



Scriptures and Doctrine :: The Theology of John Wesley

The Theology of John Wesley - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/18 22:56

I wrote the following paper for my "History of the Church From the Reformation" class at Gordon-Conwell Theological seminary this semester. Thought I would post my survey of Wesley's theology on here for your reading pleasure. It's about 15 pages long when you double space it and add in the footnotes (of which I had many).

--The Theology of John Wesley--

###Introduction###

Though of small stature, standing only five-feet-five-inches tall and weighing a mere one-hundred and twenty pounds, John Wesley was a giant figure of the eighteenth-century Great Awakening. Wesley was born on June 28, 1703. He was born again on May 24, 1738. Shortly after his Aldersgate Street conversion experience when he felt his heart "strangely warmed," many church doors in England began closing to his ministry. Feeling encouraged from the example of his friend George Whitefield, on April 2, 1739, John Wesley began preaching open-air, where an estimated crowd of over three-thousand people gathered to listen to his sermon that day. Declaring the world was his parish, Wesley began a fifty-two year ministry where he preached in the fields and streets of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. During his ministry, it is estimated that Wesley traveled more than a quarter-million miles on horseback, and speaking an average of three times a day is estimated to have preached over forty-two thousand sermons, also writing over two-hundred books. Wesley drew his last breath on March 2, 1791.

With such an active ministry, it is perhaps not very surprising that he never produced a formal systematic theology. Because Wesley was not really a very conceptual theologian that organized his thoughts in a very formal way, some of his critics have dismissed him as not being a theologian at all. But this is the furthest thing from the truth. Wesley was perhaps a theologian of the highest kind. Instead of writing theology from a lofty academic ivory tower (which he would have been capable of doing had he wanted to), his theology was grounded in real life. Wesley in essence was a practical theologian.

Wesley's practical theology can perhaps only be explained by the two natures that seemed to be alive in him. As an evangelist, he was chiefly concerned with seeing souls saved. Being unapologetically Arminian in theology, he realized the truth that "all those who attain do not retain." Therefore, the pastor's heart within him sought to tend to the soul of the individual after they were converted in order to see to it that they did retain eternal life. In part, he formed the Methodist societies to this end. The theological chain that linked these two natures together in the one man was primarily soteriological. Not being overly speculative, John Wesley's theology was primarily concerned with "the way to heaven." The whole of his theology therefore, is shaped by his *ordo salutis*.

###Wesley's Ordo Salutis###

A student seeking to understand the gospel of John Wesley must first begin with an understanding of how he viewed sin. Wesley said, "We know no gospel without salvation from sin." To Wesley, sin in its essence is not merely an outward act of rebellion towards God (though he also understands sin in these terms). Rather, Wesley saw the heart of sin to be a broken relationship with God. Sin is not merely something that sneaks up on an individual and overtakes him, rather it is something that arises out of a person. Sin results in a sickness that leads to corruption, and that corruption's ultimate end results in the death of man. Wesley saw humanity as being "sick unto death."

Wesley's understanding of sin was twofold. He considered sin to be both an act as well as a state of being. As a state of being, Wesley saw that man, who was originally created holy and good in the image of God, as a result of sin saw a corruption of his nature (though not a total destruction as taught in Calvinism). It is out of the sinfully corrupt human nature that actual acts of sin flow. Within this twofold view of sin, Wesley distinguishes between "sin so properly called" and "sin so improperly called." The former being a voluntary transgression of a known law of God. The latter being an involuntary transgression of a law of God, known or unknown.

As a result of a broken relationship with God because of sin, man falls under His wrath that is to be revealed against all ungodliness and is in danger of hell fire. However, there is hope for man. Through the atoning death of Jesus Christ,

man's relationship with God can be restored, and he can escape the sentence of hell. The journey to heaven in Wesley's theology is only possible through God's grace. Failure to truly understand Wesley's doctrine of grace has led some to erroneously conclude that Wesley believed in man's ability to obtain salvation on his own, as if one were saved by works. This is simply not in any way true.

The starting point of this journey Wesley called "prevenient grace." Prevenient grace speaks of the grace that comes to man before any conscious personal experience of divine grace. Prevenient grace speaks of God who makes the first move to reconcile man to Himself. To use more biblical language, it is the grace that is offered to man while still yet sinners (Ro 5:8). Prevenient grace begins to move men towards a place of repentance by creating sensitivity to God's will, as well as producing a slight conviction of having violated God's will, and then begins to stir in an individual a desire to please God. The doctrine of prevenient grace explains why man, depraved as he is in his fallen state, is capable of doing any sort of good or holding any sort of virtue (however limited that might be).

It must be emphasized that prevenient grace is not sufficient enough to bring about salvation. It is not a saving grace. If such were the case, then according to the theology of Wesley everybody would be saved. For Wesley did not believe that prevenient grace was by any means limited to the select few. Rather, he saw prevenient grace as grace that is available for all. There is not a single individual in the world that does not experience this grace, for Christ died for all.

For Wesley prevenient grace was important, because otherwise man could not be viewed as truly responsible for his sins if he were simply predestined to do them. For such an absolute decree would undermine genuine responsibility. For man can only be accountable if he has a genuine power of choice. But because man is responsible for his sins before God, Wesley believed that prevenient grace created this "response-ability." Therefore through grace man is enabled to be truly responsible! As Wesley said, "God worketh in you; therefore you can work. Otherwise it would be impossible." Man's freedom of choice is a "grace-infused ability."

The most important thing to note about prevenient grace is that this grace enables man to make a response of faith in Christ. Only through faith in Christ does grace become saving. This saving faith has two aspects to it: repentance and belief. Wesley called repentance "the porch of religion." However, repentance itself was not sufficient to save. Belief is also needed. For in repentance a person turns from a life without Christ, and in belief man completes the turn by embracing the way of Christ.

For Wesley, true belief and obedience are coupled together, and are not to be divorced. Such obedience is not simply duty driven and cold, rather it joyfully arises out of a hunger to do God's will. Because Wesley believed a life of obedience was part of saving faith, for this reason Wesley was never content when ministering to individuals if they said they were saved "x" years ago. If somebody would appeal to a past salvation experience, Wesley would go on and ask, "But are you saved, in this moment?" Wesley wanted to know if the past experience was still alive in the present. For if the saving faith of the past was still not active in the life of the individual, then it was no longer saving.

Along with salvation, Wesley taught that there are a number of effects that accompany man in his conversion. First of all, Wesley taught that men are justified. Prior to justification, the sinner stands before a just and holy God guilty for the sins he has committed. After a man is pardoned through justification, all his past sins are covered and blotted out, to be remembered no more. In the eyes of God, the man is no more guilty for those sins than if he had never committed them to begin with.

Along with justification comes "initial sanctification," where both inward and outward holiness begins for the believer. For Wesley, it was unthinkable that God would call people something they were not. In the conversion experience, not only is man imputed righteousness, but he also has righteousness imparted to him. He's not simply declared righteous, but he's actually made righteous. This infused righteousness is nothing less than the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In this view, Wesley borrows from both Western and Eastern traditions. He incorporates the forensic images of Latin Christianity into his conception of justification, and borrows from Eastern Christianity a "participation motif" as is seen in his views on sanctification.

It is through this participation motif that regeneration occurs. By being infused with the righteousness of Christ, the sinner genuinely undergoes a transformation of character. Such causes the sinner to experience the new birth. In the new birth, the fallen image of God inside of man is restored in true holiness. As a result, the Christian is no longer bound to sin, and can in fact, overcome sin. After all, since God is not bound to commit sin, and in fact, conquered sin through Christ, neither is the regenerated man bound to commit acts of sin. For through the new birth, the image of God in man was restored, enabling man to live as Christ lived.

After an individual becomes a Christian, they might perhaps think that the salvific work of God has been completed in regard to their soul, and that there is nothing more to the Christian life save to grow in grace, without further conviction, repentance, or any spiritual crises. However, as they go along in their new found life in Christ, they begin to find (perhaps to their amazement), that though they have a great desire to serve Christ and to live according to His commandments, they also still seem to have strong desires in their soul to turn away from God, and still feel the presence of sin within themselves. The new believer begins to realize that though he has dedicated his heart to God, that his entire heart is not indeed so dedicated, and has affections for things other than God. There was a reason for this according to Wesley. According to Wesley, there is still a far deeper work that God wants to accomplish in the soul beyond justification.

For though a believer has been made right in the sight of God, and the fallen image of God has been renewed in the regenerate man, there still remains in the believer the need to grow in respect to the initial sanctification the Christian has experienced. For in initial sanctification, the work of God has only begun in the soul in respect to its cleansing. To Wesley, "it is evident that if any sin remain, we are not cleansed from all sin." Here Wesley is not speaking of any actual acts of sin that the believer needs to be cleansed from. Remember, Wesley viewed sin in a twofold manner as actual acts of sin, as well as being a state of being.

According to Wesley, in justification man is cleansed in regard to the guilt of his crimes against God, but in his soul still remains the inbred desire to commit the same offenses. Therefore, while the Christian is holy in regard to his outward conduct in that he is guilty of no offense towards God by having been forgiven of that offense, inwardly there still is room for improvement in respect to holiness, as rebellious desire is still a present reality. Wesley therefore believed that the Christian was still in need of further sanctification.

By further sanctification it is meant that Wesley believed the Christian though forgiven of his sins through his justification, still needed to undergo a further inward cleansing of the heart. He did not believe that the newly justified believer had a fully cleansed heart. Therefore, the moment the believer is justified, the sanctification process begins in which the believer gradually dies to the sin in his heart, and is cleansed from all the unrighteousness that still remains within. Perhaps this doctrine is best expressed in part of a Methodist hymn that reads: "Heavenly Adam, life Divine, Change my nature into Thine; Move and spread throughout my soul, Actuate and fill the whole." The culmination of this process will eventually result in the complete sanctification of the Christian, where inwardly he has experienced a full cleansing of rebellion from the inner man.

It is at this point that John Wesley's theology becomes extremely controversial. For Wesley insisted that, contrary to the teachings of Roman Catholicism and the leaders of the continental Reformation, that "entire sanctification" can take place in this life. For these groups believed that a Christian could only be entirely purified of inward sin through death (and through purgatory to be specific, in the case of Roman Catholicism). Wesley stood at contrast with these traditions because in them he saw that they not only erred in respect to when entire sanctification takes place, but also the means by which entire sanctification occurred. For Wesley the sanctification process did not reach its climax through purgatory or death, but rather, through the Holy Spirit of God. Wesley caused further controversy not only insisting that entire sanctification can take place in this life, but to make matters worse, he called this experience, "Christian Perfection."

Wesley believed that Christian perfection was attainable in this life because Christ had commanded, "Be ye perfect, as your Father who is in heaven, is perfect" (Matt 5:48). In essence Wesley's reasoning was, Christ would not command somebody to do something if it were not something that could not actually be done. If Christ commanded it, then it might be asked, just when in this life does entire sanctification occur? While in general, Wesley believed most did not experience Christian perfection until just shortly before their death, he believed it was attainable before then, to those who by faith, "expect it sooner." Wesley did not believe it was attainable until a period of time had indeed passed since the believer was justified, though he would not set any sort of definite time frame on it, since he saw the experience being at the disposal of God's sovereign pleasure. For some, Christian perfection might happen sooner in some than others.

Just what exactly is Christian perfection? In what sense are Christians who experience entire sanctification, "perfect?" Wesley attempted to answer these questions and more in detail in his famous work, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully survey his views contained in this book, not to mention numerous sermons and letters in which he also addressed this topic. However, a few additional comments can be made.

In addition to using terms such as "entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection," Wesley also employed other terms to

describe this work of God brought about in the life of a believer. Sometimes Wesley employed Pentecostal phrases such as "baptism of the Holy Spirit" or "receiving the Spirit" to describe this experience. He also used terms such as, "full salvation," "a higher salvation," "to save to the uttermost," and "perfect love," amongst many other terms.

In essence, Christian perfection can be described as an instantaneous work of God's grace brought about in the life of a believer that is the culmination of the sanctification experience, whereby a believer is cleansed of all inward sin, resulting in a "habitual disposition of the soul" that entails being endued with "those virtues which were in Christ Jesus." It is the ultimate realization of holiness in the soul. It ultimately is a singleness of intention where the fully sanctified believer now has nothing but a constant and abiding love for God and neighbor in their heart. It is to, "have the mind that was in Him, and always walk as He walked." This is in contrast to the believer who has not attained Christian perfection, whose heart is a mixed one. For while bent towards loving God, the believer who is not yet entirely sanctified still has an inward love for sin.

In hopes to keep misunderstanding concerning this doctrine down, Wesley also testified to what Christian perfection was not. Wesley did not believe that those who had experienced Christian perfection were spiritual infallible, being unable to sin, and were still liable to mistakes. Wesley called such a notion "angelism." Nor did he think such made one a superior Christian, as those who were perfect would be filled with humility. Christian perfection also did not make one vaccinated against the problems of real life. He also denied that perfect Christians no longer need Christ, saying that when they receive entire sanctification, they do not receive a stock of holiness apart from Christ. For they still need Christ to supply them every moment of their lives the grace they need, otherwise, "nothing but unholiness would remain."

Also, Wesley would have rejected any notion that somebody that has experienced Christian perfection has in any sense, "arrived." For even after the experience of Christian perfection, Wesley still expected the fully sanctified believer to grow as a Christian. The growth a Christian experiences after entire sanctification is now a fully pure heart that continues to grow. Wesley himself said that it was an improvable condition, "constantly preceded and followed by a gradual work." Wesley sees the Christian as one who never ceases to grow in the love and knowledge of God. He will do so not only until death, but even through all eternity. Finally, it is interesting to note, the evidence suggests that Wesley himself, never arrived at the experience he so deeply was convinced was true (though he knew others that did). Wesley is never known to have experienced Christian perfection.

###Conclusions###

John Wesley was undeniably a spiritual giant in his age. Were you to have transported him to any other time in the history of the Church, he still would have towered above many other great men and women of God. John Wesley a man of complex and deep thought. Far from not being a true theologian, Wesley has arguably been one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Church. Often neglected and misunderstood, Wesley's message (whether you agree with it fully or not) still deserves a fresh hearing even today.

John Wesley was an intense individual. His zeal, unquenchable. His gospel, straight and to the point. Loving God and his fellow man, Wesley sought to see the lives of men and women radically changed. He wanted everybody to experience first-hand the redemption that Christ provided, and all the glories that accompany it. He wanted people to not only know that Christ loved them, but that they could experience that love resulting in a fully transformed life.

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Re: The Theology of John Wesley - posted by habakkuk3 (), on: 2005/12/19 15:13

Thanks for posting this KJ. Over the last couple of weeks I've begun reading a bit on Christian perfection from the Wesley Center Online.

I believe it may help clarify what he believed Christian perfection is for those who want to know. I like the term practical theology, which is something he has actually walked through, not merely something he learnt by studying.

Do you know how Wesley distinguished "sin" from a "mistake?" I was bit confused on that.

Here's Wesley's Questions and Answers...

"As these thoughts were at first thrown together by way of question and answer, I let them continue in the same form. They are just the same that I have entertained for above twenty years.

QUESTION. What is Christian perfection?

ANSWER. The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love.

Q. Do you affirm, that this perfection excludes all infirmities, ignorance, and mistake?

A. I continually affirm quite the contrary, and always have done so.

Q. But how can every thought, word, and work, be governed by pure love, and the man be subject at the same time to ignorance and mistake?

A. I see no contradiction here: 'A man may be filled with pure love, and still be liable to mistake.' Indeed I do not expect to be freed from actual mistakes, till this mortal puts on immortality. I believe this to be a natural consequence of the soul's dwelling in flesh and blood. For we cannot now think at all, but by the mediation of those bodily organs which have suffered equally with the rest of our frame. And hence we cannot avoid sometimes thinking wrong, till this corruptible shall have put on incorruption.

But we may carry this thought farther yet. A mistake in judgment may possibly occasion a mistake in practice. For instance: Mr. De Renty's mistake touching the nature of mortification, arising from prejudice of education, occasioned that practical mistake, his wearing an iron girdle. And a thousand such instances there may be, even in those who are in the highest state of grace. Yet, Where every word and action springs from love, such a mistake is not properly a sin. However, it cannot bear the rigour of God's justice,~ but needs the atoning blood.

Q. What was the judgment of all our brethren who met~ at Bristol in August, 1758, on this head?

A. It was expressed in these words: (1.) Every one may mistake as long as he lives. (2.) A mistake in opinion may occasion a mistake in practice. (3.) Every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law. Therefore, (4.) Every such mistake, were it not for the blood of atonement, would expose to eternal damnation. (5.) It follows, that the most~ perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves, as well as for their brethren, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'

"This easily accounts for what might otherwise seem to be utterly unaccountable; namely, that those who are not offended when We speak of the highest degree of love, yet will not hear of living without sin. The reason is, they know all men are liable to mistake, and that in practice as well as in judgment. But they do not know, or do not observe, that this is not sin, if love is the sole principle of action.

Q. But still, if they live without sin, does not this exclude the necessity of a Mediator? At least, is it not plain that they stand no longer in need of Christ in his priestly office ?~

A. Far from it. 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 separate from) 'me ye can do nothing.'

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 derived 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 on 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 short-comings, (as some not improperly speak,) their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For these are all 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 noway contrary to love; nor therefore, in the Scripture sense, sin.

"To explain myself a little farther on this head: (1.) Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law,) but sin, improperly so called, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown,) needs the atoning blood. (2.) I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. (3.) Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. (4.) I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. (5.) Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned.

Q. What advice would you give to those that do, and those that do not, call them so?

A. Let those that do not call them sins, never think that themselves or any other persons are in such a state as that they can stand before infinite justice without a Mediator. This must argue either the deepest ignorance, or the highest arrogance and presumption.

"Let those who do call them so, beware how they confound these defects with sins, properly so called.

"But how will they avoid it? How will these be distinguished from those, if they are all promiscuously called sins? I am much afraid, if we should allow any sins to be consistent with perfection, few would confine the idea to those defects concerning which only the assertion could be true.

Q. But how can a liability to mistake consist with perfect love? Is not a person who is perfected in love every moment under its influence? And can any mistake flow from pure love?

A. I answer, (1.) Many mistakes may consist with pure love; (2.) Some may accidentally flow from it: I mean, love itself may incline us to mistake. The pure love of our neighbour, springing from the love of God, thinketh no evil, believeth and hopeeth all things. Now, this very temper, unsuspecting, ready to believe and hope the best of all men, may occasion our thinking some men better than they really are. Here then is a manifest mistake, accidentally flowing from pure love.

Q. How shall we avoid setting perfection too high or too low?

A. By keeping to the Bible, and setting it just as high as the Scripture does. It is nothing higher and nothing lower than this,--the pure love of God and man; the loving God with all our heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words, and actions.

Q. Suppose one had attained to this, would you advise him to speak of it?

A. At first perhaps he would scarce be able to refrain, the fire would be so hot within him; his desire to declare the loving-kindness of the Lord carrying him away like a torrent. But afterwards he might; and then it would be advisable, not to speak of it to them that know not God; (it is most likely, it would only provoke them to contradict and blaspheme;) nor to others, without some particular reason, without some good in view. And then he should have especial care to avoid all appearance of boasting; to speak with the deepest humility and reverence, giving all the glory to God.

Q. But would it not be better to be entirely silent, not to speak of it at all?

A. By silence, he might avoid many crosses, which will naturally and necessarily ensue, if he simply declare, even among believers, what God has wrought in his soul. If, therefore, such a one were to confer with flesh and blood he would be entirely silent. But this could not be done with a clear conscience; for undoubtedly he ought to speak. Men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel; much less does the all-wise God. He does not raise such a monument of his power and love, to hide it from all mankind. Rather, he intends it as a general blessing to those who are simple of heart. He designs thereby, not barely the happiness of that individual person, but the animating and encouraging others to follow after the same blessing. His will is, 'that many shall see it' and rejoice, 'and put their trust in the Lord.' Nor does anything under heaven more quicken the desires of those who are justified, than to converse with those whom they believe to have experienced a still higher salvation. This places that salvation full in their view, and increases their hunger and thirst after it; an advantage which must have been entirely lost, had the person so saved buried himself in silence.

Q. But is there no way to prevent these crosses which usually fall on those who speak of being thus saved?

A. It seems they cannot be prevented altogether, while so much of nature remains even in believers. But something might be done, if the Preacher in every place would, (1.) Talk freely with all who speak thus; and, (2.) Labour to prevent the unjust or unkind treatment of those in favour of whom there is reasonable proof.

Q. What is reasonable proof? How may we certainly know one that is saved from all sin?

A. We cannot infallibly know one that is thus saved, (no, nor even one that is justified,) unless it should please ~God to endow us with the miraculous discernment of spirits. But we apprehend those would be sufficient proofs to any reasonable man, and such as would leave little room to doubt either the truth or depth of the work: (1.) If we had clear evidence of his exemplary behaviour for some time before this supposed change. This would give us reason to believe, ~he would not 'lie for God,' but speak neither more nor less than he felt; (2.) If he gave a distinct account of the time and manner wherein the change was wrought, with sound speech which could not be reprov'd; and, (3.) If it appeared that all his subsequent words and actions were holy and unblamable.

"The short of the matter is this: (1.) I have abundant reason to believe, this person will not lie; (2.) He testifies before God, 'I feel no sin, but all love; I pray, rejoice, and give thanks without ceasing; and I have as clear an inward witness, that I am fully renewed, as that I am justified.' Now, if I have nothing to oppose to this plain testimony, I ought in reason to believe it.

"It avails nothing to object, 'But I know several things wherein he is quite mistaken.' For it has been allowed, that all who are in the body are liable to mistake; and that a mistake in judgment may sometimes occasion a mistake in practice; though great care is to be taken that no ill use be made of this concession. For instance: Even one that is perfected in love may mistake with regard to another person, and may think him, in a particular case, to be more or less faulty than he really is. And hence he may speak to him with more or less severity than the truth requires. And in this sense, (though that be not the primary meaning of St. James,) 'in many things we offend all.' This therefore is no proof at all, that the person so speaking is not perfect.

Q. But is it not a proof, if he is surprised or fluttered by a noise, a fall, or some sudden danger?

A. It is not; for one may start, tremble, change colour, or be otherwise disordered in body, while the soul is calmly stayed on God, and remains in perfect peace. Nay, the mind itself may be deeply distressed, may be exceeding sorrowful, may be perplexed and pressed down by heaviness and anguish, even to agony, while the heart cleaves to God by perfect love, and the will is wholly resigned to him. Was it not so with the Son of God himself? Does any child of man endure the distress, the anguish, the agony, which he sustained? And yet he knew no sin.

Q. But can any one who has a pure heart prefer pleasing to displeasing food; or use any pleasure of sense which is not strictly necessary? If so, how do they differ from others?

A. The difference between these and others in taking pleasant food is, (1.) They need none of these things to make them happy; for they have a spring of happiness within. They see and love God. Hence they rejoice evermore, and in every thing give thanks. (2.) They may use them, but they do not seek them. (3.) They use them sparingly, and not for the sake of the thing itself. This being premised, we answer directly, -- Such a one may use pleasing food, without the danger which attends those who are not saved from sin. He may prefer it to displeasing, though equally wholesome, food, as a means of increasing thankfulness, with a single eye to God, who giveth US all things richly to enjoy: On the same principle, he may smell to a flower, or eat a bunch of grapes, or take any other pleasure which does not lessen but increase his d

elight in God. Therefore, neither can we say that one perfected in love would be incapable of marriage, and of worldly business: If he were called thereto, he would be more capable than ever; as being able to do all things without hurry or carefulness, without any distraction of spirit.

Q. But if two perfect Christians had children, how could they be born in sin, since there was none in the parents?

A. It is a possible, but not a probable, case; I doubt whether it ever was or ever will be. But waving this, I answer, Sin is entailed upon me, not by immediate generation, but by my first parent. 'In Adam all died; by the disobedience of one, all men were made sinners;' all men, without exception, who were in his loins when he ate the forbidden fruit.

"We have a remarkable illustration of this in gardening: Grafts on a crab-stock bear excellent fruit; but sow the kernels of this fruit, and what will be the event? They produce as mere crabs as ever were eaten.

Q. But what does the perfect one do more than others? more than the common believers?

A. Perhaps nothing; so may the providence of God have hedged him in by outward circumstances. Perhaps not so much; though he desires and longs to spend and be spent for God; at least, not externally: He neither speaks so many words, nor does so many works. As neither did our Lord himself speak so many words, or do so many, no, nor so great works, as some of his Apostles. (John 14:12.) But what then? This is no proof that he has not more grace; and by this God measures the outward work. Hear ye Him: 'Verily, I say unto you, this poor widow has cast in more than them all.' Verily, this poor man, with his few broken words, hath spoken more than them all. Verily, this poor woman, that hath given a cup of cold water, hath done more than them all. O cease to 'judge according to appearance,' and learn to 'judge righteous judgment!'

Q. But is not this a proof against him, -- I feel no power either in his words or prayer?

A. It is not; for perhaps that is your own fault. You are not likely to feel any power therein, if any of these hinderances lie in the way: (1.) Your own deadness of soul. The dead Pharisees felt no power even in His words who 'spake as never man spake.' (2.) The guilt of some unrepented sin lying upon the conscience. (3.) Prejudice toward him of any kind. (4.) You are not believing that state to be attainable wherein he professes to be. (5.) Unreadiness to think or own he has attained it. (6.) Overvaluing or idolizing him. (7.) Overvaluing yourself and your own judgment. If any of these is the case, what wonder is it that you feel no power in anything he says? But do not others feel it? If they do, your argument falls to the ground. And if they do not, do none of these hinderances lie in their way too? You must be certain of this before you can build any argument thereon; and even then your argument will prove no more than that grace and gifts do not always go together.

"But he does not come up to my idea of a perfect Christian.' And perhaps no one ever did, or ever will. For your idea may go beyond, or at least beside, the scriptural account. It may include more than the Bible includes therein, or, however, something which that does not include. Scripture perfection is, pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions. If your idea includes anything more or anything else, it is not scriptural; and then no wonder, that a scripturally perfect Christian does not come up to it.

"I fear many stumble on this stumbling-block. They include as many ingredients as they please, not according to Scripture, but their own imagination, in their idea of one that is perfect; and then readily deny any one to be such, who does not answer that imaginary idea.

"The more care should we take to keep the simple, scriptural account continually in our eye. Pure love reigning alone in the heart and life, -- this is the whole of scriptural perfection.

Q. When may a person judge himself to have attained this?

A. When, after having been fully convinced of inbred sin, by a far deeper and clearer conviction than that he experienced before justification, and after having experienced a gradual mortification of it, he experiences a total death to sin, and an entire renewal in the love and image of God, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. Not that 'to feel all love and no sin' is a sufficient proof. Several have experienced this for a time, before their souls were fully renewed. None therefore ought to believe that the work is done, till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, as clearly as his justification.

Q. But whence is it, that some imagine they are thus sanctified, when in reality they are not?

A. It is hence; they do not judge by all the preceding marks, but either by part of them, or by others that are ambiguous. But I know no instance of a person attending to them all, and yet deceived in this matter. I believe, there can be none in the world. If a man be deeply and fully convinced, after justification, of inbred sin; if he then experience a gradual mortification of sin, and afterwards an entire renewal in the image of God; if to this change, immensely greater than that wrought when he was justified, be added a clear, direct witness of the renewal; I judge it as impossible this man should be deceived herein, as that God should lie. And if one whom I know to be a man of veracity testify these things to me, I ought not, without some sufficient reason, to reject his testimony.

Q. Is this death to sin, and renewal in love, gradual or instantaneous?

A. A man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die, till the instant the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet he is not dead to sin, till sin is separated from his soul; and in that instant he lives the full life of love. And as the change undergone, when the body dies, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any we had known before, yea, such as till then it is impossible to conceive; so the change wrought, when the soul dies to sin, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any before, and than any can conceive till he experiences it. Yet he still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity.

Q. How are we to wait for this change?

A. Not in careless indifference, or indolent inactivity; but in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily; as well as in earnest prayer and fasting and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God. And if any man dream of attaining it any other way, (yea, or of keeping it when it is attained, when he has received it even in the largest measure,) he deceives his own soul. It is true, we receive it by simple faith: But God does not, will not, give that faith, unless we seek it with all diligence, in the way which he hath ordained.

"This consideration may satisfy those who inquire, why so few have received the blessing. Inquire, how many are seeking it in this way; and you have a sufficient answer.

"Prayer especially is wanting. Who continues instant therein? Who wrestles with God for this very thing? So, 'ye have not, because ye ask not; or because ye ask amiss,' namely, that you may be renewed before you die. Before you die! Will that content you? Nay, but ask that it may be done now; to-day, while it is called to-day. Do not call this 'setting God a time.' Certainly, to-day is his time as well as to-morrow. Make haste, man, make haste! Let

Thy soul break out in strong desire
The perfect bliss to prove;
Thy longing heart be all on fire
To be dissolved in love!

Q. But may we not continue in peace and joy till we are perfected in love?

A. Certainly we may; for the kingdom of God is not divided against itself; therefore, let not believers be discouraged from 'rejoicing in the Lord always.' And yet we may be sensibly pained at the sinful nature that still remains in us. It is good for us to have a piercing sense of this, and a vehement desire to be delivered from it. But this should only incite us the more zealously to fly every moment to our strong Helper, the more earnestly to 'press forward to the mark, the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.' And when the sense of our sin most abounds, the sense of his love should much more abound

Q. How should we treat those who think they have attained?

A. Examine them candidly, and exhort them to pray fervently, that God would show them all that is in their hearts. The most earnest exhortations to abound in every grace, and the strongest cautions to avoid all evil, are given throughout the New Testament, to those who are in the highest state of grace. But this should be done with the utmost tenderness; and without any harshness, sternness or sourness. We should carefully avoid the very appearance of anger, unkindness, or contempt. Leave it to Satan thus to tempt, and to his children to cry out, 'Let us examine him with despatch and tort

ure, that we may know his meekness and prove his patience.' If they are faithful to the grace given, they are in no danger of perishing thereby; no, not if they remain in that mistake till their spirit is returning to God.

Q. But what hurt can it do to deal harshly with them?

A. Either they are mistaken, or they are not. If they are, it may destroy their souls. This is nothing impossible, no, nor improbable. It may so enrage or so discourage them, that they will sink and rise no more. If they are not mistaken, it may grieve those whom God has not grieved, and do much hurt unto our own souls. For undoubtedly he that toucheth them, toucheth, as it were, the apple of God's eye. If they are indeed full of his Spirit, to behave unkindly or contemptuously to them is doing no little despite to the Spirit of grace. Hereby, likewise, we feed and increase in ourselves evil surmising, and many wrong tempers. To instance only in one: What self-sufficiency is this, to set ourselves up for inquisitors-general, for peremptory judges in these deep things of God! Are we qualified for the office? Can we pronounce, in all cases, how far infirmity reaches? what may, and what may not, be resolved into it? what may in all circumstances, and what may not, consist with perfect love? Can we precisely determine, how it will influence the look, the gesture, the tone of voice? If we can, doubtless we are 'the men, and wisdom shall die with us.'

Q. But if they are displeased at our not believing them, is not this a full proof against them?

A. According as that displeasure is: If they are angry, it is a proof against them; if they are grieved, it is not. They ought to be grieved, if we disbelieve a real work of God, and thereby deprive ourselves of the advantage we might have received from it. And we may easily mistake this grief for anger, as the outward expressions of both are much alike.

Q. But is it not well to find out those who fancy they have attained when they have not?

A. It is well to do it by mild, loving examination. But it is not well to triumph even over these. It is extremely wrong, if we find such an instance, to rejoice as if we had found great spoils. Ought we not rather to grieve, to be deeply concerned, to let our eyes run down with tears? Here is one who seemed to be a living proof of God's power to save to the uttermost; but, alas, it is not as we hoped. He is weighed ill the balance, and found wanting! And is this matter of joy? Ought we not to rejoice a thousand times more, if we can find nothing but pure love?

"But he is deceived.' What then? It is a harmless mistake, while he feels nothing but love in his heart. It is a mistake which generally argues great grace, an high degree both of holiness and happiness. This should be a matter of real joy to all that are simple of heart; not the mistake itself, but the height of grace which for a time occasions it. I rejoice that this soul is always happy in Christ, always full of prayer and thanksgiving. I rejoice that he feels no unholy temper, but the pure love of God continually. And I will rejoice, if sin is suspended till it is totally destroyed.

Q. Is there no danger then in a man's being thus deceived?

A. Not at the time that he feels no sin. There was danger before, and there will be again when he comes into fresh trials. But so long as he feels nothing but love animating all his thoughts, and words, and actions, he is in no danger; he is not only happy, but safe, 'under the shadow of the Almighty;' and, for God's sake, let him continue in that love as long as he can. Meantime, you may do well to warn him of the danger that will be, if his love grow cold and sin revive; even the danger of casting away hope, and supposing, that, because he hath not attained yet, therefore he never shall.

Q. But what, if none have attained it yet? What, if all who think so are deceived?

A. Convince me of this, and I will preach it no more. But understand me right: I do not build any doctrine on this or that person. This or any other man may be deceived, and I am not moved. But, if there are none made perfect yet, God has not sent me to preach perfection.

"Put a parallel case: For many years I have preached, 'There is a peace of God which passeth all understanding?' Convince me that this word has fallen to the ground; that in all these years none have attained this peace; that there is no living witness of it at this day; and I will preach it no more.

"O, but several persons have died in that peace.' Perhaps so; but I want living witnesses. I cannot indeed be infallibly certain that this or that person is a witness; but if I were certain there are none such, I must have done with this doctrine.

"You misunderstand me. I believe some who died in this love, enjoyed it long before their death. But I was not certain th

at their former testimony was true till some hours before they died.'

"You had not an infallible certainty then: And a reasonable certainty you might have had before; such a certainty as might have quickened and comforted your own soul, and answered all other Christian purposes. Such a certainty as this, any candid person may have, suppose there be any living witness, by talking one hour with that person in the love and fear of God.

Q. But what does it signify, whether any have attained it or no, seeing so many scriptures witness for it?

A. If I were convinced that none in England had attained what has been so clearly and strongly preached by such a number of Preachers, in so many places, and for so long a time, I should be clearly convinced that we had all mistaken the meaning of those scriptures; and therefore, for the time to come, I too must teach that 'sin will remain till death.'"

20. In the year 1762, there was a great increase of the work of God in London. Many, who had hitherto cared for none of these things, were deeply convinced of their lost estate; many found redemption in the blood of Christ; not a few backsliders were healed; and a considerable number of persons believed that God had saved them from all sin. Easily foreseeing that Satan would be endeavouring to sow tares among the wheat, I took much pains to apprize them of the danger, particularly with regard to pride and enthusiasm. And while I stayed in town, I had reason to hope they continued both humble and sober-minded. But almost as soon as I was gone enthusiasm broke in. Two or three began to take their own imaginations for impressions from God, and thence to suppose that they should never die; and these, labouring to bring others into the same opinion, occasioned much noise and confusion. Soon after, the same persons, with a few more, ran into other extravagances; fancying they could not be tempted; that they should feel no more pain; and that they had the gift of prophecy, and of discerning of spirits. At my return to London, in autumn, some of them stood reprov'd; but others were got above instruction. Meantime, a flood of reproach came upon me almost from every quarter; from themselves, because I was checking them on all occasions; and from others, because, they said, I did not check them. However, the hand of the Lord was not stayed, but more and more sinners were convinced; while some were almost daily converted to God, and others enabled to love him with all their heart.

21. About this time, a friend at some distance from London wrote to me as follows: --

"Be not over alarmed that Satan sows tares among the wheat of Christ. It ever has been so, especially on any remarkable outpouring of his Spirit; and ever will be so, till he is chained up for a thousand years. Till then he will always ape, and endeavour to counteract, the work of the Spirit of Christ.

"One melancholy effect of this has been, that a world, who is always asleep in the arms of the evil one, has ridiculed every work of the Holy Spirit.

"But what can real Christians do? Why, if they would act worthy of themselves, they should, (1.) Pray that every deluded soul may be delivered; (2.) Endeavour to reclaim them in the spirit of meekness; and, Lastly, take the utmost care, both by prayer and watchfulness, that the delusion of others may not lessen their zeal in seeking after that universal holiness of soul, body, and spirit, 'without which no man shall see the Lord.'

"Indeed this complete new creature is mere madness to a mad world. But it is, notwithstanding, the will and wisdom of God. May we all seek after it!

"But some who maintain this doctrine in its full extent are too often guilty of limiting the Almighty. He dispenses his gifts just as he pleases; therefore, it is neither wise nor modest to affirm that a person must be a believer for any length of time before he is capable of receiving a high degree of the Spirit of holiness.

"God's usual method is one thing, but his sovereign pleasure is another. He has wise reasons both for hastening and retarding his work. Sometimes he comes suddenly and unexpected; sometimes, not till we have long looked for him.

"Indeed it has been my opinion for many years, that one great cause why men make so little improvement in the divine life is their own coldness, negligence, and unbelief. And yet I here speak of believers.

"May the Spirit of Christ give us a right judgment in all things, and 'fill us with all the fulness of God;' that so we may be 'perfect and entire, wanting nothing.'"

22. About the same time, five or six honest enthusiasts foretold the world was to end on the 28th of February. I immediately withstood them, by every possible means, both in public and private. I preached expressly upon the subject, both at West-Street and Spitalfields. I warned the society, again and again, and spoke severally to as many as I could; and I saw the fruit of my labour. They made exceeding few converts: I believe scarce thirty in our whole society. Nevertheless, they made abundance of noise, gave huge occasion of offence to those who took care to improve to the uttermost every occasion against me, and greatly increased both the number and courage of those who opposed Christian perfection.

23. Some questions, now published by one of these, induced a plain man to write the following --

"QUERIES, humbly proposed to those who deny perfection to be attainable in this life.

"(1.) Has there not been a larger measure of the Holy Spirit given under the Gospel, than under the Jewish dispensation? If not, in what sense was the Spirit not given before Christ was glorified? (John 7:39.)

"(2.) Was that 'glory which followed the sufferings of Christ,' (1 Peter 1:11,) an external glory, or an internal, viz., the glory of holiness?

"(3.) Has God anywhere in Scripture commanded us more than he has promised to us?

"(4.) Are the promises of God respecting holiness to be fulfilled in this life, or only in the next?

"(5.) Is a Christian under any other laws than those which God promises to 'write in our hearts?' (Jer. 31:31, &c.; Heb. 8:10.)

"(6.) In what sense is 'the righteousness of the law fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?' (Rom. 8:4.)

"(7.) Is it impossible for any one in this life to 'love God with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and strength?' And is the Christian under any law which is not fulfilled in this love?

"(8.) Does the soul's going out of the body effect its purification from indwelling sin?

"(9.) If so, is it not something else, not 'the blood of Christ which cleanseth' it 'from all sin?'

"(10.) If his blood cleanseth us from all sin, while the soul and body are united, is it not in this life?

"(11.) If when that union ceases, is it not in the next? And is not this too late?

"(12.) If in the article of death; what situation is the soul in, when it is neither in the body nor out of it?

"(13.) Has Christ anywhere taught us to pray for what he never designs to give?

"(14.) Has he not taught us to pray, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven?' And is it not done perfectly in heaven?

"(15.) If so, has he not taught us to pray for perfection on earth? Does he not then design to give it?

"(16.) Did not St. Paul pray according to the will of God, when he prayed that the Thessalonians might be 'sanctified wholly, and preserved' (in this world, not the next, unless he was praying for the dead) 'blameless in body, soul, and spirit, unto the coming of Jesus Christ?'

"(17.) Do you sincerely desire to be freed from indwelling sin in this life?

"(18.) If you do, did not God give you that desire?

"(19.) If so, did he not give it you to mock you, since it is impossible it should ever be fulfilled?

"(20.) If you have not sincerity enough even to desire it, are you not disputing about matters too high for you?

"(21.) Do you ever pray God to `cleanse the thoughts of your heart, that' you `may perfectly love him?'

"(22.) If you neither desire what you ask, nor believe it attainable, pray you not as a fool prayeth?

"God help thee to consider these questions calmly and impartially!"

24. In the latter end of this year, God called to himself that burning and shining light, Jane Cooper. As she was both a living and a dying witness of Christian perfection, it will not be at all foreign to the subject to add a short account of her death; with one of her own letters, containing a plain and artless relation of the manner wherein it pleased God to work that great change in her soul: --

Re: The Theology of John Wesley - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/19 17:51

King Jimmy's

Quote:
-----Along with justification comes "initial sanctification," where both inward and outward holiness begins for the believer. For Wesley, it was unthinkable that God would call people something they were not. In the conversion experience, not only is man imputed righteousness, but he also has righteousness imparted to him. He's not simply declared righteous, but he's actually made righteous. This infused righteousness is nothing less than the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In this view, Wesley borrows from both Western and Eastern traditions. He incorporates the forensic images of Latin Christianity into his conception of justification, and borrows from Eastern Christianity a "participation motif" as is seen in his views on sanctification.

I have been studying Wesleyan Theology for about 40 years now although I wouldn't call myself an expert on topic. In addition to other hymns we still use a hymn book of 120 Wesley hymns in their full glory; some have 14 verses and we sometimes sing them twice! I have quoted this section because this is the section of his theology which I find most confusing. If 'regeneration' (which he equates with justification in the moment of its occurrence) imparts Christ's righteousness (as well as imputing it) what exactly is a separate, discreet, experience of 'sanctification' expected to add to this?

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2005/12/19 20:15

Quote:
----- If 'regeneration' (which he equates with justification in the moment of its occurrence) imparts Christ's righteousness (as well as imputing it) what exactly is a separate, discreet, experience of 'sanctification' expected to add to this?

From Wikipedia...

Imputed righteousness, in Methodist theology, is that gracious gift of God given at the moment of the new birth which enables a Christian disciple to strive for holiness and sanctification. John Wesley believed that imparted righteousness worked in tandem with imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus credited to the Christian, enabling the Christian to be justified; imparted righteousness is what God does in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit after justification, working in the Christian to enable and empower the process of sanctification (and, in Wesleyan thought, Christian perfection).

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/19 22:25

Quote:

I have been studying Wesleyan Theology for about 40 years now although I wouldn't call myself an expert on topic. In addition to other hymns we still use a hymn book of 120 Wesley hymns in their full glory; some have 14 verses and we sometimes sing them twice! I have quoted this section because this is the section of his theology which I find most confusing. If 'regeneration' (which he equates with justification in the moment of its occurrence) imparts Christ's righteousness (as well as imputing it) what exactly is a separate, discreet, experience of 'sanctification' expected to add to this?

Indeed, his theology on sanctification is a little bit hard to understand. I'm far from an expert on Wesley either. Essentially Wesley believes that in regeneration the image of God is restored, though not fully so. The heart is made clean when one is washed in the blood of the Lamb, but one is not fully washed. The actual deeds one is guilty of are cleansed, but the inward rebellion that produced those sins is not entirely purified.

The Pentecostal Church I go to (Church of God, Cleveland, TN) comes from a Wesleyan view of sanctification, and in general believes a second distinct work of grace post conversion called sanctification. I've never heard a clear teaching on this that makes sense, and none seem to be able to pinpoint exactly what this "sanctification" experience is. They all seem to be buying into a Wesleyan theology without really studying Wesley. Wesley makes it a little more clear, though it is easy to see where misunderstandings arise.

My biggest problem with this sanctification theology is "how does one get cleaner?" I mean, are we cleansed or not? If only partially so, why only partially so? Why does the blood of Jesus not fully cleanse us when we are justified?

To Wesley, the notion of somebody who is "entirely sanctified" at the moment of justification is really absurd, though when cornered hard enough he does not deny it is possible, but ultimately that, he knows of nobody practically speaking who has experienced what he describes as entire sanctification.

Though I was unable to cover this topic more fully in my paper (mostly due to my researching in other areas that only mentioned it in brief, and not more fully), it seems that Wesley's issue mostly arose out of his disagreement with Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Zinzendorf taught that entire sanctification occurs at justification. Zinzendorf taught that if you had any doubts, or any fears, etc. then you were not obviously entirely sanctified, and therefore, not justified.

Wesley believed one could come to such a state of being, but not until much later, when one received an entire sanctification experience after their justification- usually not until they were on death's door in old age (he seems to never have taken into account people who have very sudden and early deaths, as if all people lived as long as he did- 88 yrs old).

The disagreement between Wesley and Zinzendorf was not so much one of kind, but simply of timing. Wesley thought Zinzendorf's doctrine to be too disheartening to new Christians who after experiencing justification, still felt doubts and fear, and therefore, wondered if they were really saved to begin with. Zinzendorf would tell them no.

Wesley's timing issue seems to have been mostly reactionary.

Personally, it is my conviction that the Scriptures teach that we experience Christian Perfection at justification. However, by that I don't agree with the essence of what Christian perfection is as stated by either of these men. They state Christian perfection to essentially be in one's tempers. That is, does one feel a sense of pride when complemented, or does one have any fear arise in them when put in a tricky situation? If so, Zinzendorf and Wesley would say you have not experienced perfection.

However, I've yet to find anywhere in my Bible where this is in anyway taught. Wesley taught that Christian perfection was a habitual state of being that essentially governed one's temperaments/moods. Wesley like many others teaches that perfection is something you strive for, something you seek. The Catholics, Luther, Calvin, etc. taught that you are to seek after it, but that you'll never attain it in this life. Wesley taught you seek after it, but can attain it. I think they are all wrong.

Perfection is ultimately a gift from God. I believe all who are born again are perfect. Biblical perfection has to do with completeness. When I am born again, I have all I need to live a life of godliness and faith in Christ. The apostle Peter him

self in his listing of virtues says that we have all we need for a life pertaining to godliness. I don't need some sort further "zap" so I can live right or more godly. All the virtues/fruit of the Spirit are mine right now.

Sanctification doesn't really have anything to do with sinning less and less the more I mature in my faith. Sanctification doesn't really have anything to do with any the removal of any sort of inbred carnal fears I might have... otherwise not even Christ was fully sanctified, as His prayer in the garden makes evident.

Biblical sanctification has to do not so much with sin, but with the abundance of the fruit of the Spirit evident in my life. As Peter says of the virtues he mentions, "if these are yours...and every increasing...."

The fact of the matter is, I might always have a tendency towards doubt, fear, lust, etc. Sanctification doesn't really have anything to do with removing these things. And when I say this, that doesn't mean just because I have doubts or fears, that I give into them and so by sin against God. Sometimes some of the best messages I personally feel I have preached have been born only after overcoming some doubts that were lingering in my soul. I'll never forget the agony I was in shortly before preaching one sermon in particular. I was facing some great intellectual doubts that I had recently been bombarded with when reading. However, I would not let these doubts win the day, and after having wrestled for a while, was victorious and preached a rather fruitful message.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/20 3:57

InTheLight's

Quote:

-----From Wikipedia...

Imputed righteousness, in Methodist theology, is that gracious gift of God given at the moment of the new birth which enables a Christian disciple to strive for holiness and sanctification. John Wesley believed that imparted righteousness worked in tandem with imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus credited to the Christian, enabling the Christian to be justified; imparted righteousness is what God does in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit after justification, working in the Christian to enable and empower the process of sanctification (and, in Wesleyan thought, Christian perfection).

Ron,
This was my point. Wikipedia says 'imparted righteousness' is 'after justification' whereas the earlier Wesleyan statement seemed to be that 'imparted righteousness' is part of justification/regeneration. I use these terms differently in my own mind but am pretty 'bilingual' as a result of my reading over the years. Wesley saw justification and regeneration as separate events theologically but synchronised them in experience. If they are synchronised in experience I still don't see what a second blessing of 'sanctification' adds to the mix.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/20 4:09

Kingjimmy's

Quote:

-----The Pentecostal Church I go to (Church of God, Cleveland, TN) comes from a Wesleyan view of sanctification, and in general believes a second distinct work of grace post conversion called sanctification. I've never heard a clear teaching on this that makes sense, and none seem to be able to pinpoint exactly what this "sanctification" experience is. They all seem to be buying into a Wesleyan theology without really studying Wesley. Wesley makes it a little more clear, though it is easy to see where misunderstandings arise.

The first part I sympathise with. My own experience, while not being tied to a denomination, seemed to fit a three stage 'salvation' experience but I could never sort out the proper chronological order. Did I need to be sanctified so that the Spirit could take up residence or did I need the power of the Spirit in residence to effect sanctification.

I now have a theological solution to this dilemma although it is radical and raises a lot of contention.

If you have not read it can I strongly recommend (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0871230437/qid1135069439/sr1-4/refsr_1_4/002-2267178-3286463?sbooks&vglnce&n283155) *The Burning Heart* by Skevington Wood. This is the most helpful book I have ever read on Wesley's theology. He has a whole chapter on Wesley's unique view of Sanctification which many don't realise was Wesley's greatest passion. John Wesley believed that God had raised up the Wesleyan Methodists to proclaim this truth and that it was God's particular commission and trust given to him. William Booth felt the same. His typically 'moderate' statement was "There is One God and John Wesley is his prophet" ;-)

Quote:

----- They all seem to be buying into a Wesleyan theology without really studying Wesley.

I think you are absolutely right. Everyone claims Wesley as part of their family tree, but how many have really listened to him?

We have an electricity power break scheduled for most of the day so I will try to get back later.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/20 9:29

Quote:

This was my point. Wikipedia says 'imparted righteousness' is 'after justification' whereas the earlier Wesleyan statement seemed to be that 'imparted righteousness' is part of justification/regeneration.

This is the one thing that I think at least Wesley got right, whereas Calvin and the rest didn't quite grasp. The idea that righteousness is something that we actually subjectively experience through the objective declaration of righteousness that comes by faith is quite good. Christ was given to us for righteousness, and we are the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It's not simply something we are declared to be, but it is actually something we become and now are. It's not simply imparted righteousness, it's also imputed.

Quote:

If they are synchronised in experience I still don't see what a second blessing of 'sanctification' adds to the mix.

This is just the sort of thing that theologians do. The *ordo salutis* for the most part, is sandwiched all together. However, the theologian after the sandwich is made, attempts to explain how it was made. This is quite good when talking about the bun. But what was put on next, the turkey, mayo, mustard, or tomato? It makes for great discussion, but has little to do with anything else.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/20 9:38

Quote:

Did I need to be sanctified so that the Spirit could take up residence or did I need the power of the Spirit in residence to effect sanctification.

Hehehe. In my denomination, traditionally you need to be sanctified first before you can be baptized in the Spirit. Their argument is, the Holy Spirit can't dwell in an unclean vessel. Granted, they can't point to any Scripture to actually back up this claim, but they'll defend it until blue in the face.

It is interesting to note that my pastor, while he doesn't buy into this triple cure notion, says if ever had a sanctification experience, it was after he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Even though I don't believe in a distinct second work of grace called sanctification, I'd say if I've ever had a sanctification experience, it was indeed after I was baptized in the Spirit, and not before. This testimony causes some to gasp in horror at the thought.

The only way in which my local church generally recognizes sanctification simply is as far as the *ordo salutis* is concerned. Very few actually believe in an actual second sanctification experience apart from justification.

One thing I'd also like to point out is that Wesley believed that one continued to grow in their sanctification even after a secondary experience. He saw no finality to the Christian life. He taught that one continued to grow, but now with a fully

pure heart.

It is my belief that this is actually what happens when we are sanctified when we first become Christians. I believe we are fully sanctified at conversion, and simply continue to grow in this as we mature. To me, the notion that we are only "partially" cleansed when we are born again is as erroneous as the Calvinistic notion that Christ did not die for all people, instead, only the elect. Such views are very shaky.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/20 9:54

Quote:

He has a whole chapter on Wesley's unique view of Sanctification which many don't realise was Wesley's greatest passion

Indeed. Many in Methodism have forgotten this doctrine and experience. It seems to only being recently rediscovered and taught by them. It seems to have fallen into great neglect with them via the liberal faction of the Methodist church starting in the 19th century. It seems today even, that Methodist scholars are not really preaching the experience, but simply teaching it almost in a "history of religion" sense.

Though various other Wesleyan denominations have taught and continued to teach the experience. But, they seem more or less to be eating from table scraps that others have left over, instead of actually diving into Wesley. Such has caused some to take an eradication and or sinless perfection views of Wesley's teaching, though he taught nothing of the sort and greatly denied it. It's a pity.

My pastor typed a paper on Wesley's theology for a history of Christianity class he took at Lee University. Granted, his professor for that class wasn't really a history expert per say (more so a fill in D.Min, not a Ph.D), but did buy into a secondary sanctification experience theology. He said the professor really didn't care for his summary of Wesley's theology, as it clashed with his own personal theology.

It's amazing that though Wesley pretty much coined this doctrine, that few people actually go back to him to learn it, and when they do, they don't tend to agree with his views on it! Yet in our denomination's tradition, Wesley's sanctification doctrine is essential, and part of the official statement of faith!

Re: - posted by Agent001 (), on: 2005/12/20 12:55

Some good information on the topic:

(<http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Wesley/wesley.htm#Wesley>) <http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Wesley/wesley.htm#Wesley>

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/21 4:47

Quote:

This is just the sort of thing that theologians do. The ordo salutis for the most part, is sandwiched all together. However, the theologian after the sandwich is made, attempts to explain how it was made. This is quite good when talking about the bun. But what was put on next, the turkey, mayo, mustard, or tomato? It makes for great discussion, but has little to do with anything else.

This may surprise some but I am personally really only interested in 'pastoral theology'. By which I mean truth which affects the saints. I have studied these things in some detail as a result of seeking to support the saints in their quest for God's full provision in salvation. Sometimes that means you have to dis-assemble the sandwich to see what they have been feeding on. ;-)

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/21 4:57

Quote:
-----"About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart 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." It was May 24, 1738.

This is a quotation from the URL posted by Agent 001. I wonder why so many end the quotation at this point. This point is clearly 'the moment of justifying faith' but is it more? A fuller quotation can be found (http://academics.smcvt.edu/relstudies_courses/RS130/John%20Wesley.htm) here which included the phrase...

Quote:
-----I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.

Now this begins to sound like the 'love of God shed abroad' in his heart 'by the Holy Spirit.' which most Wesleyan exponents of 'Sanctification' would regard as part of the 'second experience'. Interesting?

Re: - posted by Agent001 (), on: 2005/12/21 9:18

From philologo's link:

Quote:
-----In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart 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.

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, "This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?" Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth, them according to the counsels of His own will.

It would be a real stretch for anyone to take the second paragraph as support for Wesley's "second experience."

So yes, interesting.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/21 9:45

Quote:
-----t would be a real stretch for anyone to take the second paragraph as support for Wesley's "second experience."

And I am not doing so. :-) I have read and re-read this stage of Wesley's life so often, trying to get to grips with his experience. The evidence is very full. He referred to this as the time when 'faith came' and further described it as the faith of a 'son' rather than that of a 'slave'. But 'when faith came' is exactly the way Paul describes the coming of the Spirit in Gal. 3:23,25.

Personally, I can find no scriptural evidence to support the 'second blessing' theme of Wesleyan Sanctification. Wesley himself, it is often said, constantly preached it but never claimed to have received it. I think he did receive 'it'. I think he received 'it' at the same time as the 'first experience'.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/21 13:17

Though I am limited in my reading of Wesley, the closest experience I know of his to a "baptism in the Spirit" or "sanctification" experience he had is found on p. 67 of Basil Miller's biography of him, "John Wesley," where Wesley says of a prayer meeting he was part of on New Years Eve of 1738-39:

Quote:

"About three in the morning," says Wesley, describing the service, "as we were continuing in instant prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch as many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at th

the presence of His majesty we broke out in one voice, "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord!"

It was only a couple months later that Wesley was preaching to the masses open air, and with great results. In my opinion, Pentecostal though I am, I believe it was at this time that Wesley was baptized in the Holy Spirit- tongues or no tongues. If compared to accounts in the book of Acts, or Azusa Street, there seems to be some great similarities.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/12/21 16:11

Quote:
-----"About three in the morning," says Wesley, describing the service, "as we were continuing in instant prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch as many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty we broke out in one voice, "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord!"

KingJimmy

Of course I wouldn't want to start another hare running but this also sounds not unlike Toronto! This sounds more like a 'revival' happening that a personal 'spirit baptism' to me. There is at least one occasions in the Acts where we read of something similar, I think.

Quote:
-----"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31, KJVS)

This was experienced by folk who had already experienced a 'spirit baptism'.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/12/21 16:22

Quote:

I wouldn't want to start another hare running but this also sounds not unlike Toronto!

Shhh... not in this thread :)

Though on a personal note, it sounds more like a somewhat typical altar call in any Pentecostal church (like mine) with people being "slain in the Spirit." Though typically (not always) it has been my experience such phenomenon only occurred after people have laid hands on each other. Though I remember once two men next to each other standing there praying, and suddenly just collapsing onto each other on our altar/bench. Both were perfectly fine, though quite out like lights for a while.

Wesley is not reporting animal sounds here :)

Anyway...

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/12/21 16:28

Quote:

-----This was experienced by folk who had already experienced a 'spirit baptism'.

I was in a service recently where a young lady about 16 years old was praying for a friend whose mother was thought to have cancer and was going in for testing. She was weeping exceedingly (as she often does in prayer) and suddenly fell to the ground crying out to God. To me, I wondered in amazement that a young person could feel such compassion for a friend and cry out to God on their behalf in such a way; but wondered if it may have been viewed by some as some sort of flakey 'manifestation'.