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JOHN WESLEY'S CONCEPT OF SANCTIFICATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1955

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

Definition and Scope of Thesis

It is the purpose of this study to present clearly and

objectively the concept of sanctification as it was believed and

taught by John Wesley. The term is used to indicate thought or

opinion. The term sanctification is used in the same sense by

many writers. The term is used in the same sense by

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John Wesley was the leader of the religious and moral reforms which took place in England in the eighteenth century. Wesley's life extended from the beginning until almost the end of that period. He was born at Epworth, England on June 17, 1703, as the fifteenth of sixteen children. He graduated from a well-known university of divinity and exhortation. He became an outstanding scholar in the law school of Oxford University, and was assigned there as a Fellow of Lincoln College after he had earned his master's degree. While at Oxford he became greatly disturbed over his own spiritual condition and tried to relieve his anxiety in various ways. Through

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

Definition and Scope of Thesis

It is the purpose of this thesis to set forth clearly and objectively the concept of sanctification as it was believed and taught by John Wesley. Concept is used to indicate thought or opinion or view. Sanctification is used in the narrow sense to mean the conduct of the Christian life or holiness of living which follows justification. This concept of sanctification will be limited to its doctrinal content and characteristics with a survey of influences which affected it in one way or another. No attempt is made to trace the social and political implications of this teaching, except in so far as they touch upon the doctrinal background. Finally a brief summary and evaluation of the teaching are given.

John Wesley was the leader of the religious and moral reform which took place in England in the Eighteenth Century. Wesley's life extended from the beginning until almost the end of this period. He was born at Epworth, England on June 17, 1703, as the fifteenth of nineteen children. He proceeded from a well-educated ancestry of clergymen and scholars. He became an outstanding scholar in his own right at Oxford University, and was assigned there as a Fellow of Lincoln College after he had earned his master's degree. While at Oxford he became greatly disturbed over his own spiritual condition and tried to relieve his anxiety in various ways. Through

all of his religious discipline and practice he found no relief or comfort for his spiritual unrest. He accepted an assignment as a missionary to the Georgia Indians as another step in gaining assurance of his own eternal salvation. This venture gave him no peace, but he did make contact with a group of Moravians, and through later experiences with them after his return to England gained a conviction of justification by faith in 1738. After this he began to preach of his new-found faith to the crowds in open air meetings, the doors of the Church of England being closed to him. He was highly successful in this work and gained hundreds of thousands of followers in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. He spent the remainder of his life as an itinerant preacher and overseer of these groups which came to be known as Methodist. Although Wesley never made a formal break with the Anglican Church, the groups he organized made a final break after his death in 1791. This group remained very zealous and aggressive in extending its outreach and represents the largest segment of Protestantism in the United States today. The teachings of John Wesley have been influential in much of the English speaking world even beyond the confines of the Methodist groups.

The claim is made that "next to Calvin and Luther no other Protestant leader has exerted such a wide, deep, and lasting influence on so many people as John Wesley."¹ It is also widely recognized that Wesley's theological development reaches its climax in

¹Frederick E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 292.

the doctrine of perfection or entire sanctification. All other doctrines are subservient to this in Wesley's theology. He taught this doctrine not only after his "conversion" in 1738, but throughout his ministerial life.² This fact is established by the following statement of Wesley:

In 1729 two young men (John and Charles Wesley), reading the Bible, saw that they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others to do so. In 1737, they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point.³

Terminology Used By Wesley

It is difficult to state just what Wesley taught about the concept of sanctification because of his wide use of various terms and his inconsistencies in teaching this doctrine. Wesley was never bothered about a definite terminology. Sanctification, holiness, perfection were often used by him to express the same thing, an experience of divine light. He seemed to favor the use of "perfection of love" to include both love to God and love to man.⁴ However, perfection, Christian perfection, sanctification, entire sanctification, perfect love, and holiness were used interchangeably by Wesley as synonymous

²Ibid.

³Franz Hildebrandt, From Luther To Wesley (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 24.

⁴John Wesley, Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley, compiled by Rev. J. A. Wood (Chicago: The Christian Witness Company, c.1921), p. 6.

terms meaning deliverance from all sin and love to God with all the heart.⁵

In analyzing the wide variety of terms used by Wesley in speaking of sanctification, we find the following: perfect love, glorious liberty, the whole image of God, full salvation, pure love of God, second change, renewed in love, full sanctification, holiness, a clean heart, entire salvation, perfected in love, saved from sin, the root of sin taken away, sanctification, full renewal in His image, and cleansed from all sin.⁶

"Second blessing" and "second change" are used to designate Christian perfection as a higher stage compared to the "new birth." Actually, Wesley means to distinguish between sanctification and entire sanctification, but he is not consistent. In practice he did not always observe the distinction, but in principle he did. Sanctification was used to mean all who have been saved from sin, while "wholly" or "entirely" was reserved for those who had attained a higher plane.⁷ Another view of perfection is given in the passage, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Perfection or sanctification can also be called the "fruit of the Spirit," "the putting on of the new man which is created in righteousness

⁵Ibid., p. 28.

⁶Ibid., p. 103.

⁷Harold Lindstroem, Wesley and Sanctification (Stockholm: Nya Bokfoerlags Arktiebolaget, 1946), p. 127.

and true holiness."⁸

Manner of Teaching

From the use of terminology by Wesley it is obvious that "an exact definition of Wesley's position in the doctrine of entire sanctification is extremely difficult,"⁹ but this becomes more evident when it is realized that Wesley wrote no formal systematic work outlining his teachings. In order to determine what Wesley taught it is necessary to examine his sermons, his other writings, his Journal, and the minutes of the Methodist Conferences of his day. Some of his doctrines were set forth under controversy and this must be taken into consideration. Most of his doctrinal teaching is contained in his sermons which he preached in a logical, simple manner to the common people of England. There is no systematic treatment in a scholarly, theological style, because Wesley never felt it necessary to write such a work. He did write various tracts defending his doctrine of sanctification since this was the main emphasis of his life. It is from these sources that Wesley's doctrine must be gleaned.

Brief Survey Of The Doctrine Of Sanctification

Wesley believed and taught that sanctification was the purpose

⁸ John Wesley, Wesley's Sermons (Boston: Christian Witness Company, n.d.), pp. 117 f.

⁹ Frederick E. Mayer, "Entire Sanctification," Concordia Theological Monthly III (June, 1932), 418.

of religion. Wesley, along with the mystics, emphasized a change in man which would qualify him for glorification. Perfection was given the primary meaning of the purity of intention, the imitation of Christ, and the love of God and our neighbor. These three points stand out in the doctrine presented by Wesley before and after his Aldersgate experience.¹⁰

The importance of this teaching is shown in these words of Wesley:

Our main doctrines, which include all the rest are repentance, faith, and holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself.¹¹

The great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parents.¹²

The following terse statement from a sermon of 1765 gives a preview of just what Wesley means by sanctification or perfection:

What is, then, the perfection of which man is capable while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command: "My son, give Me thy heart." It is the "loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind." This is the sum of Christian perfection: it is all comprised in the one word, love.¹³

¹⁰Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 130.

¹¹W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and his Century (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 424.

¹²John Wesley, Wesleyana: Or a Complete System of Wesleyan Theology (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), p. 56.

¹³Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught by John Wesley, pp. 17 f.

Remarks About Wesley

Macaulay attributes to Wesley "a genius for government not inferior to that of Richelieu." Southey says that Wesley's was "the most influential mind of the last century; the man who will have produced the greatest effects centuries or perhaps millenniums hence, if the present race of men should continue so long." Lecky says that the Aldersgate experience "forms an epoch in English history." In the history of the English speaking race Wesley far exceeds Shakespeare in influence. Wesley's least monument is said to be the church he built, even though it is one of the outstanding Protestant bodies. Wesley's true monument is the England of the Twentieth Century. "Nay, it is the whole changed temper of the modern world: the new ideals in politics, the new spirit in its religion, the new standard in its philanthropy."¹⁴

Wesley "restored Christianity to its place as a living force in the personal creed of men and in the life of the nation."¹⁵

All the great and characteristic contributions to Christianity in modern days come, in brief by direct descent from Wesley. Although cast out of the Church of England, he exerted a powerful influence over its life.¹⁶

Wesley undoubtedly did much to reduce the social ills of English

¹⁴Fitchett, op. cit., pp. 2 f.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 285.

society, such as the drink evil. Philanthropy, the abolition of slavery, and child-labor legislation may be traced indirectly to Wesley's effort.¹⁷

Could all of these fabulous claims about Wesley and his influence possibly be true? Has John Wesley been the greatest contributor to the social, moral, political, and religious atmosphere in which we live today? If these claims are valid, then a study of Wesley and his teachings is mandatory if we are fully to understand the world in which we live. Certainly, we should carefully analyze Wesley's doctrine of sanctification which was the basis of all his theology.

¹⁷Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America, p. 304.

CHAPTER II

VARIOUS INFLUENCES IN JOHN WESLEY'S LIFE WHICH CONDITIONED HIS CONCEPT OF SANCTIFICATION

Influences from Wesley's Home Life

In a consideration of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification it is necessary to analyze the various historical circumstances and experiences which either directly or indirectly influenced his thinking in the development of his concept of sanctification. One of the most important factors in Wesley's later development was the home and family influence. John Wesley came from a long line of respectable ancestors, consisting of scholars and clergymen on both the maternal and paternal side of the family.¹

John Wesley was the namesake and a true successor to his grandfather who conducted an itinerant ministry, had a great concern for the common people, was loyal to his principles, successful in winning souls, and led a simple, godly life.² This does not imply that the first John Wesley was always on good terms with the Anglican Church. As a matter of fact, he was imprisoned in 1661 for refusing to use the Book of Common Prayer in his services. Grandfather John was not known beyond the confines of his parish for he died at a

¹W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and his Century (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 13.

²John Telford, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Eaton and Mains, n.d.), p. 6.

comparatively early age due to the hardships of his time which were imposed upon him by a heartless church.³ It is interesting to speculate that possibly the action of the church against his grandfather played an important role in its reaction to John Wesley, and also influenced Wesley in his actions toward the church and his work in England.

Samuel Wesley, the father of John, also had a compassion for souls and an independent will. He became a minister in the church which had rejected his father and grandfather. He was installed as vicar in the church at Epworth which became the home of the Wesley family.⁴ His love for the Bible can be seen from the advice which he once gave to his son, John, "You ask me, what is the best commentary on the Bible? I answer, the Bible itself."⁵ On his deathbed, he impressed these words upon the mind of young John, "The inward witness, son, the inward witness; this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity."⁶ The fact that John Wesley never forgot these words becomes evident from the study of his concept of sanctification.

Undoubtedly, the influence of his father was a factor in John Wesley's later development, but this influence is far overshadowed

³Fitchett, op. cit., p. 13.

⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁵Telford, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶Ibid., p. 72.

by the greater influence of his mother. Isaac Taylor says:

The Wesleys' mother was the mother of Methodism in a religious and moral sense; for her courage, her submissiveness to authority, the high tone of her mind, its independence, and its self-control, the warmth of her devotional feelings, and the practical direction given to them, came up and were visibly repeated in the character and conduct of her sons.⁷

Susannah Wesley was truly a remarkable woman, the daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley who was also an ejected clergyman and a man of great learning. She had a natural love for learning and acquired the knowledge of Greek, Latin, and French while still in her teens. She was also well-versed in theology. She married Samuel Wesley when she was only nineteen and bore nineteen children in twenty-one years. Mrs. Wesley was held responsible for managing the financial affairs of the household. Due to a large family and a small income, it is not surprising to learn that the Rev. Samuel Wesley was sent to debtor's prison several times.⁸

It was imperative for Susannah Wesley to find a system or method in managing the home. She employed her genius and ruled the children very strictly and very methodically. The principle of method carried over into the religious training of the children. They had to learn early to distinguish the Sabbath day from other days, and to sit still at family prayers. Their minds were stored with hymns, collects,

⁷Ibid., p. 167.

⁸Fitchett, op. cit., pp. 15 ff.

and Scripture passages.⁹ The Wesley children were trained in methodical procedures even from the time of birth when they were dressed and undressed according to a definite schedule. They learned obedience early, their mother's view was,

I insist upon conquering the will of children, betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of religious education, without which, both precept and example will be ineffectual.¹⁰

For twenty years, beginning in 1702, Mrs. Wesley held school in her home for her children. She even prepared certain textbooks for this program and wrote expositions of the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. The main emphases in her teachings were on method, regularity, balance, and religion.¹¹ The main religious teachings were that human nature with its self-will has need of Christ as Savior, and that man may be saved by repentance and faith. God is not known by speculation or reason alone, but by experiment. Life is to be a proving ground for eternity, therefore religion is man's most important business.¹² Her own definition of religion is as follows:

Religion is nothing else than the doing of the will of God and not our own; that, the one grand impediment to our temporal and

⁹Ibid., pp. 21 f.

¹⁰Telford, op. cit., pp. 13 f.

¹¹Philip Lotz, Women Leaders (New York: Association Press, c. 1940), pp. 119 f.

¹²Ibid., pp. 122 f.

eternal happiness being this self-will, no indulgence of it can be trivial, no denial unprofitable. Heaven or hell depend on this alone.¹³

John Wesley was well-indoctrinated through the efforts of his mother, and the effects of this remained with him throughout his life. He was taught by his mother to place a lot of emphasis on his own works and later wrote of his youthful impression,

What I then hoped to be saved by was (1) not being so bad as other people, (2) having still a kindness for religion, (3) reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers.¹⁴

An experience in the life of young John made an indelible impression on his mind and set the tenor of his later life. When John was six years old, the Epworth parsonage caught fire in the middle of the night. The rest of the family rushed out safely, but somehow little John was overlooked. He was hopelessly trapped in his second-story bedroom when he awoke and went to the window. One of the men in the crowd below acted quickly and had another man to stand on his shoulders just in time to snatch John before the flaming roof caved in. It was because of this incident that John Wesley, in later years, referred to himself as "a brand plucked from the burning." This served to encourage him in later life to believe that God had saved him for some special purpose. His theology was represented in terms of the fire with each human soul being in danger of perishing as Wesley had been, and he felt an impelling

¹³Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁴Fitchett, op. cit., p. 59.

motive to rescue mankind from eternal disaster.¹⁵

In his boyhood Wesley was a quiet, serious, patient lad who sought a reason for everything. His father considered his religious understanding advanced enough to admit him to the Lord's Supper at the age of eight. His mother saw in him at the age of fourteen the hint of future greatness and wrote this prayer in her diary:

I do intend to be more particularly careful with the soul of this child, that Thou hast mercifully provided for, than I have ever been; that I may instill into his mind the principles of true religion and virtue. Lord, give me grace to do it sincerely and prudently.¹⁶

Influences from Religious Life in Eighteenth Century England

In order to gain a greater understanding of Wesley, he must be viewed in the light of the religious, moral, and social conditions in the England of the Eighteenth Century. The greatest blight of the first half of this century was the general decay in religion. The Christian faith in the Church of England was rapidly dying. Christianity was all but dead in the whole of England. Church life had become crystallized into a system of ethics. The message of forgiveness through the redeeming Christ no longer reached the people. This was the world into which John Wesley was born in the year 1703.¹⁷ The Church had been taken over by English deism and

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 4 ff.

French rationalism. In this watered-down form of Christianity reason had become the only source of religious knowledge. The Anglican Church was in a state of "suspended animation" and its dead formalism no longer held an attraction for the masses.¹⁸

It was then not only evident that social and moral conditions had sunk to a low ebb, but also the established Church had deteriorated, Arianism had gained control of the churches in spite of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church. There was no longer any real sense of sin, and as a result no doctrine of a redeeming Christ.¹⁹ As far as Wesley is concerned in his doctrinal development, he believed himself to be at one with the Church of England in his views on sanctification. For proof of this fact he pointed to expressions used in the liturgy of the Church.²⁰

Wesley was determined to overcome the many vices of his day. He was successful in raising the moral life of the community wherever Methodism gained a foothold.²¹ It cannot be said that Wesley was the English translation of a German pietist. The principal English writers in philosophy and theology of that time were moralists.

¹⁸Frederick E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 292.

¹⁹Fitchett, op. cit., p. 142.

²⁰Harold Lindstroem, Wesley and Sanctification (Stockholm: Nya Bokfoerlags Arktiebolaget. 1946), p. 128.

²¹Telford, op. cit., p. 157.

Wesley's Anglican background played a vital role in his later development.²² It was this background which explains the fact that Wesley was a convinced Arminian.²³ Dr. W. B. Pope claims that Wesley's doctrine of perfection was derived from Arminianism, but Dr. R. N. Flew, a Methodist scholar, disputes this implication.²⁴

The Wesley brothers never dreamed of separating from the Church of England; they hoped to gain the approval of their superiors in the Church for their methods and work. They had no quarrel with the Articles or the ritual. The final outcome was that they were barred from preaching in the churches, still they did not renounce their affiliation.²⁵

In the year 1739, Wesley began preaching to the people in the open air. At first, such an idea was completely repulsive to him, but under the influence of George Whitefield, he was induced to begin this type of preaching. This method of reaching the masses Wesley was to continue for the rest of his life when he found the doors of the Church of England closed to him. In his first open-air preaching at Bristol, he experienced great success and expressed

²²Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, c.1936), p. 110.

²³Fitchett, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁴R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. vii.

²⁵Fitchett, op. cit., pp. 156 f.

the regret that he had not begun ten years sooner.²⁶

Influences from Wesley's Education

John Wesley received the benefit of the best educational facilities of England in his day. In 1720, Wesley began his course of study at Oxford University. It was an Oxford in which the students became adept at breaking rules and pretending to attend lectures which did not exist. The moral and intellectual atmosphere had fallen to a low level. There were, of course, exceptions even in this darkest period in the history of Oxford; John Wesley was one of them. He received his Bachelor's degree in 1724 and the Master's degree in 1727. "He excelled in logic and was apt to resolve everything—even his own religious experience—into the terms of logic." He developed a literary style which was clear, terse, and direct. He became well-versed in the knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and the classics.²⁷

In his Oxford days Wesley sought diligently to find "inward holiness," but he never gained comfort or assurance.²⁸ It was during this period that Wesley received the following advice of Dr. Potter, then Archbishop of Canterbury, which he never forgot.

²⁶Telford, op. cit., pp. 118 ff.

²⁷Fitchett, op. cit., pp. 46 f.

²⁸Lee, op. cit., p. 87.

If you desire to be extensively useful, do not spend your time and strength in continuing for or against such things as are of a disputable nature, but in testifying against open, notorious vice, and in promoting real, essential holiness.²⁹

In 1725, Wesley had to decide which profession he would most desire to follow—law, medicine, or ministry. After weighing the matter carefully and considering his parents' advice, he decided on the ministry. He writes,

When I was about twenty-two my father pressed me to enter into the Holy Orders. I began to alter the whole form of my conversation and to set in earnest to enter a new life.

He diligently applied himself in reading devotional literature and was especially influenced by three Christian authors who will be treated later.³⁰

In 1726, Wesley was unanimously elected Fellow of Lincoln College at Oxford, a title by which he proudly referred to himself for the rest of his life. It was during this time that his motto became, "Leisure and I have taken leave of one another, I propose to be busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged me."³¹

During his years as a student at Oxford Wesley kept up his prayers and Scripture reading, but he did not have any notion of "inward holiness." He noted of these years,

²⁹Telford, op. cit., p. 40.

³⁰Fitchett, op. cit., pp. 62 f.

³¹Telford, op. cit., p. 42.

I cannot well tell what I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually sinning against that little light I had, unless by those transient fits of what many divines taught me to call repentance.

A talk with the porter of his college made a lasting impression on his mind and caused Wesley to feel a tragic lack in his own spiritual life.³²

Influences of Three Authors

It has already been mentioned that Wesley began the study of three authors during his years at Oxford. It is claimed that the preliminary general idea of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification comes from the practical mysticism of Thomas a' Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law.³³ In the beginning stages Wesley's striving after holiness was directed more God-ward than man-ward and more toward himself than his fellow man.³⁴ One author claims that it was his mother and Jeremy Taylor that gave Wesley some sound guidance on holy living, while William Law set before him the picture of Christian perfection.³⁵

The influence of Taylor, a' Kempis, and Law in the early stages

³²Ibid., p. 37.

³³Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 128.

³⁴Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: The Abingdon Press, c.1939), p. 36.

³⁵Ibid., p. 191.

of Wesley's spiritual development was powerful. They strongly pointed out to him the ethical nature of Christianity, but they failed to emphasize the special message of a personal Savior.³⁶ Wesley gained his first insight into Christian perfection in 1725 when he was introduced to practical mysticism. He never changed this position essentially for the rest of his life. The importance he placed upon this doctrine is shown by the attention given to it in his sermons and writings. The year before his death he declared that God had raised up the people called Methodists for the purpose of setting forth this doctrine.³⁷

The influence of Jeremy Taylor, of Thomas a' Kempis and of William Law was to set Wesley upon the way to Christian perfection. Nothing less than inward and outward holiness was to be his goal from 1725 until his death more than sixty-five years later.³⁸

In 1725 Wesley began to study Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying which caused many doubts to arise in his mind. He presented these problems to his father and mother. It was only through their guidance that he was steered away from asceticism.³⁹ Taylor may have exerted an adverse influence on Wesley, because in his writings the message of the cross of Christ shines through very dimly. Taylor has been labeled as "half a Socinian in heart." He manifests a

³⁶Fitchett, op. cit., p. 71.

³⁷Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 126.

³⁸Lee, op. cit., p. 213.

³⁹Telford, op. cit., p. 39.

papistic leaven and never speaks of the work of Luther, Calvin, and other reformers. He did not help to clarify Wesley's theology, but gave it a flavor of sacerdotalism.⁴⁰

Wesley's views on the rules of Christian living were being formed long before his Aldersgate experience. After reading Bishop Taylor's book, he stated that he longed to give God all his heart, and he sought the way to perfection from that hour. This determination was strengthened by a study of Imitation of Christ written by Thomas a' Kempis.⁴¹ Whether Wesley was aware of it or not, he owed a great debt to the mystical influence of this author. He studied the writings of several mystics of which Thomas a' Kempis is the most widely recognized.⁴² Here he learned that God's Law extended to all thoughts as well as words and deeds. There was a time when he considered a' Kempis too strict, but he still found great comfort in his writings. He learned to love a' Kempis and years later, in 1761, he affirmed, "Thomas a' Kempis was next to the Bible." In him Wesley found his first religious friend. This altered his whole view of life to seek a way of overcoming his sinful past conduct. He received the Lord's Supper every week and began to pray for inward holiness. For a short time, he felt that he was

⁴⁰Fitchett, op. cit., p. 64.

⁴¹John Wesley, Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley, compiled by Rev. J. A. Wood (Chicago: The Christian Witness Company, c.1921), p. 13.

⁴²Fitchett, op. cit., p. 315.

now, at last, a good Christian.⁴³

The most influential of all the writings which Wesley studied were those of William Law, an older clergyman of the Anglican Church. Even though Wesley later disagreed with Law on certain points, he still confessed a great indebtedness for the insights gained from him, especially in regard to his understanding of sanctification.⁴⁴ It was in the year 1727 that Wesley became familiar with Law's books, Christian Perfection and Serious Call. After reading them Wesley resolved to be even more diligent in giving his body, soul, and spirit to God. This led to a close friendship with Law, and he even became Wesley's counsellor. Wesley honestly tried to lead the life outlined by Law in his writings. Later, however, when Wesley came to an understanding of the teachings of Peter Boehler, he wrote to Mr. Law, harshly denouncing him for not leading to a proper knowledge of Christ. Several letters were exchanged between Wesley and Law in which each defended his position. Wesley declared that Law had tried to lead him to sanctification before justification. The influence which Law exerted on the younger Wesley has been judged as being harmful rather than helpful. In later years, however, Wesley still spoke of Law's Serious Call in glowing terms.⁴⁵

William Law took a stand against the degenerate moral standards

⁴³Telford, op. cit., pp. 38 f.

⁴⁴Flew, op. cit., p. 314.

⁴⁵Telford, op. cit., pp. 103 ff.

in his day and set forth the ethical standards of Christianity as the highest goal. He mentions that Christian perfection does not necessarily call one to a cloister.⁴⁶ Law uses the term "perfection" to indicate that stage to which all Christians must attain. He insisted that sinners have the ability to reclaim themselves by decision and resolution. It was on this point that Wesley attacked Law's teaching.⁴⁷ Law failed to direct men to Christ in his emphasis on Christian perfection in this life. He also failed to show that the Christian life is to be followed in the ordinary occupations and circumstances of routine daily life.⁴⁸

Law taught that true perfection was unattainable in this life, but it was a goal for which to strive. The perfection possible on earth was only a gradual development in sanctification. He stressed the "inward piety of heart and mind." Life on earth was to be a period of probation in which man was to live in a state of repentance and sorrow for sin. This involved a moral effort and self-denial on the part of the individual. After 1738, Wesley proclaimed that perfection was possible in this life as a gift of God and a work of the Holy Spirit. The only reason more people did not experience it was because they did not expect it and did not pray for it in faith.⁴⁹

⁴⁶John T. McNeill, Books of Faith and Power (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1947), p. 128.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 131 f.

⁴⁸Flew, op. cit., p. 301.

⁴⁹Lindstroem, op. cit., pp. 132 f.

Wesley later confessed that it was mysticism which almost caused him to lose his faith. He was greatly attracted and influenced by the mystics until he saw their errors. Afterwards he criticized the mysticism of Law and showed it to be a form of self-righteousness. He strongly condemns the mystics when he says, "All the other enemies of Christianity are trifles. The mystics are the most dangerous."⁵⁰ Against the hermitic ideal of the mystics, Wesley held that human fellowship was a part of holiness; against Quietistic mysticism he showed that love of God was inseparable from love of neighbor. Wesley was opposed to contemplative mysticism in favor of practical mysticism. He contended that both inward and outward holiness are necessary.⁵¹

Influences From The "Holy Club"

The years 1729 through 1735 have been called the period when Wesley was living in the seventh chapter of Romans and had not yet reached the eighth chapter. It was in these years when Methodism was born. It shared with its founder in the effort to attain salvation by works and to bring forth the fruits of faith before the root was established.⁵² In 1729 Wesley began avidly to study the

⁵⁰Fitchett, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁵¹Lindstroem, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁵²Fitchett, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 f.

Bible as the only standard of truth and the model of pure religion. Here he saw even more clearly the necessity of having not just part, but all of the mind of Christ and walking as Christ walked. He arrived at the conclusion that religion was the entire inward and outward conformity to Christ.⁵³

When John once spoke to his younger brother, Charles, about the latter's spiritual life, the young Oxford student, Charles, replied, "What, would you have me to be a saint all at once?"⁵⁴ In his years at Oxford, however, Charles became more serious about spiritual matters. In 1729, with the help of brother John, they formed a group which was called by various names—Methodists, the Reforming Club, the Godly Club, the Holy Club, Sacramentarians, Bible Moths, Supererogation Men, and Enthusiasts. The names were given by the heartless students at Oxford who ridiculed their piety. Wesley was looked upon as the Curator, or Father of the Holy Club.⁵⁵

At first the Holy Club was composed of only four members, the two Wesleys, William Morgan, and Robert Kirkham. They began by meeting every Sunday evening. This was changed to two evenings a week and finally every evening from six until nine.

They began their meetings with prayer, studied the Greek Testament and the classics, reviewed the work of the past day, and talked over their plans for the morrow. . . .After prayers, the

⁵³Wesley, Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley, pp. 184 f.

⁵⁴Telford, op. cit., p. 44.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 59.

chief subject was charity. . . .On Sunday evenings they read divinity. They fasted on Wednesday and Friday and received the Lord's Supper every week. . . .A system of self-examination brought all their conduct under searching review. . . .A glance at the entire scheme will show how carefully the Oxford Methodists sought to order their lives. They studied to do the will of God in all things, to pray with fervor, to use ejaculations of hourly prayers for humility, faith, hope, love, and the particular virtue they set themselves to seek each day. The members repeated a collect at nine, twelve, and three and had their stated times for meditation and private prayer. The "Love of Man" led them to inquire whether they had been zealous in doing good works, had persuaded all they could to attend the means of grace, and to observe all the laws of the Church and the University.⁵⁶

Each member of the Holy Club sought to keep his soul under self-examination to see if he had fulfilled all of his duties toward God and man. The central emphasis was on the performance of good works, but they were not from the proper Christian motivation.⁵⁷ During the years of the Holy Club, they visited the prisoners and the sick. Their father wrote them the following encouragement,

I question whether a mortal can arrive to a greater degree of perfection than steadily to do good, and for that reason patiently and meekly to suffer evil.⁵⁸

The Wesleys remained in the Club while others joined and later had to leave. It always remained a small intimate group. One of the most important additions was George Whitefield who joined just before Wesley's Georgia mission.⁵⁹ Wesley and Whitefield became close

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 57 ff.

⁵⁷Fitchett, op. cit., p. 77.

⁵⁸Telford, op. cit., p. 52.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 63.

friends and were associated in preaching to the common people in the open-air gatherings, but Wesley later broke with Whitefield because of the latter's insistence upon defending the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination.⁶⁰

Influences From the Moravians

The two greatest influences on Wesley's doctrine of sanctification were the writings of Christian authors and the knowledge of the experiences of individual Christians in the Moravian and Methodist societies.⁶¹ It was on Wesley's voyage to Georgia that he became acquainted with the Moravians. Wesley stated his reason for accepting this Georgia assignment in this manner:

My chief motive is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. . . . I cannot hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there.⁶²

On October 21, 1735, John and Charles Wesley sailed for Georgia. There were twenty-six Moravians aboard as fellow passengers. The principles of the Holy Club were practised even during the voyage by the Wesleys and two friends. They experienced a series of storms in transit and John Wesley found himself afraid of death and exclaimed, "How is it that thou hast no faith?" His admiration of the Moravians

⁶⁰Fitchett, *op. cit.*, pp. 322 f.

⁶¹Flew, *op. cit.*, pp. 313 f.

⁶²Fitchett, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

grew when they remained calm and fearless even in the face of death.⁶³

After landing in Savannah, Wesley remained in close contact with the Moravians. He learned to know them better, and, at the same time, he recognized the inadequacies of his own personal faith more and more. In his preaching Wesley admonished the members of his Savannah congregation to change their worldly ways and to wear less elaborate clothing. There were about seven hundred people under his pastoral care, and the prospect of preaching to the Indians, the purpose for which he came, was far removed from the actual situation.⁶⁴

Wesley had a successful ministry in Savannah, until in his zeal to foster true piety among his members, he refused to give Holy Communion to a young matron in his congregation. Before her marriage, she had had designs on the bachelor, John Wesley, but all of her efforts were futile. The public rebuke of being expelled from the Lord's Supper was too much for her, and she exerted influence through her prominent father to have charges brought against Wesley. This incident meant the end of Wesley's effectiveness in Savannah and in December of 1737 he headed back to England.⁶⁵

The return voyage was one of soul searching for Wesley. He spent much time in ministering and witnessing to his fellow-passengers,

⁶³Telford, op. cit., pp. 74 ff.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 79 ff.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 87 ff.

but he felt no sense of security within himself. He writes of his Georgia experience,

It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgia Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned of myself in the meantime? Why (what I least of all suspected), that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.

In later years, looking back on this statement, he explains, "I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son."⁶⁶

In January 1738, after his Georgia experience, Wesley analyzed his spiritual state as follows:

I have a fair summer religion, I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say "To die is gain."

"I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun

My last thread I shall perish on the shore."

I think verily, if the Gospel be true, I am safe; for I not only have given and do give all my goods to feed the poor; I not only give my body to be burned, drowned, or whatever God shall appoint for me: but I follow after charity (though not as I ought, yet as I can), if haply I may attain it. I now believe the Gospel is true. "I show my faith by my works", by staking my all upon it. I would do so again and again a thousand times, if the choice were still to make. Whoever sees me, sees I would be a Christian. Therefore "are my ways not like other men's ways." Therefore I have been, I am content to be "a byword, a proverb of reproach." But in a storm I think, "WHAT IF THE GOSPEL BE NOT TRUE?"⁶⁷

On his return to England Wesley noticed the crying need of a revival in his native land. He declares,

I have read prayers, and explained the Second Lesson, to a few of those who were called Christians, but were indeed, more savage

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 92 f.

⁶⁷ Fitchett, op. cit., pp. 112 f.

in their behavior than the wildest Indians I have yet met with.⁶⁸

Wesley was thankful for one result of his Georgia experience. He had learned German, Spanish, and Italian, and now was able to read the works of "holy men" in these languages. Through his contact with the Moravians, Wesley met Peter Bohler when he arrived in England, having been ordained by Count Zinzendorf for work in Carolina. This friendship with Bohler convinced Wesley that he himself did not have the proper faith, and he felt that he should discontinue all preaching. Bohler insisted that Wesley should continue, and when Wesley asked, "What shall I preach?" The reply was, "Preach faith till you have it, and then because you have it you will preach faith."⁶⁹

Wesley became convinced from his study of the Greek testament that Bohler's views were Scriptural. He was amazed to discover that most of the conversions spoken of in the book of Acts were instantaneous. He had been formerly opposed to any thought of instantaneous conversion. Now Wesley even went so far as to say that a person must know the hour of his conversion. Soon Peter Bohler left his two friends, John and Charles Wesley, to begin his work in Carolina. The Wesleys had nothing but praise for Bohler and were grateful that he had set them to seek a living faith.⁷⁰ It has been argued that Bohler did not teach Wesley justification by faith, but instead

⁶⁸Telford, op. cit., p. 94.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 95 ff.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 98 f.

showed him the place of love in Christian experience. After Boehler left for America he wrote Wesley

. . .taste and then see, how exceedingly the Son of God has loved you and loves you still; and that so you may continually trust confidently in Him and feel His life in you and in your flesh.⁷¹

Shortly after Peter Boehler's departure, Charles Wesley sent word to his brother that he had found peace for his soul. Then on the evening of May 24, 1738 John Wesley reluctantly attended a meeting of the Moravian Society on Aldersgate Street in London where he heard Luther's preface of the epistle to the Romans being read. Here it was that the event occurred which changed Wesley's entire life, and also the lives of his followers. It can best be described in the well-known words of Wesley himself:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Immediately following this sensation Wesley began to pray and testify publicly to what had taken place.⁷²

Shortly after this Aldersgate experience, Wesley traveled to the Moravian headquarters of Herrnhut on the borders of Bohemia. The purpose of this journey to the continent was to gain assurance of his new-found faith. This trip served to strengthen him in the conviction that he had found the true faith. He expressed the wish

⁷¹Lee, op. cit., pp. 84 f.

⁷²Telford, op. cit., pp. 100 f.

that he might remain in this Moravian community, but was determined to return to England to share his findings with his own people.⁷³

It was through the Moravians that Wesley was led to his experience of justifying faith. Later, however, he condemned many of the tenets of the Moravians. The Moravians taught that "Christ has done all which is necessary for the salvation of all mankind." Wesley opposed this as being ambiguous saying that Christ has not done all which is necessary for the "absolute salvation," but only for the "conditional salvation" of all mankind. Wesley taught that man must believe and have the faith which worketh by love or he will be damned.⁷⁴

The Moravians also stated that Christ has wholly abolished the Law. Wesley said that this was utterly false and that our liberty as Christians is liberty to obey God.⁷⁵ Wesley broke with the Moravians, primarily, because of these Antinomian teachings.⁷⁶ In his struggle with Antinomianism Wesley necessarily was driven to place much emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification.⁷⁷

On sanctification the Moravians taught,

We are sanctified wholly the moment we are justified, and are

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 108 ff.

⁷⁴ John Wesley, Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley, pp. 127 f.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Fitchett, op. cit., p. 320.

⁷⁷ Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 100.

neither more nor less holy to the day of our death; entire sanctification and entire justification being in one and the same instant.

Wesley claimed that God's Word and experience proved the contrary to be true. There were other points of issue between Wesley and the Moravians, but this evidence suffices to indicate why Wesley did not continue his association with them.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ John Wesley, Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley, pp. 127 f.

CHAPTER III

OTHER DOCTRINES WHICH AFFECTED WESLEY'S

CONCEPT OF SANCTIFICATION

Original Sin

There were other doctrines which must be briefly set forth in order better to understand Wesley's concept of sanctification. Since Wesley composed no systematic treatment of various doctrines, there are often many inconsistencies in the way he presented these teachings on different occasions. An examination of three of these teachings will indicate the role they played in his development of the doctrine of sanctification. Wesley's Arminianism becomes evident in his doctrine of original sin, free will, and pre-venient grace.¹

Wesley taught clearly the corrupt state of natural man. Natural man is dead to God.² However, Wesley denied the damnableness of concupiscence.³ In a sermon entitled "Original Sin" Wesley taught that by nature man has no knowledge of God. All men are atheists by nature. Men are empty of all good and filled with all manner of evil. Human nature suffers entire depravation. The entire purpose of religion is

¹Frederick E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 296.

²Harald Lindstroem, Wesley and Sanctification (Stockholm: Nya Bokfoerlags Arktebolaget, 1946), p. 20.

³Frederick E. Mayer, "Entire Sanctification," Concordia Theological Monthly III (June 1932), 421.

to raise man from entire depravation to entire sanctification.⁴

Wesley goes on to counteract these effects of original sin by teaching that original sin does not determine man's final destiny, for no one is eternally damned unless he chooses to be. The imputed guilt of original sin means temporal and spiritual death, but does not involve eternal death unless the promptings of original sin are followed. The person suffering eternal damnation has no one to blame but himself.⁵

The manner in which this view of original sin plays into the doctrine of sanctification is clear when Wesley proposes that the imperfections which remain even in the "perfected" man are due to Adam's fall. They are as natural to the believer as breathing. This means that such a person cannot actually fulfill the law, but he can be considered as fulfilling it because his defects are not due to want of love, but to want of knowledge which stems from the fall of Adam.⁶

Pre-venient Grace

Again Wesley counteracts the total depravation of man by teaching a doctrine of pre-venient grace. There is no such thing as the total-

⁴John Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, authorized by Wesleyan Conference, 1914 (London: J. Alfred Sharp, n.d.), pp. 534 ff.

⁵Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 35.

⁶Ibid., pp. 146 f.

ly dead natural man such as Wesley describes in his sermon on original sin, because Wesley taught that God gives to all men a pre-venient grace, that is, a grace that comes before and apart from the means of grace. Man can either cooperate with or oppose God's grace due to this pre-venient grace given to all men in varying amounts. This makes it possible for all men to seek God.⁷

This allowed Wesley to teach the freedom of the human will. It is this which gives man the ability to say "No" to God, but it also gives man the ability to say "Yes." Wesley held that without such a free will, there could be no goodness among men. He failed to distinguish between the civic realm and the spiritual realm.⁸

Here, again, Wesley followed the laws of human reason which led him to a belief in a possibility of universal salvation for all men, even without the Gospel. He taught that men will be judged according to their actions on the basis of the light which they possess.⁹ Therefore, "No man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath."¹⁰

Justification

⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

⁸ W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and his Century (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 424.

⁹ Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America, p. 298.

¹⁰ John Wesley, Wesleyana: Or a Complete System of Wesleyan Theology (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), p. 213.

Wesley taught that sanctification begins the moment a person is justified. Justification is the "new birth" and the gateway to the whole process of sanctification. Equal stress should be placed on the doctrine of full, free, present justification and the entire sanctification of heart and life.¹¹ At another time, possibly when the doctrine of sanctification was being misunderstood, Wesley changed his suggestion and the Methodist preachers were encouraged to speak primarily about the state of justification, but also, less frequently, in clear words to preach about entire sanctification.¹²

In a sermon on "Free Grace" Wesley insists upon the free grace of God in salvation. "The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all and free for all." It is free for man, not depending on any merit or power within him. He strongly objects to those who oppose universal grace, showing that if election to damnation were true, then all preaching is in vain. Such a teaching would do away with all comfort, assurance, and good works. If some men are lost, it is because they rejected the will of God.¹³

Previously it was mentioned that Wesley once equated justification and new birth. However, in his sermon, "New Birth," he makes a distinction between these terms. He says that these are, properly speak-

¹¹John Wesley, Christian Perfection as Taught by John Wesley, compiled by Rev. J. A. Wood (Chicago: The Christian Witness Company, c.1921), p. 37.

¹²Ibid., p. 162.

¹³John Wesley, Practical Sermons (London: Leighton and Murphy, Printers, n.d.), pp. 288 ff.

ing, called fundamental doctrines. Justification the work of God for us, in forgiving our sins; new birth, the work of God in us, in renewing our fallen nature. Both acts occur in man at the same time, but in order of thinking justification precedes the new birth. This new birth then leads to holiness, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The new birth is absolutely necessary for eternal salvation, and is considered only a part of sanctification, not the whole of it.¹⁴

Justification does not wholly purify the heart of the believer. It means the overpowering of sin, but not the removal of sin. Sin does not reign, but it does remain after justification in the form of self-will, pride, and idolatry. The moment a person is justified his heart is cleansed only in a low degree. The heart is not fully cleansed until the believer becomes perfect in love.¹⁵

Wesley confuses the role of "free grace" in justification by proposing that the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's own description of the way to heaven for all mankind.¹⁶ Also in the Conference of 1771, Wesley set forth the following resolution to describe the place of works in justification:

We have received it as a maxim that "a man is to do nothing in

¹⁴ Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, pp. 547 ff.

¹⁵ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught by John Wesley, pp. 35 f.

¹⁶ William Ragsdale Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon--Cokesbury, c.1946), p. 227.

order to [sic] justification." Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favor with God should "cease from evil, and learn to do well." Whoever repents should do "works meet for repentance." And if this is not in order to find favor, what does he do them for? Is not this "salvation by works?" Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition.¹⁷

For Wesley, justification involves only a relative change, while sanctification involves a real change. The former is objective, the latter subjective. The former delivers from the guilt of sin, the latter from the power and root of sin.¹⁸ Sanctification is not a cause, but an effect of justification.¹⁹ However, sanctification is declared necessary to retain justification.²⁰

Perhaps it can best be shown in the following summary just how Wesley looked upon man as passing through three different states or stages on his way to justification. The first state is natural man without pre-venient grace, the second or legal state is man with pre-venient grace, the third is a description of the justified man.²¹ Most Methodistic groups still retain these distinctions.

<u>The Natural State</u>	<u>The Legal State</u>	<u>The Evangelical State</u>
Man sleeps in death	Is awakened	Is a child of God
Neither fears nor loves God	Fears God	Loves God
Has no light in the things of God; walks	See painful light of hell	See the joyous light of heaven

¹⁷Fitchett, op. cit., p. 380

¹⁸Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 84

¹⁹Ibid., p. 59.

²⁰Ibid., p. 96.

²¹Ibid., pp. 109 f.

in utter darkness
Has false peace
Has fancied liberty
Sins willingly
Neither conquers
nor fights

Has no peace
Is in bondage
Sins unwillingly
Fights but does
not conquer

Enjoys true peace
Enjoys true liberty
Does not sin
Fights and conquers,
is more than conqueror.

STRENGTH IN THIS LIFE

In the history of persecution the difficulties, divisions, and
... it is taught that such a state is attainable
... himself changed his views on this point at
... of 1735 Wesley declared that "perfect
... This was a vacillating period of
... his beliefs were not crystallized into
...
... Wesley's reasons in England, he came to
... He noticed the
... and realized the necessity of
... the goal toward
... He showed her that perfect
... this earthly life.² Wesley
... to free all sin,

¹ Wesley, *Journal*, 1735-1736 (New York: The Wesleyan Press, 1872), p. 175.
² Wesley, *Journal*, 1735-1736 (New York: The Wesleyan Press, 1872), p. 175.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTERISTICS OF WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

ATTAINABLE IN THIS LIFE

In the teaching of perfection the difficulties, divisions, and confusions begin when it is taught that such a state is attainable here and now.¹ Wesley himself changed his views on this point at various times. In a sermon of 1735 Wesley declared that "perfect holiness is not found on earth." This was a vacillating period of Wesley's life, during which his beliefs were not crystallized into their final form.²

In the early days of Wesley's crusade in England, he came to the conclusion that mere conversion was not enough. He noticed the losses from among his early converts and realized the necessity of setting up the ideal of Christian perfection as the goal toward which all Christians should strive. He showed how this highest ideal was within reach of all during this earthly life.³ Wesley maintained that if the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin,

¹Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: The Abingdon Press, c.1939), p. 198.

²W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and His Century (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 86.

³McConnell, op. cit., p. 192.

then there can be no sin or unrighteousness in the believer that would cause him to sin again.⁴ Wesley admonished his hearers not to rest until entire sanctification became their own.⁵

In order to comfort those who could not claim to have experienced entire sanctification Wesley maintained that if Christian perfection were not reached during this life, it had to be attained at the hour of death and that this was the case with most Christians. It would be impossible for a Christian to enter heaven if this were not true.⁶ To avoid indifference to this teaching Wesley also stressed that where the doctrine of Christian perfection was not clearly and forcefully preached, the result would be a cold and dead church. The believers should be taught to expect perfection at any time, for to expect it only at death was the same as not expecting it at all.⁷

Wesley speaks of those Christians who have not seen the advantage of gaining entire sanctification as walking in the "lower way." This way may be a good way, but there is a "more excellent way", that of seeking after perfect holiness.⁸ In awaiting the time of entire

⁴ John Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, Authorized by Wesley-an Conference Office, 1914 (London: J. Alfred Sharp, n.d.), pp. 488 ff.

⁵ John Wesley, Wesley's Sermons (Boston: Christian Witness Company, n.d.), p. 104.

⁶ McConnell, op. cit., p. 200.

⁷ John Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, compiled by Rev. J. A. Wood (Chicago: The Christian Witness Company, c.1921), p. 87.

⁸ Ibid., p. 173.

sanctification, the believer should be zealous in keeping all the commandments of God, in denying himself, in taking up his cross daily, in earnest prayer and fasting, and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God. He is to seek it in faith, but God does not give faith unless it is taught diligently. The reason why so few receive the blessing in this life is because so few seek it properly through prayer and wrestling with God.⁹

In 1749 Wesley held to the following aspects of the time element in perfection, which remained essentially the same throughout the remainder of his life:

1. Christian perfection is that love of God and our neighbors which implies deliverance from all sin.
2. That this is received merely by faith.
3. That it is given instantly, in one moment.
4. That we are to expect it, not at death, but every moment; that "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."¹⁰

Not An Absolute Perfection

Wesley saw that there were definite limits to the capabilities of Christians in this earthly life. This made it necessary to place certain conditions and restrictions on the degree of perfection which man can reach. Wesley did not believe that man was capable of reaching the perfection of the good angels. Nor is it possible for man to attain the perfection of Adam before the fall. The perfection which man can realize in this life does not exclude ignorance, errors,

⁹Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 54.

and infirmities. Because of weakness every believer is liable to transgress the perfect law and thus needs the blood of the atonement.¹¹ In other words, the idea of perfection is not to be thought of as synonymous with sinlessness.¹² In 1762 Wesley wrote, "To set perfection too high is to drive it out of the world."¹³ This is also emphasized in a letter of the same year, "While we breathe, we shall, more or less, mistake. If therefore Christian perfection implies this, we must not expect it till after death."¹⁴ Perhaps Wesley's idea of perfection can be better understood from the following points:

In what sense Christians are not perfect:

1. In knowledge.
2. From mistake--in things unessential to salvation they frequently err.
3. From infirmities--these cannot be known sins.
4. From temptation.

In what sense Christians are perfect:

1. Do not commit sin--made free from inward and outward sin.
2. Free from evil thoughts.
3. Free from evil tempers.
4. Free from pride.
5. Free from self-will.¹⁵

It was not Wesley's intent to set up a sinlessness on the part of the believer. He avows,

Absolute or infallible perfection I do not contend for. Sinless

¹¹ Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, pp. 111 ff.

¹² R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection In Christian Theology (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. xii.

¹³ McConnell, op. cit., p. 202.

¹⁴ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 21.

¹⁵ Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, pp. 488 ff.

perfection, I do not contend for, seeing it is not Scriptural. A perfection such as enables a person to fulfill the whole law, and so needs not the merits of Christ,—I acknowledge no such perfection; I do now, and always did protest against it.

"But is there no sin in those who are perfect in love?" I believe not; but be that as it may, they feel none,—no temper contrary to pure love,—while they rejoice, pray, and give thanks continually. And whether sin is suspended, or extinguished, I will not dispute it; but it is enough that they feel nothing but love. This, you allow, we should daily press after. And this is all I contend for.¹⁶

Wesley gives this definition of sin, "By sin I mean, a voluntary transgression of a known law."¹⁷ Therefore when he proposes that the believers cannot sin, he goes on to explain that he means an outward, voluntary transgression of the law.¹⁸ Wesley defends this definition of sin by saying that St. John does not teach that all transgression of the law is sin, but rather, "All sin is a transgression of the law."¹⁹ Wesley goes on to say that involuntary transgressions, known or unknown, are also in need of atonement. There is no perfection which is without these, therefore Wesley does not contend for "sinless perfection."²⁰ In his classification of voluntary and involuntary transgressions, Wesley approaches the concept of mortal and venial sins.

Wesley violently opposed the idea that there is no sin in believers. He taught that such a doctrine blocked the daily repentance of a Christ-

¹⁶ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 23.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁹ Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, p. 126.

²⁰ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 223.

ian, and, as a result, blocked the way to sanctification. He believed that repentance was absolutely necessary in the life of the believer, if he were to be perfected in love.²¹ In a sermon, "Sin in Believers", Wesley strongly affirms the fact that the flesh opposes the Spirit even in believers. He clearly points out that these two contrary principles are evident throughout the Scriptures. Christ can be in the same heart with sin, but Christ cannot reign where sin reigns. It is possible for a person to be born of the Spirit, and, at the same time, be not altogether spiritual. "Having sin does not forfeit the favor of God; giving way to sin does."²²

The justified believer is still plagued by inward sin clinging to him which affects all his thoughts, words, and deeds. For this there is no condemnation either from God or his own heart. It is due to the remaining corrupt nature, so that the seeds of every kind of sin remain in him. The believer is not condemned for anything which is not in his power to avoid, whether it be of the inward or outward nature. The sins of infirmity are not properly sins and bring no guilt with them.²³

Wesley shows that even the Christian needs to live in daily repentance because of the sins that occur in his life. Just because a person is justified is no reason to believe that he is entirely sanc-

²¹Ibid., p. 34.

²²Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, pp. 9 ff.

²³Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 43 f.

tified and does not need the forgiveness of sins. The Christian should be aware of his own inability and also realize that he can do all things through Christ.²⁴

Wesley distinguishes between sinfulness and helplessness. The sanctified person need not know sinfulness any more, but will experience helplessness until death.²⁵ Love may actually incline a person to make a mistake when it causes him to think more highly of his neighbor than the neighbor really deserves. This is said to be an accidental mistake, flowing from pure love.²⁶ In those who are entirely sanctified it is not a defect of love, but a defect of knowledge which may cause them to act, think, or speak wrongly.²⁷ There will also be the defect of wandering thoughts brought on by the evil spirits which will continue to plague the believer as long as he is in the world.²⁸ The state of holiness does not exclude temptation, because even Christ was tempted. In these cases of temptation the soul resists them and is filled with pure love.²⁹

Christian perfection, for Wesley, meant only one thing, the purity of motive. The love of God is to be the motivation for every thought in a believer's life. All selfishness and evil desires are

²⁴Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, pp. 31 ff.

²⁵Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 79.

²⁶Ibid., p. 224.

²⁷Ibid., p. 253.

²⁸Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, p. 520.

²⁹Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 254 f.

ruled out. It is true that such a Christian may still make mistakes in judgment, and thus perfection in the sense of infallibility is impossible on earth.³⁰ Wesley never equated human perfection with the absolute perfection of God. Man can be like God in motive when his life is guided by love. Man, however, can make mistakes and needs Christ's atonement even when he has reached entire sanctification. Wesley did not consider these mistakes as sins. He says, "Perfection, therefore, is the realization of the best moral and spiritual possibilities in a life dominated completely by God and motivated entirely by love."³¹

The sanctity bestowed on man acquires the character of a quality in man. For Wesley, however, it does not become an independent quality, but it must be connected with Christ and His work. It is due to the merit of Christ and not the merit of man. Wesley recognizes the need of the atonement even in those who are entirely sanctified. He illustrates how those who have reached this goal recognize even more their total dependence on Christ.

None feel their need of Christ like these; none so entirely depend upon Him. For Christ does not give life to the soul separate from, but in and with, Himself. Hence His words are equally true of all men in whatsoever state of grace they are: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Without (or

³⁰William Ragsdale Cannon, The Theology Of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, c.1946), p. 241.

³¹Ibid., p. 253.

separate from) me ye can do nothing."³²

In answer to those who objected that Christ would not be needed for those who are entirely sanctified, Wesley declares:

In every state we need Christ in the following respects, (1) Whatever grace we receive, it is a free gift from Him. (2) We receive it as His purchase, merely in consideration of the price He paid. (3) We have this grace, not only from Christ, but in Him. For our perfection is not like that of a tree, which flourishes by the sap received from its own root, but, as was said before, like that of a branch which united to the vine bears fruit; but severed from it, is dried up and withered. (4) All our blessings, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, depend upon His intercession for us, which is one branch of His priestly office, whereof therefore we have always equal need. (5) The best of men still need Christ in His priestly office to atone for their omissions, their shortcoming (as some not improperly speak), their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For all these are deviations from the perfect law and consequently need an atonement. Yet that they are not properly sins, we apprehend may appear from the words of St. Paul. "He that loveth hath fulfilled the law; for love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. 13:10. Now, mistakes and whatever infirmities necessarily flow from the corruptible state of the body, are no way contrary to love; nor therefore in the Scripture sense, sin.³³

Christian perfection does not mean an exemption from ignorance, mistakes, and weaknesses or temptations. It is another term for holiness. There is no absolute perfection upon earth. Regardless of how much spiritual stature a person may obtain, there is still need to "grow in grace" and knowledge and love of God, his Savior.³⁴

³²Harald Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification (Stockholm: Nya Bokfoerlags Aktiebolaget, 1946), p. 152.

³³Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 222 f.

³⁴Ibid., p. 26.

When a believer reaches a stage of perfect love, he is not to rest on his laurels, rather he is continually to advance in Christian growth. It is impossible for him to stand still. He must go forward, or else he will go backward.³⁵ Progress in sanctification also effects progress in humility. The perfectly sanctified realize their total dependence upon God's grace. While in the earlier stages humility is mixed with pride, the perfectly sanctified are also perfect in humility.³⁶

Gradual and Instantaneous Aspects

The teaching of perfection had always been one of the basic tenets of Wesley and his followers, but it was not until 1762 that stress was laid upon instantaneous sanctification by faith.³⁷ From the examples which Wesley gives of persons who claimed entire sanctification, it was a matter of individual feeling or experience which was accepted as an indication that they were truly sanctified. The matters of times and dates were especially observed in testimonies. In the early days of Wesley's ministry he believed solely in a gradual sanctification, but later came to believe in instantaneous sanctification as a result of the experience of many people. This sanctifi-

³⁵John Wesley, Practical Sermons (London: Leighton and Murphy, Printers, n.d.) p. 282.

³⁶Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 157.

³⁷Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 64.

cation could occur at any time after conversion.³⁸

Wesley was also certain that sanctification is gradual as well as instantaneous. The believer gradually dies to sin and grows in grace from the moment he is justified. For Wesley there is a gradual work of grace preceding and succeeding sanctification, just as there is a gradual work of grace which precedes justification.³⁹ Sanctification occurs in some gradually and in others instantaneously. The believer is to look for it momentarily.⁴⁰ The length of time between justification and sanctification varies. In some cases men have been sanctified within a few days after they were justified. All should be encouraged to expect sanctification from the moment they are justified.⁴¹ It was for this reason that Wesley wrote to his brother, Charles, in 1766, "Insist everywhere on full redemption received by faith alone. . . . Press the instantaneous blessing." In later life, Wesley was inclined to believe that sanctification was generally, if not always, instantaneous.⁴²

The gradual development of sanctification will lead to an instantaneous recognition of entire sanctification. This is the higher stage

³⁸Ibid., pp. 49 ff.

³⁹Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, c.1936), p. 187.

⁴⁰Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 55.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 49.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 59 ff.

in the Christian life when the believer is freed from the power and root of sin, although he is still subject to imperfections in knowledge and judgment. The entire sanctification can be seen in both inward and outward righteousness. The person who has reached this stage will be convinced of it, but there is still room for improvement. He cannot stand still, but the gradual development continues.⁴³ Since entire sanctification involves a powerful intervention of God, it must be an instantaneous act. New birth takes place instantaneously, followed by gradual sanctification which is followed by instantaneous entire sanctification which in turn is followed by another gradual growth. Man cannot expect entire sanctification unless he has undergone a period of gradual growth.⁴⁴ Wesley goes so far in establishing this gradual development in sanctification that he holds that it can continue after death to reach greater heights gradually.⁴⁵

Not Inamissable

The early development of Wesley saw a period when he held that a person entirely sanctified could not fall from grace. He later altered this view and retracted several expressions in some of the hymns which implied such inamissibility.⁴⁶ He now took the stand that

⁴³Lindstroem, op. cit., pp. 117 f.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 133 f.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 121.

⁴⁶Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 174.

those who are entirely sanctified can grow in grace or can fall from it. In the case of those who fall from grace, it is possible that they may recover the state of grace or even reach perfection again.⁴⁷

To attain entire sanctification is not a guarantee that faith cannot be lost. It is essential to continue to grow. Wesley stated that it is a miracle for a person to remain in faith with all the forces of earth and hell arrayed against him. It is a greater thing to remain in faith than to gain it originally. Wesley believed that hardly one out of three remain in the state of grace.⁴⁸ But, how can those who are renewed in love possibly grieve the Holy Spirit? Wesley answers,

St. Paul tells you very particularly, (1) By such conversation as is not profitable, not to the use of edifying, not apt to minister grace to the hearers. (2) By relapsing into bitterness or want of kindness. (3) By wrath, lasting displeasure, or want of tender-heartedness. (4) By anger, however soon it is over; want of instantly forgiving one another. (5) By clamor or bawling, loud, harsh, rough-speaking. (6) By evil speaking, whispering, tale-bearing; needlessly mentioning the fault of an absent person, though in ever so soft a manner.⁴⁹

Biblical Basis

Wesley claims to have found this doctrine of entire sanctification in the Bible when he had no other desire than to save his own soul.⁵⁰ He did not claim this doctrine as his own, but asserted that it was in

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 263 f.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 116 ff.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 260.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 286.

keeping with "the whole tenor of the New Testament." Wesley bases his doctrine on thirty different texts, ten from St. Paul, ten from St. John, and ten from the rest of the Bible.⁵¹

The petition in the Lord's prayer, "Deliver us from evil," is offered as proof that entire sanctification is obtainable. Wesley claims that this would be mockery against God if deliverance from all evil were not possible in this life. The high priestly prayer of Christ is submitted as further proof of the possibility of entire sanctification.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be made one in us, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. Jn. 17:20--23⁵²

St. John is given as a New Testament example of one who attained perfection. Also included are those to whom he says, "Herein is our love made perfect, that he may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world." 1 Jn. 4:17.⁵³ St. John was speaking of believers who had attained different degrees of perfection when he addresses them as "little children, young men, and fathers."⁵⁴ Wesley explains that the reason more examples are not mentioned in the New Testament is due to the fact that the church was still in its

⁵¹W. E. Sangster, The Path To Perfection (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943), pp. 35 f.

⁵²Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 163 f.

⁵³Ibid., p. 165.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 26.

early stages, and the apostles were not ready to offer such strong meat to new converts.⁵⁵

Recognition Points

There is nothing in the outward life which would distinguish an entirely sanctified person from one who is not so sanctified.⁵⁶ Just as in justification, so in sanctification the testimony of the Holy Spirit is necessary to assure the individual of entire sanctification.⁵⁷ A person may judge for himself that he has attained entire sanctification when he has added to the experience of love the testimony of the Spirit. But if a person judges these marks incorrectly, it is possible for him to be deceived.⁵⁸

By what "fruit of the Spirit" may we "know that we are of God", even in the highest sense?

By love, joy, peace always abiding; by invariable long-suffering, patience, resignation; by gentleness triumphing over all provocation; by goodness, mildness, sweetness, tenderness of spirit; by fidelity, simplicity, godly sincerity; by meekness, calmness, evenness of spirit; by temperance, not only in food and sleep, but in all things natural and spiritual.⁵⁹

For Scripture proof of the witness of the Spirit in entire sanctification, Wesley pointed to 1 Cor. 2:12.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 165

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 229.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 71.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 231

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 258.

We have received, not the spirit that is of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given us of God.⁶⁰

Wesley outlined certain characteristics which were common to all those who had experienced the attainment of entire sanctification.

- (i) The goal is uninterrupted communion with God. It is also described as Love, including both love to God and love to man.
- (ii) The attainment is a gift of God, just as the entrance on the Christian life (conversion) is His work.
- (iii) The entrance on this larger experience is instantaneous, i.e., it is given in a moment and can be dated.
- (iv) There is a process of struggle and quest leading to the decisive moment.
- (v) There is a full consciousness of the need for progress in love and growth in the spiritual life after the Great Salvation has been received.
- (vi) The experience includes a deliverance from all conscious sin. The recipients believed that indwelling sin had been rooted out of them. They were conscious of a liberty beyond anything previously experienced.
- (vii) But all of them are most careful not to claim perfection, or sinlessness, or even enjoyment of that Great Salvation, at any time at which they write.⁶¹

The Place of Works

It is typical of Wesley to regard sanctification as an expression of both the law and love.⁶² He does not connect the fulfillment of the law with the atonement and justification, but rather with sanctification. This explains why the law means so much to him in the doctrine of sanctification.⁶³ Wesley believed that the law showed the way to

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 256.

⁶¹ Flew, op. cit., p. 323.

⁶² Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 82.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 75.

entire sanctification.

Education or social reform alone cannot produce righteousness in the ways of man. Nor can the grace of God alone change man. There must be a constant moral struggle on the part of man. The grace of God is given, but there must also be man's effort.⁶⁴ Among the good works necessary for sanctification, Wesley mentions the works of piety, such as, public prayer, family prayer, praying in our closet, receiving the Lord's Supper, hearing, reading, and meditating on the Scriptures, fastings, and abstinence. Then should follow works of mercy to the bodies and souls of men, such as, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining strangers, visiting prisoners, visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant, awaking the sinner, quickening the lukewarm, comforting the feeble minded, and doing anything to save souls from death.⁶⁵ All of these works are to be performed before entire sanctification is reached.

The concept of sanctification dominates all of Wesley's theology. Final salvation is the result of the real change in the process of sanctification. This is the ultimate goal of the Christian life. The Christian must prepare himself for eternal life in heaven. He is required to travel the path of sanctification to reach that final goal.⁶⁶ Wesley admitted that it is possible for a person to be sanctified with-

⁶⁴Lee, op. cit., p. 320.

⁶⁵Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, pp. 81 f.

⁶⁶Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 218.

out works, but only if he has neither the time nor the opportunity to perform them.⁶⁷

The Place Of Faith

It seems that Wesley altered his views in regard to the role which works play in reaching sanctification in order to possess final salvation. An examination of his statements on this subject at least points to a great inconsistency. It may have been that under heavy criticism Wesley was forced to change his emphasis from works to faith. Wesley taught that while works and their fruits are considered necessary to entire sanctification, they are not as important as faith. Faith is directly and immediately necessary, the fruits of repentance are remotely and conditionally necessary. The faith which makes complete sanctification possible implies confidence that God will keep His promises and redeem from all sin, perfecting the believer in love. It must all be believed that God can do it without delay, and that He actually does do it.⁶⁸

At the first Methodist Conference in 1744, it was stated that faith is both the condition and instrument of sanctification. "When one begins to believe, then sanctification begins, and as faith increases holiness increases, until we are created anew."⁶⁹ In the

⁶⁷ Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, p. 83.

⁶⁸ Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 117.

⁶⁹ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 54.

same measure in which a person grows in faith, he also grows in holiness. He will increase in love, lowliness, and meekness until he is thoroughly convinced of inbred sin, and then God will take it all away, cleansing him from all unrighteousness.⁷⁰

In 1771 Wesley wrote:

Many years since I saw that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." I began following after it, and inciting all with whom I had any intercourse to do the same. Ten years after, God gave me a clearer view than I had before of the way how to attain this; namely, by faith in the Son of God. And immediately I declared to all, "We are saved from sin, we are made holy by faith."⁷¹

Just before his death, Wesley preached:

Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition and the only condition of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification. It is the condition: none is sanctified but that he believes; without faith no man is sanctified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for sanctification. Every one that believes is sanctified, whatever else he has or not. In other words, no man is sanctified till he believes; every man when he believes is sanctified.⁷²

Present Salvation And Final Salvation Compared

From the beginning of his religious unrest, Wesley tried for nothing less than perfection. He soon discovered that this did not consist in merely a trained will and a disciplined mind, because the emotions are not constant. This led him to stress sanctification in

⁷⁰ Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, p. 101.

⁷¹ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 64.

⁷² Ibid., p. 66.

the Christian life as a stage above justification.⁷³ Many times Wesley equates entire salvation with entire sanctification. "You do well insisting upon the full and present salvation, whether men will hear or forebear."⁷⁴

At conversion the peace which a person knows may last for a long period, but then this is followed by fears and doubts. The Holy Ghost comes to the believer to assure him that he is a child of God.⁷⁵ The difference between new birth and entire sanctification becomes nothing more than a degree of difference in development. Love is instilled in the new birth, this love becomes perfect in entire sanctification. Entire sanctification does not produce a new kind of love, but a greater perfection in love.⁷⁶

Entire sanctification means full deliverance from sin, while the new birth gives only a partial deliverance. The regenerate man is no longer dominated by sin, he does not commit outward sins, but the inward sin still remains. The root of sin is still present and is partially carnal. The perfected man no longer has the root of sin, he is free from evil thoughts and is totally dead to sin, being entirely renewed in love and the image of God.⁷⁷

⁷³Lee, op. cit., p. 94

⁷⁴Wesley, Wesley's Sermons, pp. 92 f.

⁷⁵Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 203.

⁷⁶Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 141.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 143 f.

The widest use of the term sanctification includes the entire Christian life, the object of which is restoring the image of God. Wesley did not restrict the meaning of sanctification to entire sanctification. Sanctification finds its place in Wesleyan theology between present salvation and final salvation. In the former, justification is not a condition of sanctification, but in the latter, sanctification is a condition of final justification. It is only through sanctification that man becomes fit for final salvation and glorification. In this way sanctification becomes the chief fact in eternal salvation.⁷⁸

Present salvation comes through faith alone. Final salvation is produced by continuing in faith and being perfected in love. Thus entire sanctification becomes the chief factor in the Christian life. In present salvation, the emphasis is on the works of God; in final salvation, the emphasis is on the works of man.⁷⁹ This helps to clarify Wesley's position as to the role of faith and works in the doctrine of entire sanctification.

Means Of Reaching Entire Sanctification

In a sermon dealing with justification and sanctification Wesley outlines the following steps in the life of a believer:

1. The operation of pre-venient grace.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 216.

2. Repentance previous to justification.
3. Justification or forgiveness.
4. The New Birth.
5. Repentance after justification and the gradually proceeding work of sanctification.
6. Entire sanctification.⁸⁰

He also teaches that the Holy Ghost leads us into all truth and into all holiness.⁸¹ The means of attaining perfection are prayer, reading, meditation, and frequent communion.⁸² The self denial of the Christian is a vital factor. The Christian must deny himself everything that does not "spring from and lead to" God.⁸³

For Wesley, love is the very essence of sanctification. God's love in atonement and justification establishes the law of love in the heart of man. Faith is only the means, love is the end. Love is eternal, faith is temporal. Faith did not come until love had been lost through sin. The eternal life of fellowship with God will be all love. Man's love must be born of God's love. Love is the direct fruit of justifying faith. Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We love Him, because he first loved us. God's love in Christ is, then, the source of man's love to God and his neighbor.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 113.

⁸¹John Wesley, Wesleyana: Or A Complete System Of Wesleyan Theology (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), p. 111.

⁸²Lee, op. cit., p. 219.

⁸³John Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, p. 595.

⁸⁴Lindstroem, op. cit., pp. 172 ff.

It is this love which enables man to gain entire sanctification.

The Methodist Societies

In his first tract entitled, "The Character of a Methodist" which was published in 1739 Wesley writes:

A Methodist is one who loves the Lord, his God with all his soul, with all his mind and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul. . . . Perfect love having now cast out fear, he rejoices evermore.⁸⁵

The followers of Wesley were banded together into small groups known as Methodist Societies. They were to encourage one another, and leaders were appointed to see that they conducted themselves properly. From these groups a "Select Society" developed from more advanced members who, under Wesley's guidance, were to "go on unto perfection."⁸⁶ The Methodist classes and bands were organized according to the spiritual state which the individuals had reached. The categories corresponded to the steps in the process of salvation—repentance (before justification), justification, and entire sanctification.⁸⁷ Wesley considered himself responsible for the temporal and spiritual life of his people. He advised them in civic and political matters to be model subjects and citizens.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 189 f.

⁸⁶ John Telford, The Life Of John Wesley, (New York: Eaton and Mains, n.d.), pp. 151 ff.

⁸⁷ Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 122.

⁸⁸ Telford, op. cit., p. 155.

Those who had experienced the gaining of holiness were encouraged by Wesley to speak to others about it. He warned them that even their fellow believers would not always accept their testimony, but they must not keep silent. This was to serve to arouse desires in those who were justified to seek a still higher salvation. He also warned, "If any deny the witness of sanctification, and occasion disputing in the select society, let him or her meet therein no more."⁸⁹ Wesley traced the decline of membership in the Methodist societies to the neglect of the doctrine of sanctification in that community.⁹⁰

Dangers In Claiming Perfection

Wesley was aware that the doctrine of perfection could produce despair in the Christian. For this reason he taught that the Christian should not be afraid of dying before he had received entire sanctification. Also the believer should not be depressed by the awareness of sins in his life, but should more eagerly turn to Christ and continue on the path to perfection and victory. The greater the sense of sin, the more intensive should be the efforts to grow in love. The believer should not forget the change that has already taken place in him.⁹¹ Wesley recognized also the dangers of self-righteousness, self-pride, emotionalism, antinomianism, and devisive factors which could result

⁸⁹ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 74 f.

⁹⁰ Sangster, op. cit., p. 25.

⁹¹ Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 201.

from a false claim and understanding of perfection.⁹²

Wesley was opposed to emotionalism in all forms among his followers. He warned against the deception of believing that one had received the gift of prophecy or discerning of spirits. He was against any disorderly conduct in worship services. He disliked the appearance of enthusiasm, overvaluing feelings and inward impressions, mistaking the mere work of imagination for the voice of the Spirit, expecting the end without the means; and undervaluing reason, knowledge, and wisdom in general. All of these dangers are inherent in Wesley's doctrine of sanctification.⁹³

Proof of Entire Sanctification

In his examination of those who claimed that they had acquired entire sanctification, Wesley did not always accept their affirmation. Those who were accepted by him as valid were received on the following basis:

1. That they feel no inward sin, and to the best of their knowledge commit no outward sin;
2. That they see and love God every moment, and pray, rejoice, give thanks evermore;
3. That they have constantly as clear a witness from God of sanctification as they have of justification.⁹⁴

The Methodist Conference of 1759 outlined the following proof for the attainment of perfection:

⁹²Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 265 ff.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 150 ff.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 72.

1. If we had sufficient evidence of their unblameable behavior preceding.
2. If they gave a distinct account of the time and place and manner wherein they were saved from sin, and of the circumstances thereof, with such sound speech as cannot be reprov'd.
3. If, upon a strict inquiring afterward, from time to time, it appeared that all their tempers, and words, and actions, were holy and unrep'evable.⁹⁵

No Self-claim Of Attainment By Wesley

It is indeed significant that Wesley nowhere claims for himself the experience of entire sanctification which he taught so far and wide. He believed that a person could be absolutely certain when he had reached this state. Perhaps a clue to the omission of this claim was the fact that he recognized the dangers of Pharisaism and spiritual pride involved in claiming perfection. Some have tried to discover in Wesley's Journal a definite indication of the time when he arrived at entire sanctification, but no conclusive evidence has been proposed.⁹⁶ On the contrary, at one time Wesley plainly denies that he had attained this goal, "I tell you flat that I have not attained the character I draw."⁹⁷

Another defect in Wesley's doctrine of sanctification is the insistence that the Christian can have assurance that he has reached this level. The individual is directed to look at past experience in himself, rather than to look to Christ. This may also help to explain

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 161 f.

⁹⁶ Flew, op. cit., pp. 328 f.

⁹⁷ Sangster, op. cit., p. 31.

why Wesley never claims that he felt that all his sins had been removed from his own heart.⁹⁸ Even after the Aldersgate experience Wesley had times of doubt concerning his own faith. He wrote in 1739 that he knew that he was not a Christian. His high ideal of the Christian life produced these doubts and caused him to crave perfection as an assurance.⁹⁹ Even on his death-bed Wesley stressed the attainment of full sanctification. He said,

How necessary it is for everyone to be on the right foundation,
 I the chief of sinners am,
 But Jesus died for me
 We must be justified by faith and then go on to full sanctifi-
 cation.¹⁰⁰

Miscellaneous Aspects

In 1765 Wesley, reflecting on his earlier life as a Lincoln Fellow, wrote in his journal about a sermon he preached in 1733 on the "Circumcision of the Heart" in which he spoke of "giving the whole heart and the whole life to God." Of this sermon he declares, "This was then, as it is now, my idea of perfection."¹⁰¹ In 1778, Wesley affirmed, "Forty years ago, I knew and preached every Christian doctrine which I now preach." That would go back to the year of the

⁹⁸Flew, op. cit., p. 337.

⁹⁹Lee, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁰⁰Telford, op. cit., p. 348.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 14.

Aldersgate experience.¹⁰²

Although Wesley's doctrine was very close to practical mysticism, it was not identical. Even though he did not change his views essentially after 1738, there were certain adjustments necessary in the teaching of perfection.¹⁰³ The concept of entire sanctification has been forced to undergo certain modifications and limitations to conform with the actual potential of man since the Fall. Wesley admits that we cannot set the standards of perfection higher than the Scriptures describe them.¹⁰⁴ In later years Wesley confessed that in 1740 he had expressed features of Christian perfection too strongly when he said that those who had experienced it never felt any doubt or temptation. He also modified his view that it was impossible to fall from entire sanctification.¹⁰⁵

The person who has attained pure love should be careful how he speaks of it. He should not speak of it to those who do not know God. He should also guard against the appearance of boasting or pride and display true humility, giving all glory to God. However, such a person should not keep silent just to avoid any crosses which may come his way. He should speak of this experience in a way to

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁰³Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 139.

make others desire it.¹⁰⁶ While Wesley taught that Christian perfection was possible for every believer, he did not say that all who did not attain it were lost and under the curse of God. He still maintained that a person is in the state of grace as long as he believes. Yet a person must believe also that he can reach perfection before he finally arrives at perfection.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 225.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF WESLEY'S DOCTRINE

General Summary

Perfection was the chief aim of Wesley's teaching and work. Wesley was very realistic and logical in this task and observes that it was necessary to caution certain individuals who claimed to have reached this goal.¹ It will be observed that although Wesley gained a clearer view of the doctrine of justification by faith from his experiences with the Moravians, he still retained his concept of sanctification which he had learned in his early life and from his study of the three authors, Jeremy Taylor, Thomas 'aKempis, and William Law. He persisted in teaching that the original act of justification was not enough for the full and complete remission of sins necessary for final salvation. This could be attained only by the moral efforts of the individual in the realm of the Christian life. Thus sanctification played a vital role in the believer's life, if he were to enjoy eternal salvation.

Wesley firmly maintained that where the doctrine of Christian perfection was not strongly and clearly set forth the work of God would not prosper. On the other hand, where this teaching was

¹Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: The Abingdon Press, c.1939), pp. 208 ff.

emphasized, it was followed by discernible results.² The purpose which Wesley had in mind was a high and noble one which no Christian can overlook. He wanted to inculcate the blessings of a Christian life upon each one of his followers to be a salt of the earth and a light brightly shining in the midst of unbelieving darkness. It is the method and motivation of attaining this goal which leaves Wesley open to criticism.

Wesley set forth this doctrine in many different ways under varying conditions. In order to gain a general picture of just what the sum and substance of this doctrine was, there is no better way than to examine the various statements of Wesley himself. At one time Wesley spoke of three different ways of viewing this doctrine.

In one view it is the purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is the renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.³

At another time Wesley summarized his teaching in the conclusion

²John Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, compiled by Rev. J. A. Wood (Chicago: The Christian Witness Company, c.1921), pp. 106 ff.

³Harald Lindstroem, Wesley and Sanctification (Stockholm: Nya Bokfoerlags Aktiebolaget, 1946), p. 131.

of a sermon entitled "Perfection." It was in this manner that Wesley presented sanctification to the common people.

What is then the perfection of which man is capable, while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with the kind command "My son, give me thine heart." It is the loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind. This is the sum of Christian perfection; it is all comprised in that one word, love. The first branch of it is the love of God; and as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets;" these contain the whole of Christian perfection.⁴

In still another sermon, "On Perfection," just three years before his death, Wesley expressed his doctrine in a slightly different manner, yet the fundamental characteristics remain unchanged:

1. To love God with all one's heart and one's neighbor as oneself;
2. The mind that is in Christ;
3. The fruits of the Spirit (in accordance with Gal. v.) unified;
4. The image of God, a recovery of man to the moral image of God which consists in "righteousness and true holiness;"
5. Inward and outward righteousness, sanctity of life issuing from sanctity of heart;
6. God's sanctifying of man in spirit, soul, and body;
7. Man's own perfect consecration to God;
8. A continuous presentation through Jesus of man's thoughts and words and actions as a sacrifice to God of praise and thanksgiving;
9. Salvation from all sin.⁵

Perhaps the most complete statement of just what Wesley taught is comprehended in the following:

In the year 1764, upon a review of the whole subject, I wrote down the sum of what I had observed in the following short propositions:

1. There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again

⁴John Wesley, Wesley's Sermons (Boston: Christian Witness Company, n.d.), p. 116.

⁵Lindstroem, op. cit., pp. 131 f.

mentioned in Scripture.

2. It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to "go on unto perfection, Heb. 6: 1.
3. It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect, Phil. 3: 15.
4. It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.
5. It does not make a man infallible; none is infallible while he remains in the body.
6. Is it sinless? It is not worth while to contend for a term. It is "salvation from sin."
7. It is "perfect love," 1 John 4: 18. This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits are rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing; and in everything giving thanks. 1 Thess. 5: 16.
8. It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that many perfected in love may grow far swifter than he did before.
9. It is amissable, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this, till five or six years ago.
10. It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.
11. But is it in itself instantaneous or not? An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers. . . . But in some the change was not instantaneous.⁶

It is quite clear that Wesley did not intend to teach that man was capable in this life of reaching the same degree of sanctification which Adam possessed before the Fall. Since Wesley recognized the terrible calamity that sin brought into the world, he saw the necessity of placing certain limitations upon the accomplishments of even the entirely sanctified person. It is interesting to compare the teachings of Wesley on the perfection of Adam before the Fall with the Christian perfection now attainable.

Adamic Perfection

Based on covenant of works;
Man must fulfill the law of

Christian Perfection

Based on covenant of grace;
Man must fulfill the law of

⁶ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, pp. 263 f.

works.

Signifies perfect obedience to every point in this law. This holiness must be perfect in degree and continue without intermission throughout the whole life.

This is perfect fulfillment of the law and perfect deliverance from sin in the absolute and objective sense.

faith.

Signifies perfect obedience in so far as this is attainable in the present circumstances of man. It means perfect love. This holiness is a perfection of motive, not of degree.

This is a perfect fulfillment of the law and perfect deliverance from sin in the relative and subjective sense.⁷

A further comparison of the absolute, objective viewpoint with the relative, subjective viewpoint reveals the following:

Absolute and Objective

He who is fully sanctified is imperfect.

This means that because of innumerable defects he must transgress the absolute law. In this sense he is not free from sin.

For this reason he is not free from guilt.

Therefore in order that he may not suffer damnation for his sin and guilt, he is every moment dependent on the merit and intercession of Christ.

Relative and Subjective

He who is fully sanctified is perfect.

This means that he perfectly loves God and his neighbor and is perfectly free from sin properly so called.

For this reason he is also free from guilt.

Yet in order to remain perfect he is every moment dependent on the merit and intercession of Christ.⁸

Defects In Wesley's Doctrine

In holding to the concept that a Christian may be entirely free from anything opposed to pure love, and, at the same time, be subject to mistakes, it has been proposed that perhaps Wesley was not clear

⁷Lindstroem, op. cit., pp. 153 f.

⁸Ibid., p. 154.

in his own mind as to the nature and scope of sin.⁹ Possibly the greatest defect in Wesley's doctrine is this inadequate understanding of the nature of sin. To say that that only is sin which is known by the individual as such, limits the real extent of the degree of moral development and understanding of the individual.¹⁰ On the other hand, Wesley's understanding of the concept of sin is shown by the fact that he uses the term in two different ways. Sin to him can mean the falling short of the divine ideal, or it can mean the voluntary transgression of a known law of God which man has the power to obey. It was in the latter sense that Wesley taught that a Christian could be free from sin. There may be such a thing as involuntary transgression in the state of entire sanctification.¹¹

Wesley was trained in the High Church of the Anglicanism which taught a doctrine of grace, presuming original sin in man. This results in an inherent leaning toward evil. Wesley did not believe that the evil tendency itself is sin, but this leads to actual transgression which is sin. Possibly Wesley never got rid of the idea of sin as a substance. Thus it was possible for a Christian to overcome actual sin, but inbred original sin must be removed by sanctification.¹²

⁹R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection In Christian Theology (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 327.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 332 f.

¹¹Ibid., p. 326.

¹²Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, c.1936), pp. 120 f.

Wesley's teaching on pre-venient grace also reveals how close he came to the Roman Catholic doctrine of gratia infusa. Wesley's own words betray a remarkable degree of similarity with this Thomistic doctrine. "Stir up the spark of grace which is in you, and he (God) will give you more grace."¹³ Thus the entire doctrine of sanctification becomes, in effect, a result of moral effort on the part of men. This holds true despite the fact that Wesley at times claims that both justification and sanctification proceed from a free gift of grace and not of works. Wesley's refusal to call sin sin agrees with the proclamation of Session V of the Council of Trent.

This concupiscence, which the apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood as being truly and properly sin in those born again, but (it is called sin) because it is of sin and inclines to sin.¹⁴

Wesley's use of New Testament proof passages shows a tendency to take the passage out of the context and to place into it certain meanings contrary to the analogy of faith. It seems that many times Wesley approached the Scriptures not to view the doctrine of sanctification objectively, but to gain support for the teaching which had already been settled in his own mind. The use of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil," as a proof that man can be totally freed from evil in this earthly life, omits a consideration

¹³Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁴Frederick E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 421.

of the petition, "Forgive us our trespasses," which indicates the Christian's daily need for forgiveness of sins. He also fails to give a thorough exegesis of the meaning of the Greek word, Telós, which is generally translated "perfect" in the King James version. The use of this word does not always imply that which is accomplished in the Christian in this life, but may mean that which is finally completed or perfected in eternity. Wesley's exegetical principles were not always sound, but included the use of eisegesis to prove his point. This is clearly seen when he teaches that St. John uses the terms "little children, young men, and fathers" to indicate different degrees of sanctification.

Wesley placed a strong emphasis on the experience in the life of the individual Christian as a source for the teaching of entire sanctification.¹⁵ In speaking of the fact that he had made no changes in the teaching of sanctification he asserts,

Indeed, by viewing it in every point of light, and comparing it again and again with the word of God on the one hand, and the experience of the children of God on the other, we saw farther into the nature and properties of Christian perfection.¹⁶

This illustrates how Wesley found support for his doctrine not only in Scripture, but also in Christian experience. This was always found in others, and never in himself.¹⁷ However in speaking of ex-

¹⁵Flew, op. cit., p. 316.

¹⁶Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 208.

¹⁷Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 135.

perience in connection with the meaning of Christianity, he claims,

What Christianity (considered as a doctrine) promised is accomplished in my own soul. And Christianity, considered as an inward principle, is the completion of those promises. It is holiness and happiness, the image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.¹⁸

These examples seem to demonstrate that Wesley based this doctrine primarily on experience and secondarily on the Word of God. This emotional basis makes the individual subject to his own feelings in answering the question of whether or not he could always feel entirely sanctified. The entire concept of sanctification is based on a subjective foundation and has no firm substantiation in the objective view of the Bible. Wesley sums up his argument for entire sanctification in these rational words:

Since God cannot be pleased with the sin which still dwells in the regenerate Christian, therefore God has provided a second gracious act, whereby we become perfect images of God.¹⁹

What Wesley meant by the word perfection was sound and well-intentioned. Perhaps if another word had been chosen, a great amount of useless controversy would have been avoided.²⁰ Wesley himself claimed that he had no particular fondness for the term, "perfection," but that it had been forced on him by his enemies. To him perfection was only another term for holiness.²¹ If Wesley had held to the better

¹⁸ Lee, op. cit., pp. 137 f.

¹⁹ Frederick B. Mayer, "Entire Sanctification," Concordia Theological Monthly, III (June 1932), 419.

²⁰ McConnell, op. cit., p. 193.

²¹ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 98.

title of "perfect love" and not let anything detract from it, certain serious defects in the doctrine would not have developed. This is the opinion of at least one author.²² The fact remains that whether Wesley used the term perfection or perfect love, he still did not have in mind that perfect means perfect, but rather it conveys the sense of imperfect. By his choice of terminology in calling imperfection perfection and by calling sin sinlessness, Wesley tried to say what he did not mean and to mean what he did not say.

As a result Wesley did not leave his followers with a clear-cut definition of the attainability of entire sanctification for every Christian. This has been the cause of much disagreement and contention in Methodist circles.²³ Even before his death Wesley saw that the teaching of perfection was causing divisions and confusion in the Methodist societies. It was evident by the many obvious imperfections of those who claimed to have reached perfection. This prompted John to ask in a letter to brother Charles whether or not they should continue teaching this doctrine of sanctification. Despite its many faults and imperfections, however, Wesley insisted upon the continued teaching of this doctrine.²⁴

The success of Methodism has been attributed to its stress on

²²W. E. Sangster, The Path To Perfection (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943), p. 155.

²³Mayer, "Entire Sanctification," p. 420.

²⁴McConnell, op. cit., p. 214.

the doctrine of sanctification which is to be sought in its ministry and in its laity. It is believed that it is the mission of Methodism "to spread holiness over these lands." Thus it has been that ever since the days of Wesley, the main emphasis has remained on the doctrine of sanctification in Methodistic groups.²⁵ Usually this has been done at the expense of the doctrine of justification by faith. This is evidenced in the Salvation Army which is one outgrowth of Wesley's work.²⁶ Here the main emphasis is on the way of works as a means of gaining favor with God. Also most of the present "holiness" movements have been traced back to John Wesley. Although Wesley would emphatically object to the emotional element of enthusiasm in most of these groups, he would have to admit that it was due to his stress on experience and feeling in teaching entire sanctification.

Wesley held that Law and Gospel are simply two points of view. If a command is regarded as an order, then it is Law; if it is regarded as a promise, it is Gospel. For Wesley every commandment becomes a veiled promise.²⁷ This fact proves that Wesley did not have a clear understanding of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. He tried to achieve by means of the Law the fruits of faith in the believers life which can only flow from the Gospel motivation. In other

²⁵ Wesley, Christian Perfection As Taught By John Wesley, p. 86.

²⁶ W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and His Century (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 289.

²⁷ Lindstroem, op. cit., p. 180.

words, Wesley tried to "force" fruit from the tree which should be produced naturally because it is the function of the tree to bear fruit. In doing this he placed a stumbling block in the path of the simple Christian and imperiled his clinging to Christ alone for full and free forgiveness.

Wesley set forth a three-fold function of the Law in promoting sanctification.

1. To convince the Christian of the sin that remains in him and thus keep him so close to Christ that His blood may cleanse him every moment;
2. To "derive strength from Christ" to the believer in order to supply him with the strength which Christ bestows to enable him to do His Law and commands;
3. To confirm his hope of whatever the law commands and he has not yet attained, "of receiving grace upon grace" till he is "in actual possession of the fulness of God's promises."²⁸

Thus the entire motivation behind the achieving of Christian perfection becomes the motivation of the Law. There is nothing in Wesley's teaching that such a Christian life will flow freely and naturally as an expression of gratitude for the reconciliation which is complete through faith in Christ. It becomes a moral striving for those who have known "present justification" in order that they may gain "final justification." Everything is left up to the individual to strive after an imperfect "perfection" in order that he may receive eternal glory. At many times Wesley brings out some sound Scriptural principles in his teaching, but he then cancels these principles by resorting to reason and experience, instead of letting the Word of God decide the issue. Throughout his doctrine of sanctification there

²⁸Ibid., p. 81.

are elements of Arminian synergism, Roman Catholicism, and practical mysticism which counteract any true Scriptural emphasis he may have proposed.

A Brief Comparison With Luther's Doctrine

Holmquist, a Swedish Lutheran Church historian, has described Methodism as "the Anglican translation of the Evangelical-Lutheran doctrine of salvation." Wesley's knowledge of Luther came primarily through the strong influence which the Moravians at one time exerted on him.²⁹ Many times this was not a true picture of Luther and his teaching. This may explain why Wesley praises and criticizes Luther at the same time. Wesley said,

Who has wrote more ably than Martin Luther' on justification by faith alone, and who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conception of it?³⁰

Wesley advises that if one wants to be convinced of Luther's "total ignorance with regard to sanctification" to read "without prejudice" Luther's commentary on Galatians. It seems strange that Wesley would so strongly criticize Luther on the teaching of sanctification with regard to the epistle to the Galatians, since the theme of Galatians is Christian liberty emphasizing the doctrine of justification by faith alone and showing the uselessness of man's efforts in keeping

²⁹Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God (London: The Epworth Press, 1947), pp. 3 f.

³⁰Ibid., p. 171.

the Law in order to achieve salvation. Could it be that Wesley was opposed to the doctrine in Galatians rather than the doctrine of Luther?

The Lutheran Church was confronted with the problem of perfectionism long before Wesley appeared on the scene. Agricola, George Major, and Andreas Osiander at one time threatened to lead the Lutheran Church into a teaching of perfectionism. The Formula of Concord in Articles 3, 4, and 5 definitely rejects all perfectionistic tendencies. Yet the Pietistic movements in the midst of Lutheranism saw a return to perfectionism and related mystical subjectivism under the leadership of Zinzendorf in the Moravian group at Herrnhut.³¹ It was not strange, then, that Wesley should feel a strong attraction for this group for the rest of his life, even after he broke with them on certain issues.

Luther spoke on the state of perfection when he said,

The state of perfection is to have a lively faith, to be a despiser of death, life, glory, and all the world, and to live in glowing love as the servant of all men.³²

Luther always stressed the fact that man was made perfect through faith in Christ and that works of love or sanctification stemmed from gratitude on the part of the believer.

Although Calvin did not believe that a state of perfection was attainable in this life, he did say that if anyone wanted to speak of the perfection of the saints, he would not object as long as this perfection included the recognition of imperfection both in truth and

³¹Mayer, "Entire Sanctification," p. 418.

³²Flew, op. cit., p. 245.

humility.³³ Calvin seems to have been closer to Wesley's approach to sanctification than Luther.

One thing that is lacking in Wesley's doctrine that is always present in Luther is the treatment of the "old man" and the "new-man." Wesley failed to recognize that a person can be a sinner and a saint at the same time. He did not have Luther's insight into the concept simul iustus et peccator. Luther realized that as long as the Christian was in the world he would still be tempted by the devil, the world, and his flesh; yet by virtue of his faith in the all-sufficient vicarious atonement of Christ, the same person can be assured of his complete forgiveness.

In accord with the teaching of Scripture, Luther emphasizes that the Christian life is never a "having become," but always a "becoming." The Christian never reaches the stage where he can say that he is perfect or entirely sanctified. This is not to cause despair, but to remind the Christian faithfully to employ the means of grace to improve in faith, knowledge, and service in his daily life. The more a person honestly tries to do this, the more he realizes the truth of Luther's explanation, "We daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment." Certainly Wesley would not have subscribed to this thought as being in harmony with his concept of entire sanctification.

The "becoming" which the Christian pursues is always given the right motivation by Luther. It flows entirely from the love of Christ

³³Ibid., pp. 244 f.

when the believer realizes what a great thing Christ has done for him.

There is no compulsion, no fear, no seeking for reward and merit.

Luther shows how the work of salvation is fully completed in the work of Christ, it is a present and final salvation at the same time. The believer has eternal life now as his very own, and there is nothing more that he can or must do in the realm of sanctification to achieve this. The sanctification in the life of the Christian will flow inevitably from a realization of these truths. Luther taught that justification is by faith alone, and then he adds that faith is never alone, but is always followed by good works in the Christian's life.

Finally, it is worthwhile to remember this brief summary given by Dr. F. E. Mayer:

The basic difference between Luther, Calvin, and Wesley may be stated as follows: In Lutheranism the Christian is viewed as the justified sinner; in Calvinism as the obedient servant; in Methodism as the perfect man.³⁴

³⁴Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America, p. 292.

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