Thawng.

³⁴ https://www.logos.com/free-bible-study-software?utm_source=gotquestions&utm_medium=advertising_display&utm_campaign=promo-basic-fundamentals&utm_content=solo-man-300x250 (accessed 5/10/21).

holiness is according to the Bible. I will compare some of their doctrines to Chin culture and tradition in order for Chin people to understand more deeply.

John Calvin

I do not agree with all of John Calvin's theology, but I think that his understanding of holiness will help Chin people. John Calvin and John Wesley are similar in their views of holiness, according to my understanding, because they both believed that we cannot be holy by our good work. John Calvin believed that we are totally depraved. We cannot do good work and cannot see the light because we are in darkness. We cannot be holy and cannot love God because we are sinners. This means that it is impossible for human beings to love God unless God loves first. Calvin said, "We shall never be clothed with the righteousness of Christ except we first know assuredly that we have no righteousness of our own."³⁵ And he also said that "being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes, instead of a judge an indulgent Father; and being sanctified by his Spirit we aspire to integrity and purity of life."³⁶

John Calvin also believed that God elects people who are going to heaven. I believe that we should not teach Chin people this. Calvin said, "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God by which he has determined in himself what he would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny, but for others. Every [person], therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say is predestined either to life or to death."³⁷ This doctrine destroys Christian holiness and especially for new believers, even though others of Calvin's teaching are so good.

³⁵ https://www.azquotes.com/author/2355-John_Calvin (accessed 5/11/21).

³⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes* (N.p.: MacDonald Publishing Company, n. d.), 381.

³⁷ Clyde Manschreck. *A History of Christianity's Readings in the History of the Church* (Grand: Baker Rapids, 1964), 81.

Theodore Beza

I believe that the doctrine of Theodore Beza also will help the Chin people. Beza was a follower of John Calvin but was more striking than John Calvin. The way he understood holiness is the same with John Calvin. We can never be holy by ourselves because we are sinners, but when we receive the Holy Spirit, we are holy, and our holiness shows or is proven in our daily life. He also said, “If the tyrant forbids what God commands, you should not at all judge that you have performed your duty if you have merely refused to obey the tyrant, unless at the same time you obey the command of God.”³⁸

John Wesley

After reading a couple of his sermons, I can see clearly from John Wesley that loving God is the most essential in our Christian life. I personally believe that if someone asked John Wesley what the meaning of Christianity is, he simply would say love and holiness. These two are the main sources of Christianity. Love and holiness are the first steps of Christianity, and others will follow according to the time and situation. I contextualize almost every time I read John Wesley’s sermons because they relate so well to our Chin society. Sometimes, it seems like he knew Chin people because his sermons are really effective for us, and the sermons can lead many Chin people to Christ. We can see how much he cared for poor people during his lifetime, and he did not have favoritism toward the poor and rich. He shared the gospel and spread the word of God wherever he went. The idea about Christianity, which we Chin people have, is the same with John Wesley because love and holiness cannot spread without each other in the Christian life. I think that Chin culture is very much about love and care for others, just like John Wesley showed. I remember in Dr. Dick Eugenio’s class, I asked about Matthew 5: 48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”: Is this possible? And he answered, yes, if we totally depend on the Holy Spirit. I think this is the same idea as John Wesley. When the Holy Spirit is living within us, he controls everything. We Chin people need to depend on the Holy Spirit and not our culture or traditional laws. Christ

³⁸ https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ref-rev/12-2/12-2_beeke.pdf (accessed 5/20/21).

should be the foundation of Christianity in Chin State.

What is love according to John Wesley and Chin Culture?

John Wesley said, “Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment, it is not only the first and greatest command but all the commandments in one. Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, they are all comprised in this one word love.”³⁹ Wesley mentioned that we should love creatures because this love leads to the Creator.⁴⁰ This encourages me personally, and I believe it will also encourage Chin people because loving even small creatures can lead to God because our God is the one who created everything. Perfect love now casts out all fear; we rejoice forevermore. “Yea, his joy is full, and all his bones cry out, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, how according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten me again unto a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for me.’”⁴¹ And loving God is loving our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps, this can be interpreted in many different ways, but I will interpret it from a Chin perspective.

We Chin people are generally poor and lack knowledge, but how we share our love with each other is remarkable. For example, when we harvest our farms, pastors are the ones who eat first whatever we harvest. And also, when a hunter hunts an animal, we give the best part to pastors and also share with our neighbors. We share almost everything we have. I heard a couple of times that Buddhists usually say that Christians are lovely in taking care of each other very well. I think that if John Wesley came to Chin State, he would say, “Wow, this is what I mentioned many times: Christianity is loving each other and sharing what we have.” He said, “Love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper. It has cleansed him from pride, whereof only cometh contention, and he hath now

³⁹ John Wesley. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Reprint, Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966), 12.

⁴⁰ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 13.

⁴¹ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 18.

put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.”⁴² Many Reformers believed that Matthew 5: 48, “Thou shalt love the Lord the God with all thy heart,” is impossible for us to do. I like how John Wesley responded, saying, “from the very nature of a command, which is not given to the dead but to the living.” “Therefore,” he continued, “thou shalt love God with all thy heart cannot mean Thou shalt do this when thou diest but while thou livest.”⁴³ Yes, I agree that the command is not for dead people but for us. Loving God means loving our neighbors and friends. The pure love of our neighbor, springing from the love of God, “thinketh no evil, believeth and hopeth all things.”⁴⁴

What is holiness?

Hebrews 12:14 says, “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord.” I think that John Wesley is the one who spoke the most about holiness. Being Christian and holy cannot be separated from each other. This does not mean that if we are holy by ourselves, we will go to heaven, but that holy people who are washed by the blood of Christ will go to heaven because God calls Christians to be holy and righteous. This is one of the main points that we Chinese people should understand because we cannot be holy by ourselves. It is impossible to be holy by human effort, ability, or culture. Only the blood of Christ can wash our sins from us, only his blood, not animals’ blood anymore. I would like to quote his hymn: “The sanctifying Spirit pour, to quench my thirst and wash me clean, now Savior, let the gracious shower, Descend, and make me pure from sin. Purge me from every sinful blot; my idols all be cast aside; cleanse me from every evil thought, from all the filth of self and pride.”⁴⁵

John Wesley and Tertullian are similar in some ways. Tertullian believed that after being baptized, Christians cannot sin because the Holy

⁴² Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 19.

⁴³ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 39.

⁴⁴ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 45, 46.

⁴⁵ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 39.

Spirit is in them. Likewise, John Wesley also emphasized so much about holiness because he wanted Christians to be different from unbelievers. It seems to me that Christians can live without sin after having received the Holy Spirit. Living in a Buddhist country that worships untrue gods has shown me that when Buddhists see the holiness that we have, they might change or convert to Christianity. Holiness is a part of Christian perfection. We are not holy by our own effort, but the Spirit of the Lord makes us holy and righteous. Holiness is the assignment for all Christians to do in our daily life.

Views on Christian Perfection

Wesley's sermon on Christian perfection and the culture of Chin is similar, and this will help Chin people to love God more than before. Wesley talked about Christian perfection in two ways. In what sense are Christians not perfect, and in what sense then are they perfect? Firstly, Christians are "not perfect in knowledge, and they are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination."⁴⁶ Secondly, Wesley also mentioned that we are not free from temptation and behavior. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase.⁴⁷ This is important for Chin people because we should know that we cannot be perfect by following cultural rules. It is impossible to be perfect by doing our good work without having Christ.

In what sense are Christians not perfect, and in what sense then are they perfect?

Wesley said, "Observe, we are not now speaking of babes in Christ, but adult Christians. But even babes in Christ are so far perfect as not to commit sin."⁴⁸ Proverbs 24:16 states, "For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes." Some people

⁴⁶ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 50.

⁴⁷ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 23.

⁴⁸ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 53.

think that it is okay to sin seven times or more. But Wesley responded to those who interpreted this verse wrongly. He said, “But does not Scripture say, A just man sinneth seven times a day? It does not. Indeed, it says, A just man falleth seven times. But this is quite another thing; First, the words, a day are not in the text. Second, there is no mention of falling into sin at all. It just said that falling into temporal affliction.”⁴⁹ Sometimes, it seems that Wesley does not talk about the Old Testament. Instead, he is more focused on the New Testament. He sometimes mentions that we are not under Jewish law but under the Holy Spirit who is in us and leads us to be holy and blameless.

First John 1: 8-10 says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word is not in us.” When I read these Bible verses, Wesley came to my mind because he seems to say that Christians can live without sin, but in these Bible verses, it is the opposite. Wesley points out clearly that verse 10 fixes the sense of verse 8: “If we say we have no sin, in the former, being explained by, if we say we have not sinned; in the latter verse. The point under consideration is not whether we have not sinned, heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin or commit sin now. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin.”⁵⁰

According to my understanding, when John Wesley talked about sin, he only emphasized doing sin, but sin is not only doing something but can also be in our thoughts. He said that a Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin; this is the glorious privilege of every Christian. We are free from evil or sinful thoughts and evil tempers. Christ delivers from inward as well as outward sin.⁵¹ This is very true and important for Chin people to know and understand. We are not under cultural law, and we should not

⁴⁹ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 25.

⁵⁰ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 28.

⁵¹ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 30.

be because Christ died for us and cleanses us of all our sins. Wesley said that “the blood of Christ will clean (at the hour of death, or in the day of judgment), but it cleanses at the time present, us living Christians from all sin and Christians are saved in this world from all sin from all unrighteousness, that they are now in such a sense perfect as not to commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers.”⁵² Yes, this can be difficult in practical or real life, but being a Christian means denying ourselves and bringing the cross to every daily life. Galatians 2:20 states, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This requires living in obedience to God.

And we Chin people should also understand justification because we cannot be justified by ourselves. We should know that we are sinners, not perfect human beings. Therefore, we need to know who justifies us.

John Wesley believed that God justifies those who are sinners and who cannot be justified by themselves. He believed that “it is not a saint but a sinner that is forgiven, and under the notion of a sinner. God justified not the godly, but the ungodly; not those that are holy already, but unholy.”⁵³ After we are justified, unholy people become holy, and sinners become God’s own children. Therefore, John Wesley strongly believed that justification and holiness cannot be separated because justified people should live a holy life. We are justified in order to be holy in our daily life. He said that “where there is no love of God, there is no holiness.”⁵⁴

There is also a difference between John Calvin and John Wesley. Calvin believed that God does not justify everyone but only his elect people. But when asked this question, “Does then the good Shepherd seek and save only those that are found already?” Wesley replied, “No, he seeks and saves that

⁵² Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 32.

⁵³ John Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1: *Sermons 1, 1-33*, edited by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 194-196.

⁵⁴ Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” 198.

which is lost. He pardons those who need his pardoning mercy.”⁵⁵ I also believe that God did not just justify only a few people because God is love and sent his only Son to the world for all human beings. The death of Jesus was not for a few people but for all who believe in him. God justifies us to do good work and for a holy life (an especially important message for Chin people). Good work before being justified is meaningless or does not bring glory to God. Wesley said, “No works are good which are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done.”⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit leads us to do good works only after justification. This does not mean that we should not do good work before being justified, but that good work cannot justify us. The only person who can justify us is Jesus Christ.

So, God justifies those who are sinners and hopeless and not those who think of themselves as good people in their own eyes. The death of the Son of God is for everyone and not just for a few. This is essential for Chin people to understand: we are justified by faith, not by our work nor by following cultural law. John Wesley strongly believed that we are justified by faith alone and not by our good works. If good works could save us from our sins, the Son of God did not need to come to the world and die on the cross. Wesley said, “For the righteousness or mercy of God is only by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all of them that believe, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.”⁵⁷ God justifies us when we believe Christ died for my sins because he loved me and gave himself for me. Wesley gave the example of Peter. When Peter had faith in Jesus Christ, he could walk on the sea. Likewise, when we have faith in Jesus Christ, we are justified by faith in him alone and not by works.

These three great theologians will especially help Chin people in our daily life. We will understand now that it is impossible for us to be holy by ourselves but only by Christ’s blood.

⁵⁵ Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” 198.

⁵⁶ Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” 205.

⁵⁷ Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” 199.

Conclusion

I strongly believe that this topic is great for me as well as for Chin people. I purposefully chose this subject for Chin people who cannot read the Bible well or are not educated so that they will clearly see that our culture gives us a lot of benefits: love, care, protection, and others. After completing this study, I see our culture in a different way. Ruth Benedict divides cultures into two, saying, “Western culture is called a culture of sin and Japanese culture is called a culture of shame.”⁵⁸ I call Chin culture a “culture of love.” Benedict said that Western culture is very independent, and the people do not have much relationship with others. They only have relationships with their close friends or family. This is a difference between Chin Culture and Western culture. All cultures have different meanings according to their understanding. Chin people have a particular type of culture that we practice and believe is true. I think that love is the foundation of our culture because love was and is practiced in different ways.

Unfortunately, however, the way we understand holiness is not biblical holiness. Our ancestors believed that their cultural holiness would lead to a good place, and they would not be cursed by the gods if they carefully practice cultural rules. They understand holiness as doing good things and following cultural rules. But this was not enough to rescue them from eternal hell. As the Bible says in Hebrews 12, there is no holiness without the blood of Jesus Christ. Our animal sacrifices will not please God because God does not want animals sacrificed but wants us to believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son. There is no way we can be holy unless we have Jesus Christ in our life. It is impossible to be holy by following our cultural rules. God did not give the Ten Commandments to Israel in order for them to be holy but for them to know what sin is and that we are sinners. We cannot be holy by ourselves. No one is holy, righteous, or perfect (Roman 6). Preman Niles said that under the Old Testament, “The holiness which is required of the people is not ethical and moral perfection as an idea, but the concrete demand to observe God’s statutes and commandants faithfully. To transgress God’s

⁵⁸ David Ackerman, ed., *The Challenge of Culture* (Taytay: Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2002), 18.

demands is to invite his holy wrath.”⁵⁹ Indeed, ethical or moral holiness is not enough for us to go to heaven. We need the blood of Jesus Christ. Mother Teresa said, “Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things. It consists in accepting, with a smile, what Jesus sends us. It consists in accepting and following the will of God.”⁶⁰ As I mentioned many times, we Chin people will understand that holiness is not by our hard work or ability but starts when we receive Christ in our personal life. I like what A. W. Tozer said, “Holiness, as taught in the Scriptures, is not based upon knowledge on our part. Rather, it is based upon the resurrected Christ indwelling us and changing us into his likeness.”⁶¹ Christian holiness will lead us to Christlikeness in our daily life.

Then, I would like to quote from one of the interviewees, who said that our grandfathers thought that holiness is following the laws such as no stealing, no fighting, no telling lies, and others. He said that no one stole anything from others in the early years. Basically, we can say that cultural holiness leads to honest living and not doing bad things to others. Even when they fought each other, they never used weapons to hurt or hunt someone. After they fought, they still could have fellowship. Cultural holiness is outward holiness. I asked him then, “Is this similar to the Bible? Did we get this culture from someone?” He said, “No, this culture is originally from Chin. This concept really needs to change in Chin society. Many people still believe that without our cultural holiness, we cannot be holy and that the blood of Christ is not enough. One of the purposes of this paper is to help Chin Christians understand that the blood of Jesus Christ is absolutely enough for us to be holy. I have not argued that we should not practice cultural holiness, but what I mean is that the blood of Christ is enough for our holiness after we are washed by Christ’s blood. We can still practice

⁵⁹ D. Preman Niles, “Biblical Viewpoints: Old Testament,” in Emernto P. Nakpil and Douglas J. Ellwood, eds., *The Human and the Holy: Asia Perspectives in Christian Theology* (Quezon City:3008, New Day, 1978), 17-18.

⁶⁰ https://www.google.com/search?q=mother+teresa&rlz=1C1CHBF_enPH736PH736&oq=Mother&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j35i39l2j0i433l2j46i433j0i10i433j0i433l2j0.5574j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 (accessed 5/18/21).

⁶¹ <https://awtozer.com/>, “Preparing Jesus Christ Coming,” (accessed 5/18/21).

cultural holiness. Cultural holiness should not be number one in the life of Chin Christians. Our culture has much good for us to practice because it emphasizes love, care, and many more.

I would like to conclude with several Bible verses. Second Timothy 1:9 states, “He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (NIV). Philippians 2: 14-16 states, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.” Ephesians 5:3 says, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” Finally, Leviticus 20: 26 says, “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.” We Chin Christians are to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy. The blood of Christ is enough for us to be holy.

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