John Wesley's Doctrine of Sin and Man

Carl F. Dunker
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses/6
(This certification-sheet is to be bound with the thesis. The major professor should have it filled out at the oral examination.)

Name of candidate:

CARL FREDERICK DUNGER

Oral examination:

Date: July 16th, 1957

Committee:

James E. Clarke, Chairman

James Carley

J. Marion Smith

Thesis title:

John Wesley's Doctors

By John S. Smith

Thesis approved in final form:

Date: July 16, 1957

Major Professor: James E. Clarke

(Please return this certification-sheet, along with two copies of the thesis and the candidate's record, to the Graduate Office, Room 105, Jordan Hall. The third copy of the thesis should be returned to the candidate immediately after the oral examination.)
JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF MAN AND SIN

By

Carl Fredrick Dunker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

School of Religion
Butler University
Indianapolis, Indiana
June, 1957
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>The Authority for the Methodist Church Beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Aim of this Thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>THE SINFUL STATE OF MAN</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Original State of First Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Present State and the Fall of Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Original Sin and Specific Sins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Free Will of Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>THE JUSTIFICATION AND THE NEW BIRTH OF SINFUL MAN</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Justification of Sinful Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The New Birth of Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sin in Believers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repentance and Faith in Believers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>THE CHRISTIAN PERFECTION OF MAN</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian Perfection as Perfect Love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perfect Love Implies Cleansing from All Sin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attaining and Keeping Perfect Love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wesley Maintained This View Until His Death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>A COMPARISON WITH CONTEMPORARY METHODIST THINKING</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Comparison With Wesley's View of the Sinful State of Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Comparison With Wesley's View of the Justification and the New Birth of Sinful Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Comparison With Wesley's View of the Christian Perfection of Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Individual Methodists differ in their doctrinal beliefs. Perhaps this is because the Methodist Church does not emphasize doctrine as strongly as it does the works of righteousness which proceed from the love of God in the heart of man. There appears to be more emphasis on "doing" rather than "knowing." This one-sided emphasis is causing Methodists to ask, "What does our church believe?" They are confused as to what to believe concerning the Christian Faith and the Methodist position.

The Authority For The Methodist Church Beliefs

There is a standard set of doctrines held by the church, and this means that for the average Methodist to understand its church's doctrinal position, he will have to turn to the authority of The Methodist Church itself, and not to individual opinion. The Methodist beliefs are basically expressed in the Apostles' Creed, which is usually repeated every Sunday. This creed expresses the following beliefs:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

This is an accepted creed of the church, and it expresses what the denomination believes, but it is not the real authority for what the church believes. The real authority comes from the Twenty-five Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church, plus the fifty-two sermons of John Wesley, and Wesley's Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament.

The present Articles of Religion were given by John Wesley. He sent them to the Methodist Christmas Conference which met in Baltimore, December 24, 1784. It was at this time and place that the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was organized. Wesley sent to the conference a simplified version of the English Book of Common Prayer. This prayer book contained twenty-four Articles of Religion, which were selected and abridged from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The newly organized church adopted these articles to set forth its doctrinal position, and "to this day, The Methodist Church publishes them in its Discipline, and they are part of the Constitution of the Church." This

4 Harmon, op. cit., p. 27.
Christmas Conference adopted one additional article which makes the present accepted number.

These articles cannot be changed by any one Methodist, nor a group of Methodists, nor the General Conference of the denomination. The Methodist Discipline states, "Par. 91. The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion, or establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine." They can be altered only by a long-drawn-out process of amending the constitution, which requires four years to effect and the all-but-unanimous consent of the whole church acting together.

Present day Methodist theologians differ from one another in the doctrinal interpretation of these articles, and in some respects they differ from the basic traditional Methodist position. Yet, they do not provide an authoritative set of standard doctrines for the church. To accept any one man's interpretation as the Methodist position would be unfair. To know the legal Methodist doctrinal position today, one needs to study the Articles of Religion, the sermons of John Wesley, and Wesley's Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament.

The Aim Of This Thesis

This thesis is an attempt to compare Methodism's legal doctrine of man and sin, which is embedded in the Articles of

\[\text{1 Disciple Of The Methodist Church, p. 12.}\]
Religion and Wesley's works, with that held by some contempor­
yary, popular Methodist theologians and leaders. This
aim will take the following development.

First, a statement of Wesley's doctrine of man and
sin will be established. A summary of this doctrine is set
forth in the following Articles of Religion:

VII. Of Original or Birth Sin

Par. 67. Original sin standeth not in the following
of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is
the corruption of the nature of every man, that
naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, where­
by man is very far gone from original righteousness,
and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that con­
tinually.

VIII. Of Free Will

Par. 68. The condition of man after the fall of
Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself,
by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and
calling upon God, wherefore we have no power to do
good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without
the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may
have a good will, and working with us, when we have
that good will.

IX. Of the Justification of Man

Par. 69. We are accounted righteous before God
only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus
Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or
deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by
faith is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full
of comfort.

X. Of Good Works

Par. 70. Although good works, which are the
fruits of faith, and follow after justification,
cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity
of God's judgments; yet are they pleasing and ac­
ceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true
and live faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith
may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by
its fruit.
XII. Sin after Justification

Par. 72. Not every sin willingly committed after justification is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification: after we have received the Holy Spirit, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here; or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

XVII. Of Baptism

Par. 77. Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church.

Of Sanctification

Par. 86. Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement cleanseth from all sin; whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, but are washed from its pollution, saved from its power, and are enabled, through grace to love God with all our hearts and to walk in his holy commandments blameless.

This summary of Wesley's doctrine will be developed in the next three chapters. Articles VII and VIII will have detailed explanation in Chapter Two, "The Sinful State of Man." Articles IX, X, XII, and XVII will be developed in Chapter Three, "The Justification And The New Birth of Sinful Man." The article on sanctification will be treated in Chapter Four, "The Christian Perfection of Man."

1 Discipline Of The Methodist Church, pp. 27-32.
Second, Wesley's doctrine will be compared to that held by some popular, contemporary Methodist theologians and leaders. Three influential theologians have been selected; they are Dr. Harris F. Rall, Dr. Georgia Harkness, and Dr. Edwin Lewis. Also, along with this comparison with three theologians, Wesley's doctrine will be compared with the beliefs stated in the church's membership manual for adults, plus The Standard Catechism, and also connected with this comparison will be a study of Wesley's scriptural support in the light of modern Biblical scholarship, represented by The Interpreter's Bible and The International Critical Commentary. Only his choice texts will be selected. This comparison will be developed in the first three divisions of Chapter Five, "A Comparison With Contemporary Methodist Thinking."

Fourth, a basic problem will be stated which is created by a clash of contemporary concepts with the legal concept of the church. That problem is: "Are these differing persons true Methodists?" This will be treated in the fourth division of Chapter Five.

The writer expresses his appreciation to Professor James Clague for his generous assistance in the preparation of this thesis, and to the Butler School of Religion for the granted scholarships which have helped greatly to make this thesis possible.
CHAPTER II

THE SINFUL STATE OF MAN

The most logical place to begin a discussion of Wesley's doctrine of man and sin is with his view of the sinful state of man. The manner of discussing this view will be (1) the original state of first man, (2) the present state and the fall of man, (3) original sin and specific sins, and (4) the free will of man.

The Original State Of First Man

By the original state of first man, Wesley means the condition of first man, Adam, before he sinned against God. Adam was created in the image of God. Wesley maintains that the image of God basically means righteousness. He says, "God made him thus; he did not first make him, and then make him righteous: but in the very making of him he made him righteous."\(^1\) God is righteous. If God made man after His own image, then man was made good and upright, or made righteous. For supporting texts, Wesley uses Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24, Psalms 25:8, and Genesis 1:27. Colossians 3:10 states, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created

him. Ephesians 4:24 reveals, "...after God in righteousness and true holiness." In his notes on the New Testament, Wesley says, in reference to this verse, "After--In the very image of God."2 This reflects what he thinks as the image of God. He thinks of it as righteousness. The verse from Psalm 25:8 reads, "Good and upright is the Lord...." If God is good and upright, then man who was made in His image was also good and upright. Wesley interprets good and upright as meaning nothing more than righteousness. Then there is the text of Genesis 1:27, which says, "So God created man in his own image...."

This righteousness in which Adam was created was universal, natural, and mutable. It was universal in the sense that it extended to the whole of man; it extended to his soul, body, and spirit. All of man was righteous before God. Man's soul was stamped with perfect obedience unto the Almighty. He had a perfect knowledge of the law written upon his heart. As Wesley says, "God impressed it upon his soul, and made him a law to himself."3 Also, Adam's will was holy for it was in perfect harmony with God's will. There was no inclination within his life to commit evil. His will was

1 All quotations from the New Testament will be taken from Wesley's translation, and all quotations from the Old Testament will be taken from the King James Version.


3 Wesley, Doctrine Of Original Sin, p. 335.
naturally inclined to obedience to God rather than rebellion against Him. Man's affections and desires were pure and holy. The members of his body were yielded to holiness because the body was subject to the soul, which was holy, and as long as the soul remained righteous, then the body would remain the same.

Not only was this righteousness universal, extending to the whole man, but it was also natural to him. It was natural because he was created with it. It was the natural thing to obey God and to have intimate fellowship with Him.

This righteousness was mutable. It was one which could be lost. Adam was created with a will set toward righteousness, yet, Adam had the freedom to turn from righteousness and choose evil if he wished. The choice of righteousness was not concretely fixed. It could be changed. The will was movable, but the moving had to be done by Adam, not by God. This mutable righteousness is mentioned in many of Wesley's sermons. Notice how he does it in the sermon, "The Fall Of Man":

God did not make him mere matter, a piece of senseless, unintelligent clay; but a spirit, like himself, although clothed with a material vehicle. As such he was endued with understanding; with a will, including various affections; and with liberty, a power of using them in a right or wrong manner, of choosing good or evil.¹

Besides being created righteous, or in the image of God, man was also created immortal. "The perfect constitution

¹ John Wesley, Sermons On Several Occasions, "The Fall Of Man," Vol. II (New York: Published by George Lane, 1840), p. 36.
of his body, which came out of God's hand was very good, and the righteousness of his soul removed all inward causes of death. And God's special care of his innocent creature secured him against outward violence.\(^1\)

In this state of perfection, Adam was holy and happy. His life was full of peace, and he had intimate communion with God. Adam was the crown of God's creation, the favorite of all. He was made Lord of the earth; he was given dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and everything that moved on the face of the earth.

The Present State And The Fall Of Man

Wesley maintains that the first, or past, man was created with a righteous nature, but he advocates that present man is totally depraved in nature. This is expressed in his comment on Romans 6:6, as he points out that the term "old man" used by the Apostle Paul means, "Coeval with our being, and as old as the fall; our evil nature; a strong and beautiful expression for that entire depravity and corruption which by nature spreads itself over the whole man, leaving no part uninfected."\(^2\) Every man is totally corrupt in nature and born a sinner before God. On Tuesday, January 25, 1785, Wesley spent close to three hours in the House of Lords. His observation is, "I had frequently heard that this was the venerable assembly in England. But how was I disappointed!

\(^1\)Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, p. 338.

What is a lord but a sinner, born to die?" In his sermon on "Original Sin," Wesley describes God's picture of man from Genesis 6:5: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Man has been the same since Adam sinned.

This English preacher proves the corruption of man's nature from both the standpoint of the Bible and of man's experience and observation. From the standpoint of the Bible, he selects such texts as Genesis 5:3, Job 14:4, and John 3:6. Genesis 5:3 states, "Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image." Since Adam fell from his state of righteousness and became sinful, then his own son became sinful, after his image. Job 14:4 says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Every person who is born according to the course of nature is born unclean, and the uncleanness mentioned in this text is a sinful uncleanness. John 3:6 asserts, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Jesus is saying that all persons are naturally corrupt in nature. Man is "mere flesh, void of the Spirit; yea, at enmity with it."
Not only can it be proven from the Scriptures, but also from the standpoint of experience and observation. Wesley attempts to treat, or prove, it from this particular standpoint for those who doubt the scriptural position. If one denies the Biblical view, let him consider seven facts from experience and observation. (1) Let every man see the overflowing of miseries in the world, such as sickness, pain, and death. (2) Let every man look at the sins committed, such as swearing, lying, killing, etc., which all come from the heart of man. (3) Let every man consider the necessity of human laws, which try to curb sin. (4) Let every man notice how men care for the body at the expense of the soul. (5) Let every man notice how men hide themselves from God because of their evil deeds. (6) Let every man notice how men refuse to confess their sin. (7) Let every man notice how men try to blame others for their sin.

Man is corrupt. He is totally depraved. Wesley so believed this and affirmed it, that those who considered otherwise were considered "silver-tongued antichrists." As man's original righteousness reached to the whole of man, so does the corrupt nature do the same.

Man is corrupt in his understanding. He has a natural weakness toward the spiritual things of God. His nature is filled with darkness, or evil. In the mind of man there is a natural inclination to do evil, which makes the mind opposed to spiritual truths. This frame of mind makes

---

man high-minded. He thinks highly of himself and of what he owns.

Man is corrupt in his will. In Adam, the will was created in harmony with God. Now, man's will is against God. It is in harmony with sin. Man can do no good, only evil. The naturalness of his will is to do evil, but, with grace, he can choose God if he wills.

Man is corrupt in his affections. His body is no longer the servant of righteousness, but of evil, making the affections wholly disordered and distempered. Wesley writes:

The natural man's affections are wholly misplaced; he is a spiritual monster. His heart is, where his feet should be, fixed on earth: his heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on: his face is towards hell, his back towards heaven. He loves what he should hate, and hates what he should love; joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glories in his shame, and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor. 1

Present man came to be corrupt in nature because of Adam's sin. Wesley emphasizes that by one man sin entered into the world and death came to all. This "one man" is Adam. He is the representative of the whole human race. His sin corrupted man's nature and threw the whole human race into sin. Wesley expresses this concept in his sermons, "The Fall Of Man," and "On Original Sin," and in his Doctrine Of Original Sin. The concept in these works agree with his interpretation of Romans 5:12. The text reads, "Therefore as

1Wesley, Doctrine Of Original Sin, p. 366.
by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; even so death passed upon all men, in that all have sinned."

His comment on this text is as follows:

Therefore--This refers to all the preceding discourse; from which the apostle infers what follows. He does not therefore properly make a digression, but returns to speak again of sin and of righteousness. As by one man--Adam, who is mentioned, and not Eve, as being the representative of mankind. Sin entered into the world--Actual sin, and its consequence, a sinful nature. And death--With all its attendants. It "entered into the world" when it entered into being; for till then it did not exist. By sin--Therefore it could not enter before sin. Even so--Namely, by one man. In that--So the word is used also in 2 Cor. V, 4. All sinned--In Adam. These words assign the reason why death came upon all men; infants themselves not excepted, "in that all sinned."1

Adam's sin is imputed to all mankind in the sense that "in Adam all die, that is, (1) Our bodies then became mortal. (2) Our souls died; that is, were disunited from God. And hence, (3) We are all born with a sinful, devilish nature. By reason whereof, (4) We are children of wrath, liable to death eternal."2

Adam fell because he chose to fall. He misused his free will. He chose to rebel against God. He wanted to follow his own will instead of God's. Because of this rebellion against God, Adam suffered spiritual, temporal, and eternal death.3 Once the image of God, he became the image


of the devil in pride and self will.

Original Sin And Specific Sins

Wesley distinguishes between original sin and the manifestations of such which he calls specific or personal sins.

Original sin is that corruption which extends to the universal man. It is that evil nature in man that makes him inclined to evil. For Wesley, original sin not only means this corruption in man, but also guilt. Not only has man come under the dominion of sin, but he has become a child of wrath and is subject to guilt and punishment. "This punishment is seen in the suffering and death inseparable from human life as it now is, the suffering and death which are the outcome of Adam's sin."¹

Although man is subject to guilt and punishment of being an off-spring of Adam, he is nevertheless absolved from original sin because of the atonement of Christ. All men are cleared from the guilt of Adam's actual sin. In other words, original sin involves guilt, but it is guilt that is imputed and not personal.

Original sin involves guilt and punishment, which apply to all the children of Adam, yet nevertheless they are not implicated in quite the same way as Adam himself was. Although in a sense all men are burdened with guilt, Adam's descendants cannot feel his sin to be theirs in quite the same way as Adam and Eve felt it. Accordingly, as original sin cannot be ascribed to later generations in the same way as

to Adam, his guilt cannot affect them to the same extent as it would if his sin had been their own personal sin. Thus, alongside original guilt, we have the idea of personal guilt deriving from the actual sins of the individual.⁴

Original sin is an evil root that bears fruit like itself, and the fruit of this evil root is the specific, or personal, sins of man. "Such is the inbred corruption of thy heart, of thy very inmost nature. And what manner of branches canst thou expect to grow from such an evil root?," as proclaimed by Wesley.² And again, "What fruits can grow on such branches as these? Only such as are bitter and evil continually."³

Of pride cometh contention, vain boasting, seeking and receiving praise of men, and so robbing God of that glory which he cannot give unto another: of the lust of the flesh, come gluttony or drunkenness, luxury or sensuality, fornication, uncleanness; variously defiling that body which was designed for a temple of the Holy Ghost: of unbelief, every evil word and work.⁴

These specific transgressions which spring from the root of sin are divided into two different categories. Wesley calls one group as inward sins, and he labels the other as outward sins.

Inward sins are those transgressions such as pride, hate, jealousy, envy, and foolish desires. All are trans-

---

¹Ibid., p. 34, as interpreted from Wesley's Doctrine Of Original Sin.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
gressions which seem to portray a love for self instead of a love for God and neighbor.

Outward sins are those transgressions such as stealing, murder, adultery, etc., which spring from inward sin. A man is only capable of outward sinning who possesses inward sin. Stealing springs from the inward sin of covetousness; murder is an outcome of the inward sin, hate; and adultery is the offspring of lust. Yet, it must be kept in mind that both inward and outward sins are specific sins which spring from the corruption in man's nature.

The Free Will Of Man

Although man is corrupt in his nature, he still has freedom of choice. This is where Wesley differs greatly with Calvin, even though most of Wesley's views are closely related to Calvin's. Calvin maintains that God has planned every man's life, and whatever plan He has for a particular man, that man can do nothing to alter it. According to Calvin, God has predetermined some to be eternally damned and some to be eternally saved. Those who have been assigned to damnation will be damned. They can do nothing to change this; it is God's will for their life.

Wesley could not hold to this because it made man nothing more than a puppet or machine controlled by God. He maintains that man is corrupt in his nature, but he still retains "an immaterial principle, a spiritual nature, endued with understanding, and affection, and a degree of liberty;"
of a self-moving, yes, and self-governing power."¹ It is this degree of liberty that keeps man from being controlled mechanically. This freedom is expressed in Wesley's sermon, "On Predestination":

Indeed if man were not free, he could not be accountable either for his thoughts, words, or action. If he were not free, he would not be capable either of rewards or punishment; he would be incapable either of virtue or vice, of being either morally good or bad. If he had no more freedom than the sun, the moon, or the stars, he would be no more accountable than they. On supposition that he had no more freedom than they, the stones of the earth would be as capable of reward, as liable to punishment, as man: one would be as accountable as the other.²

Man's eternal destiny depends upon his own free will. He either chooses eternal life, or else he can choose eternal damnation. God does not choose it for him. God extends His grace to every man for He is willing that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Wesley charges that Calvin's doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God, "because it makes void the ordinance of God."³ Such a doctrine destroys the validity of preaching; it destroys a growth in holiness; it destroys the happiness of Christianity in that it does away with the comforting promises of Christ for all people; and it destroys one's zeal for good works. Wesley considered such a doctrine as blasphemy.⁴


⁴ Ibid., pp. 483-488.
Man does not have a natural free will to do good, but he does have a liberty to choose Christ, who then helps him to perform good works. Wesley himself felt that he had a certain inherent power as to move certain parts of his body at his own choosing, and yet, at the same time, he realized that he did not have an absolute power over his mind, because of the corruption of his nature. But through the grace of God assisting him, he had a power to choose and do good, as well as evil. He was free to choose whom he would serve. This grace is what he calls prevenient grace which makes it possible for all to seek God, despite man's natural condition.

Prevenient grace is particularly associated with the conscience of every man, who is corrupted. Concerning this matter, Wesley writes:

No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural: it is more properly termed, preventing grace. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle before they can strike deep root; or produce any considerable fruit. Every one has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And every one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.  

---

Wesley maintains that all men can be saved from sin. His doctrine is one of universal grace. Christ died for all men. Every man is free to accept this grace of God. As Bishop F. G. Ensley says "Every man, to the 'wretches that crawl on the earth,' is a potential son of God."¹

¹Francis Gerald Ensley, John Wesley, Evangelist (Nashville: Tidings, 1955), p. 33. The quote within this quote is from Wesley, but Bishop Ensley gives no reference for it.
CHAPTER III

THE JUSTIFICATION AND THE NEW BIRTH OF SINFUL MAN

Man is corrupt in nature. He is a sinner. Wesley maintains this concept of man, but he also maintains that man can be saved from sin. The next two chapters will deal with man's salvation from sin. This particular chapter deals with the justification and the new birth sinful man, which will consist of (1) the justification of sinful man, (2) the new birth of man, (3) the sin that remains in believers, and (4) repentance and faith in believers.

The Justification Of Sinful Man

Man's salvation from sin begins with prevenient grace, which consists of "all the drawings of the Father; the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more,"\(^1\) or "all that light wherewith the Son of God enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world"; showing every man 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God.'\(^2\)

The next step is repentance, a first repentance, before justification by faith. This repentance involves man

---


\(^2\) Ibid.
seeing himself as a sinner; it is a conviction of sin. As Wesley says, "Awake then, thou that sleepest. Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou art very far gone from original righteousness."¹

When man sees himself a sinner before God, he realizes that he deserves nothing but the wrath of God. He is guilty of everlasting death, which is the just reward of his inward and outward wickedness.

His guilt is now also before his face: he knows the punishment he has deserved, were it only on account of his carnal mind, the entire, universal corruption of his nature; how much more, on account of all his evil desires and thoughts, of all his sinful words and actions! He cannot doubt for a moment, but the least of these deserves the damnation of hell.²

This conviction of sin is what Wesley calls "poverty of spirit" which is the idea conveyed in Jesus' teaching, "Happy are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). "Poverty of spirit then, as it implies the first step we take in running the race which is set before us, and of our guilt and helplessness," as stated by Wesley.³ In his notes upon the New Testament, he reports, "The poor in spirit—They who are unfeignedly penitent, they who are truly convinced of sin; who see and feel the state they are in by nature, being

¹Ibid., "The Way Into The Kingdom," p. 64.


³Ibid., p. 183.
deeply sensible of their sinfulness, guiltiness, helplessness."  

After seeing himself as a sinner before God and confessing these sins, man is to believe on Christ for his justification. When Wesley advocates "to believe," he does not mean an assent to the truth of the Bible, or to creeds, but rather a "sure trust in the mercy of God, through Christ Jesus. It is confidence in a pardoning God." Faith is the condition for justification, and "it is the only condition. This alone is sufficient for justification. Everyone that believes is justified, whatever else he has or has not. In other words, no man is justified till he believes; every man when he believes is justified." He is justified by faith, not by works.

The New Birth Of Man

At the same time that sinful man is justified, or pardoned, he is also born again, that is, he receives a new birth in Christ. Justification is the work that God does for man, that is, releasing him from his sins. The new birth is the work that God does in man, that is, changing his nature. Justification brings a relative change to man, whereas, the new birth brings a real change. Justification belongs to the

---

objective side of salvation, and the new birth belongs to the subjective side.

The new birth brings an inward change to man, for it releases him from the power of sin while the love of God flows into his heart. This act makes man into a "new being," or a "new creature," in Christ Jesus. Concerning the nature of the new birth, Wesley writes:

It is that great change which God works in the soul, when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God, when it is "created anew in Christ Jesus," when it is "renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness;" when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the "mind which was in Christ Jesus."

The need for the new birth and the change that takes place can be compared with the natural birth of man. Before an infant is born into this life, he has all of his senses, but they are imperfectly used. He has eyes, but cannot see. He has ears, but cannot hear. Neither does he understand or know the world. While in this pre-natal state, the infant is not given the title of life. It is only when he is born from his mother's womb that people usually say that he has begun to live. As soon as the child is born, he begins to see and to hear, and all the other organs of the

2Ibid., pp. 402-403.
body are set in operation. He begins to breathe, and so lives as he did not live before his birth. Now compare this to the spiritual birth of man.

While a man is in his natural, sinful state, he does not spiritually see nor hear God. He does not know nor understand Him. He has no fellowship with the Father. He has no knowledge of the things of God, nor of spiritual or eternal things. The natural man is a living man, but he is dead spiritually. To know God, he must be born of God, and as soon as he is born from above, there is a change that takes place in his life. His spiritual eyes and ears begin to function, and he is able to see the glory of God and hear his inward voice saying that his sins are forgiven. Man's spiritual senses begin to function, discerning spiritual good and evil. When this birth takes place, man begins to live spiritually. He now lives a life which is hid with Christ in God.

It is necessary for man to receive the new birth so that he might enter the Kingdom of God. And what is this Kingdom? Wesley's idea of the Kingdom is summed up in Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." His notes on this verse reveal his concept of the Kingdom: "For the kingdom of God—That is, true religion, does not consist in external observations. But in righteousness—The image of God stamped on the heart; the love of God and man, accompanied with the peace that passeth all understanding, and joy in the
And righteousness, to Wesley, is the first two commandments, which announce, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Man needs to be born again in order to obtain true peace and joy for this life. These are the natural outcomes from the righteousness of God. It is a peace that passes all understanding and a joy unspeakable. The way of the transgressor is hard and like the troubled sea, but not the way of the man who has been born anew; his way is one of peace and of joy.

Again, sinful man is born anew in order to obtain eternal salvation. He must obtain the righteousness of God in this life if he is to see the face of God in glory. A man who is wicked and deceitful in his heart cannot expect to live in eternity with God, therefore, one can see "the necessity of holiness in order to glory; and consequently of the new birth, since none can be holy, except he be born again."  

Wesley maintains that the new birth and baptism are not the one and the same thing. Baptism is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The outward

---


part of baptism is water. The inward part is a death unto
sin, and a new birth unto righteousness. Wesley certainly
agrees with his church catechism. Further comment is
mentioned in the paragraph below:

But indeed the reason of the thing is so clear
and evident, as not to need any other authority.
For what can be more plain, than that the one is an
external, the other an internal work; that the one
is a visible, the other an invisible thing, and
therefore wholly different from each other?--the
one being an act of man, purifying the body; the
other a change wrought by God in the soul: so that
the former is just as distinguishable from the latter,
as the soul from the body, or water from the Holy
Ghost.¹

If the new birth and baptism are not the one and the
same thing, then neither do they always have to accompany
each other. There can be the outward sign without the inward
work, and there can be the inward work of grace without the
outward sign of water. The new born person will be best
known by his good works rather than by anything else.

When sinful man is justified and born anew, he is
given assurances that he has been accepted with God, and
that the work of grace has been wrought in his soul. There
are two such assurances. The testimony of God's Spirit, and
the testimony of man's own spirit.²

The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression
on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to
man's spirit that he is a child of God, revealing that Jesus

¹Ibid., p. 405.
Christ has loved him, died for him, blotted out his sins, and reconciled him to God.

The witness of man's own spirit is "a consciousness, that we are inwardly conformed, by the Spirit of God, to the image of his Son, and that we walk before him in justice, mercy, and truth, doing the things which are pleasing in his sight." It is a consciousness of the fruits of righteousness wrought by the Holy Spirit.

The witness of God's Spirit must precede the witness of man's spirit. The consciousness that God loves man is a necessary condition of man loving God. Man cannot love God until first he knows that God loves him. And he cannot know that God loves him unless the Spirit witnesses it to his spirit. "Since, therefore, this testimony of his Spirit must precede the love of God and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our inward consciousness thereof, or the testimony of our spirit concerning them," says Wesley.

At the same time that justification and the new birth take place in man, the gradual work of sanctification begins. When he has been born anew, he is partially sanctified, not wholly sanctified, and he begins to grow in this state of grace.

Sin In Believers

It has been established that when a sinful man is

\[\text{1 Ibid., p. 87.}\]
\[\text{2 Ibid., p. 88.}\]
justified and born anew, he becomes a new person in Christ Jesus, and the work of sanctification begins. Yet, Wesley holds that there is sin that still remains in the heart of this new person, or believer. This sin that remains is inward sin, which is contrary to the nature of Christ. Inward sin is any sinful temper, passion, or affection which is contrary to the mind which is in Christ. Such would be pride, self-will, love of the world, lust, and anger.

Wesley supports this idea with several passages from the Scriptures, such as Galatians 5:17, I Corinthians 3:1-3, and II Corinthians 7:1. Galatians 5:17 is where Paul describes the general state of believers when he says, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, but the Spirit desireth against the flesh." This signifies that there is an evil nature in the believer that opposes the Spirit of God. I Corinthians 3:1-3 tells about Paul speaking to the believers at Corinth about being carnal: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ....Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying and strife, are ye not carnal?" There appears to remain a carnal mind in the believer which is enmity against God. II Corinthians 7:1 is an exhortation by Paul for believers to "cleanse themselves from all filthiness

---

3Ibid., p. 242.
of flesh and spirit." By this statement alone, he implies that sin remains in their life.  Believers know that they are of God, yet at the same time they continually feel a heart bent to backsliding; a natural tendency to evil; a proneness to depart from God, and cleave to the things of earth. They are daily sensible of sin remaining in their heart, pride, self-will, unbelief; and of sin cleaving to all they speak and do, even their best actions and holiest duties.

This sin that remains does not reign and have dominion over the believer. Christ reigns, and it is He who has dominion over converted man. Unless the believer watches and prays, this sin will lust to pride, to anger, to the love of the world, and to the love of pleasures. It is advised that all believers should walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh.

While walking after the Spirit, the believer is delivered from the guilt of sin, from the power of sin, but not from the being of sin. The guilt of sin is taken away at justification; the power of sin broken at the new birth; but the being of sin, the sinful nature, still remains. A justified and new-born person can walk after the Spirit, but he still feels the flesh lusting against the Spirit.

It is this distinction between the guilt of sin, the power of sin, and the being of sin that distinguishes the

1 Ibid., p. 271.
3 Ibid., p. 113.
believer from the non-believer. Sin controls or governs the life of the non-believer; he obeys sin! The believer is not governed by sin even though it remains in his life. Christ governs his life, because Christ is more powerful than sin. Take the particular sin of pride. In the life of the non-believer, pride governs his life. In the life of the believer, pride, which remains, does not govern the life.

As long as the believer walks after the Spirit, he finds favor with God. If he yields to the sin in his life and begins to walk after the flesh, he will again become a child of the devil.

Repentance And Faith In Believers

If sin remains in the heart of the believer, then there must be some room for repentance and faith in believers. As there is a repentance and a faith necessary for the receiving of righteousness, so is there a repentance and a faith for the keeping of it. Both are needed for growth in sanctification.

The repentance after justification is different from the repentance before justification. The repentance afterwards does not imply any guilt, nor a sense of condemnation, nor a consciousness of the wrath of God. It is a conviction by the Holy Spirit that sin remains in the heart, although the person now has favor with God. Yet, it is like the first repentance in the sense that it involves man's knowledge of

1Ibid., p. 116.
himself and his sinfulness. "It is one kind of self knowledge, the knowing ourselves sinners, yea, guilty, helpless sinners, even though we know we are children of God," says Wesley.

Joined to this conviction that sin remains in the heart is the conviction that sin cleaves to all of man's words and actions. The believer, where he least suspects it, finds a stain of pride or self-will, so that now he is more ashamed of his best works than formerly of his worst sins. Only because of the atonement is he delivered from the guilt of his unmeritorious works.

A conviction of his guiltiness is involved. This means that he realizes that he deserves punishment, but that which he deserves does not come upon him because of his Advocate with the Father.

With this knowledge of sin remaining in the heart, and of it cleaving to all words and actions, and with a sense of guilt, is a knowledge of man's helplessness. He is unable to think one good thought, or to say one good word, or to do one good deed, except through God's free grace which accompanies him every second.

This repentance after justification should manifest itself in two different types of good works. First, there are the works of piety. These are the works of public prayer, private prayer, family prayer, attending church.

1 Ibid.
reading the Bible, receiving the Lord's Supper, and fasting. Second, there are the works of mercy, which are directed towards the spiritual and material needs of one's brother. Such works are feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sick, providing for the poor, instructing the ignorant, and visiting the prisoners.

Not only is the believer to repent after justification, but he is still called to "believe the Gospel." In other words, faith is necessary for growth in grace, or in sanctification.

Repentance and its fruits are not necessary in the same degree as faith is necessary for sanctification. Repentance and works are necessary "conditionally," meaning if there is time and opportunity for them, otherwise, man can be sanctified without them. But the believer cannot be sanctified without faith. The moment he believes, he is sanctified. Repentance is "conditionally" necessary, whereas, faith becomes "immediately" and "directly" necessary for sanctification.

The nature of faith in the believer to be sanctified is somewhat different from the faith he had to possess to be justified. It is a divine evidence and conviction that God is able and willing to cleanse the heart from all sin that remains and gives a consciousness that He has done such.

Repentance and faith in the life of a believer is

---

described by Wesley in the following words:

Thus it is, that in the children of God, repentance and faith answer each other. By repentance, we feel the sin remaining in our hearts, and cleaving to our words and actions: by faith we receive the power of God in Christ, purifying our hearts, and cleansing our hands. By repentance we are still sensible that we deserve punishment for all our tempers, and words, and actions: by faith we are conscious, that our Advocate with the Father is continually pleading for us, and thereby continually turning aside all condemnation and punishment from us. By repentance we have an abiding conviction, that there is no help in us: by faith we receive not only mercy, "but grace to help in every time of need." Repentance disclaims the very possibility of any other help: faith accepts all the help we stand in need of, from him that hath all power in heaven and earth.

Sanctification begins when sinful man receives the new birth, but he is only sanctified in the sense that he is partly sanctified, and not entirely sanctified. The believer continues in this process of sanctification by repentance and faith. After a gradual development in sanctification, the believer will sometime attain entire sanctification or Christian perfection.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN PERFECTION OF MAN

After a gradual development in sanctification, the believer will eventually reach the higher plain of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. Wesley maintains that such a level can be reached in this life. This chapter will be devoted to the discussion of this perfection. It will develop the idea of (1) Christian perfection as meaning perfect love, (2) perfect love implies the cleansing of all sin from the heart, (3) attaining and keeping this state of perfect love, and (4) Wesley's maintenance of this view until his death.

Christian Perfection As Perfect Love

When Wesley speaks of the believer attaining Christian perfection, he does not mean absolute perfection. Absolute perfection means to be perfect in every way, which God alone has. In advocating that believers are not perfect in this, Wesley says:

They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, nor, from mistakes. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities; such as weakness, or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such in another kind are, impropriety of language, and ungracefulness of pronunciation, to which one might add a
thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behaviour.

The perfection which man can obtain, while the soul dwells in the body, does not exclude ignorance, error, and infirmities. Also, man can never achieve perfection in the sense of angelic perfection, nor of the perfection that man possessed before the fall.  

By Christian perfection, Wesley means perfect love. This, he strongly maintains. Man can be perfect so far as to be perfect in love. Perfect love is "the complying with the kind command, 'My son, give me thy heart.' It is 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." Loving God is the first aspect of it, and loving neighbor is the second; for any man who loves God, loves his neighbor. At another place, Wesley says it is "loving God with all our heart and serving Him with all our strength. Nor did I ever say or mean anymore by perfection than thus loving and serving God." He is just as explicit in this definition in his

A Plain Account Of Christian Perfection, which is his best

---

1 John Wesley, A Plain Account Of Christian Perfection (New York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), p. 4.


3 Ibid., p. 169.

work on this subject. In this work, he says it is "loving God with all of your heart, and mind, and soul." On Monday, July 13, 1761, he preached "on the manner of waiting for 'perfect love.'"

Wesley used many scriptures to support his belief that a believer could be made perfect in love. As stated in his description of perfect love, his basic scriptures are the first two commandments. Besides these, there are others from the Gospel of Matthew. (1) Matthew 5:8, which asserts, "Happy are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." His comment on this verse is: "The pure in heart--The sanctified: they who love God with all their hearts." (2) Matthew 5:48, which says, "Therefore ye shall be perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." Wesley looks upon the word perfect as meaning perfect love. (3) Matthew 6:10, which reads, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." His comment on this passage says: "May all the inhabitants of earth do thy will as willingly as the holy angels! May these do it continually even as they, without any interruption of their willing service; yea, and perfectly as they!"

Wesley documents this attainment with passages from

1Wesley, A Plain Account Of Christian Perfection, p. 10.
2Curnock, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 469.
4Ibid., p. 17.
the epistles. (1) Philippians 3:15 says, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded." This is used with the emphasis that perfection can be attained, for Paul claims to be made perfect in love. (2) I Corinthians 13:13 advocates, "And now abide these three, faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is love." Wesley's notes: "Faith, hope, love--Are the sum of perfection on earth; love alone is the sum of perfection in heaven."  

This love mentioned by Paul is a love that man can possess. (3) A strong argument comes from I John 4:17, which states, "Hereby is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world." Wesley maintains that St. John has attained the state of perfect love.  

Perfect Love Implies Cleansing From All Sin

The first emphasis on perfection of love is to love God with all of the heart and serve Him with all strength. But Wesley has a secondary emphasis, which is, that perfect love implies a cleansing of all inbred sin from the heart. When he was questioned about Christian perfection as involving the cleansing of all inbred sin from the heart, he answered, "Undoubtedly; or how can we be said to be saved from all our uncleannesses?"  

He asserts that, "This implies

---

1Ibid., p. 257.
2Wesley, A Plain Account Of Christian Perfection, p. 13.
3Ibid., p. 10.
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. If man is to love God with all of his heart, then how can sin, which is against God, remain in the heart? It is impossible for man to love God with all of his heart if sin remains there, therefore, when man becomes perfected in love, it involves cleansing the heart from all sin.

As he supported with scripture: that man could be made perfect in love, so does he support with scripture that perfect love involves the cleansing of all sin. Here are six selected texts that he uses. (1) John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them through the truth: thy word is truth." Wesley's comment is, "Sanctify--Consecrate them, by the anointing of thy Spirit, to their office, and perfect them in holiness by means of thy word." (2) II Corinthians 7:1 states, "Having therefore, beloved, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Wesley's notes reveal: "From all pollution of the flesh--All outward sin. And of the spirit--All inward." (3) He supports it with a text from Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: and I live no longer, but Christ liveth in me: and the life

1Ibid., p. 14.
3Ibid., p. 271.
that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered up himself for me." Wesley says that the Apostle Paul is describing how he is free from all sin. The words "I am crucified" indicate that Paul's sinful nature is destroyed. (4) Philippians 2:5 persuades, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Wesley interprets this verse in the following paragraph:

For although this immediately and directly refers to the humility of our Lord, yet it may be taken in a far more extensive sense, so as to include the whole disposition of his mind, all his affections, all his tempers, both toward God and man. Now it is certain that as there was no evil affection in Him, so no good affection or temper was wanting. (5)

(5) I John 1:7 is another text. It reads, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." From Wesley's notes on the New Testament, we find: "Cleanseth us from all sin--Both original and actual, taking away all the guilt and all the power." (6)

One of his strongest arguments comes from I John 3:8, which says, "To this end the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil." This means "all sin. And will he not perform this in all that trust in him?"

---

1 Ibid., p. 282.
4 Ibid., p. 384.
The cleansing of sin refers to the destruction of original sin. It is a total death to sin, and an entire renewal in the love and image of God. Interpreting Wesley, Umphrey Lee writes, "The root of sin must be taken out of the heart; man must be wholly conformed to the image of God, or, more exactly, the lost image of God in man must be restored by the grace of God."¹

Wesley thinks the Christian is delivered through entire sanctification from original sin as well as from actual sin. The former is described as an evil root, an evil inclination. It is the source of all special sins, an evil corruption which finds expression in such sins as pride, self-will, covetousness, and anger, which are the antithesis of love to God and our neighbour. The corruption of sin, that is, is manifest in the evil will of the individual. Accordingly, entire sanctification in Wesley comes to mean total resignation of the will of man to the will of God. The self-will which remained in the believer, although he was not governed by sin, is now utterly annihilated.²

This can only be understood by knowing Wesley's definition of sin. He makes a distinction between sin as a voluntary transgression of a known law, and sin as an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown.³ It is this first concept of sin that applies to his doctrine of Christian perfection. Sin is looked upon as a willful transgression of a known law. The so-called unconscious sins are looked upon as mistakes. The entirely sanctified

²Lindstrom, op. cit., p. 149.
³Wesley, A Plain Account Of Christian Perfection, p. 16.
man, with all sin cleansed, will commit such infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes, because such spring from a corruptible body. But these are not sins, because they are not committed voluntarily. Wesley holds that all sin in a transgression of the law, but not that all transgression of the law is sin. A transgression is not necessarily a sin. It is only sin when it is voluntarily committed.

But Wesley does not use the term "sinless perfection." He will not call it this because of his view of absolute perfection, which he maintains that man can never reach. A man can be perfect in love, and still not be perfect in all things. As long as he is imperfect in the absolute sense, he will commit involuntary transgressions, which need the atoning blood of Christ as well as the voluntary transgressions. "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." And again, he says, "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." 

When it comes to the terms eradication and suspension,

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
Wesley is not sure of himself. In fact, in his last works on this subject, he does not attempt to use either. He maintains that all sin is cleansed, and yet, it can come back into a man's heart. People can call it what they want.

Attaining And Keeping Perfect Love

Perfect love is achieved instantaneously through faith. There is a moment in which man's whole life is perfected in love and sin ceases. Some persons are conscious when this takes place, and others are not. Wesley compares this instantaneous act of deliverance with the time that life leaves a man's body at death. "It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies, yet there is an instant in which life ceases; and if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it."¹

Man can achieve this perfect love before death. All believe that the soul must be cleansed from all sin, sometime and someplace. Some say that this cannot be attained until the soul has been refined by the fire of purgatory. Others say that it comes at the time of death, when the soul departs from the body. But Wesley says that "we may be saved from all sin before death, i.e., from all sinful tempers and desires."²

The process of sanctification does not stop after the

¹Ibid., p. 56.
²Ibid., p. 3.
believer obtains perfect love, but there is a gradual work which helps the believer to improve this state of perfect love. "It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before."\(^1\)

To be perfected in love does not mean that man is no longer tempted. As long as he dwells in the body, he will be subject to temptations. Jesus was without sin, yet, He was tempted as any man is tempted.

This state of perfection can be lost. Once this work of grace has been wrought in the soul, there is no guarantee that one cannot sin again, and that it cannot be lost. When Wesley was questioned, "Can they fall from it?," he answered:

I am well assured they can. Matter of fact puts this beyond dispute. Formerly we thought one saved from sin could not fall. Now we know the contrary. Neither does any one stand by virtue of any thing that is implied in the nature of the state. There is no such height or strength of holiness as it is impossible to fall from.\(^2\)

The believer should be able to keep this state of perfect love if he observes several things. (1) He should watch and pray continually against pride. (2) He should beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm. (3) He should beware of Antinomianism, making void the law, through faith. (4) He should beware of the sins of omission. (5) He should beware of desiring anything but God. (6) He should beware of

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 55.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 40.
schism, or of making a rent in the Church of Christ. (7) Last, he should be exemplary in all things, such as dress, use of money, deeds, and conversation.¹

Wesley believes that Christian perfection is perfect love which can be obtained in this life. He held to it so strongly that he made it plain to all preachers that they should preach it.

**Wesley Maintained This View Until His Death**

John Wesley maintained until his death that man could be made perfect in love. He died March 2, 1791. In a letter to his brother Charles, written sometime between 1768-1772, he was deeply concerned that the Methodists keep such a doctrine. He writes, "I am at my wit's end with regard to two things,—the Church and Christian perfection. Unless both you and I stand in the gap in good earnest, the Methodists will drop them both."² On June 16, 1785, he wrote to Rev. Freeborn Garrettson these words about the American believers: "The more explicitly and strongly you press all believers to aspire after full sanctification, as attainable now by simple faith, the more the whole work of God will prosper."³ As late as September 15, 1790, a few months before his death, he maintained this belief. In a letter to Robert C.

¹Ibid., pp. 41-49.

²Herbert Welch, Selections From The Writings Of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, MCMXVIII), p. 351, as in Works, VI, 671-675.

³Ibid., pp. 390-391, as quoted in Works, VII, p. 184.
Brackenbury, he wrote, "I am glad brother D____ has more light with regard to full sanctification. This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists."

It should be the earnest concern of every man to love God with all of his heart, with all of his mind, with all of his soul, with all of his body, with all of his strength, and to love his neighbor as himself. Let every man seek after this love, and let every man possess it.

---

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 397, as quoted in Works, VII, pp. 153-154.}\]
CHAPTER V

A COMPARISON WITH CONTEMPORARY METHODIST THINKING

This chapter will attempt to compare Wesley's view of man and sin with the accepted view held by leading Methodist contemporary thinkers. Wesley's key scriptural texts will be examined in the light of modern biblical scholarship, The Interpreter's Bible and The International Critical Commentary, and then the doctrine will be compared with The Membership Manual of The Methodist Church for Young People and Adults and The Standard Catechism, and then compared with the concepts held by three popular Methodist theologians, Dr. Harris F. Rall, Dr. Georgia Harkness, and Dr. Edwin Lewis.

A Comparison With Wesley's View Of The Sinful State Of Man

Wesley believes the biblical account of the creation and the Fall of man to be historically true. There was a first man, Adam, who was created righteous and immortal. This original state of righteousness was the image of God.

Adam sinned, and his sin threw the whole human race into corruption. Every man born today is born with a depraved nature inherited from Adam. This depravity is his original sin, which is imputed. But man also has his own personal sin, which springs from original sin.

Although man is depraved in nature, Wesley believes
that he has free will to choose his own salvation. Every man is accountable for his own destiny, Wesley's concept of depravity rejects the Pelagian idea that the Fall had no effect on man at all, and rejects the Calvinistic extravagance of total depravity, that is, man is so depraved that he cannot choose his destiny. God has to do it for him. Wesley maintains that man is depraved in the sense that sin affects every aspect of his personality.

First, Wesley's key texts for this concept need to be examined in the light of modern biblical scholarship. In supporting his view that the image of God means righteousness, Wesley uses Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him." As Wesley interprets this to mean righteousness, The Interpreter's Bible says that it means that man was like God "in spiritual powers--the power of thought, the power of communication, the power of self-transcendence." Wesley believes that man lost the image of God in the Fall and needs to regain it. Modern scholarship maintains that man still has the image of God, every man, for he is created this way, but the image is defaced because of sin.2

To support his concept of total corruption, he uses Romans 6:6: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we
might no longer serve sin." The "old man" is correctly interpreted by Wesley to mean man's evil nature, but there is no indication that the term implies total corruption. Another text is Genesis 5:3: "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth." Wesley maintains that Adam transferred his fallen evil nature to his posterity. *The International Critical Commentary* interprets it as "implying, no doubt, a transmission of the divine image." Wesley emphasizes the sin of man. Modern scholarship emphasizes man as being a divine person.

Also, Wesley uses Job 14:4: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." His interpretation that man is sinful is supported by *The Interpreter's Bible*, for this verse "merely points out the corporate solidarity of the human race and the deep connection of its sinful nature with universal death." Wesley connects the hereditary factor with this verse, implying that one is born with sin, and totally corrupt. *The Interpreter's Bible* does not interpret this as implying hereditary corruption. Wesley uses John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He uses the term "flesh" to mean the corrupt sinful nature of man. Wesley has

---


a misconception of this word. Present day biblical scholarship points out that the emphasis upon "flesh" in this verse is the physical side of man's nature. The same as when one states that the Logos became "flesh." This is the apostle John's meaning behind the word. Wesley gives the word the emphasis of corruption rather than John's emphasis. When it comes to the fall of a first man and the inheritance of evil, Wesley supports the historical account with Romans 5:12:

"Therefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; even so death passed upon all men, in that all sinned." Wesley's interpretation agrees with Paul's concept, for Paul was following contemporary Jewish doctrine in saying that sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. Here is raised the whole question of Biblical interpretation. Modern scholars, and some Methodists such as Edwin Lewis, do not accept Paul's idea of a first man.

Second, there is the comparison of Wesley's idea of the sinful state of man with the concept set forth in the membership manual of the Methodist Church and The Standard Catechism.

The manual is vague on setting forth what is the image of God. It avoids the subject. Yet, there is indication that it holds to the concept of image as meaning "unlike

---

animals," which would be in disagreement with Wesley. The manual states, "Because we were made in the image of God, it is imperative that we live in the presence of God and according to His laws."¹ Like contemporary scholarship, James S. Chubb, author of the manual, rejects the historical account of the Genesis story. The Standard Catechism which is used by the Methodist pastors along with the manual, does not mention the origin of man. The manual does not deal with the Fall of man, but it agrees with Wesley on the nature of sin. Man's root sin is disobedience. This is the evil inclination in his nature. Instead of dividing the manifestations of original sin into two classes of specific sins, as Wesley does, Chubb separates them into three classes which are physical, mental, and spiritual,² but the basic thought is the same as Wesley's. The Standard Catechism does not deal with the origin and the nature of sin. It does give a definition of sin stating that "sin is any violation of God's law, or any lack of conformity thereto."³ This is the catechism's weakest point. It assumes the sinfulness of man without any attempt to explain it. Both the manual and the catechism agree with Wesley on the freedom of man's will to choose his salvation.


² Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Third, there is the comparison of Wesley's concept with that held by three popular contemporary Methodist theologians, Rall, Harkness, and Lewis. All three reject the creation story as being historically true. They do accept that man has been created in the image of God, but this is present man. Wesley believes that this applied to a first man. There is a vast difference in the interpretation of what is the image of God. To Wesley it means righteousness. Rall disagrees, because to him it means that people are "not creatures without reason like the lower animals, but persons as God is a person." ¹ Georgia Harkness sets forth the same concept in her book, Understanding The Christian Faith.²

Rall, Harkness, and Lewis agree with Wesley that present man is sinful. Rall says that man is "weak, finite, sinful."³ Harkness makes the same statement: "Sinners we are, and sinners we remain save for the unmerited, forgiving mercy of God."⁴ In his book, Great Christian Teachings, Lewis states that every man is a sinner.⁵ Although these contemporary thinkers hold that present man is a sinner, they have a different concept of how he becomes one. Wesley

³Rall, op. cit., p. 41.
⁴Harkness, op. cit., p. 98.
believes that man is a sinner because of Adam's sin. Rall indicates that man becomes corrupt because of his own choosing. Harkness disagrees with Wesley. She rejects the idea of hereditary corruption passed on from a first man's guilt. Man has a biological tendency to self-centeredness which becomes uncurbed and becomes self-love, which is the root of all other sins.\(^1\) Edwin Lewis rejects the Fall story as historical. He believes that this story is the story of every man's fall. In his work, *The Creator and the Adversary*, he says, "My story is Adam's story. And the story of every other man."\(^2\) As far as man becoming a sinner, Lewis advocates that "every human being is born innocent, and under the experience of life itself surrenders his innocence and incurs guilt."\(^3\)

There is agreement on the nature of sin. Man possesses inward and outward sin which spring from a tendency to do evil. Rall's statement can easily sum it up for all three theologians: "Sin is what we are, not merely what we do."\(^4\) Lewis has the same concept when he says, "Unfilial and unfraternal attitudes and states of mind are as sinful, that is, as unchristlike, as unfilial and unfraternal deeds."\(^5\)

\(^1\)Harkness, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
\(^3\)Lewis, *Great Christian Teachings*, p. 27.
\(^4\)Rall, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
\(^5\)Lewis, *Great Christian Teachings*, p. 32.
As there is agreement on the nature of sin, so is there agreement with Wesley on the freedom of man's will. All can be saved if willing to be saved.

This comparison of Wesley's idea of the sinful state of man with some leading contemporary Methodist thinkers reveals one major change, and that is in the creation and the Fall of man. Wesley believes the biblical account to be historical. Present-day theologians, following modern biblical scholarship, no longer regard this account as historically true. Edwin Lewis' concept is a representative one for these leading Methodists:

We can no longer use the mythus as traditional theology has used it. Whether or not, we must use rather the evolutionary mythus. But what at once impresses us as we attempt to do that is the fact that the new mythus still calls for many of the older concepts, except that we can now give them an intelligibility which they had begun to lose through their articulation with the old mythus.

A Comparison With Wesley's View Of The Justification And The New Birth Of Man

Wesley believes that sinful man is justified by faith, with faith being the only condition for justification. Accompanying justification is the new birth, which brings an inward change to the sinful nature of man. Man needs to be born anew if he is to enter the rule or reign of God. When one is born again, he receives the witness of the spirit which gives him the assurance that he has become a child of God. After becoming a child of God, sin remains in the life

1 Lewis, The Creator And The Adversary, p. 232.
of a believer. This sin is inward sin. It remains but
does not reign. Because it remains, there is need for
continual repentance and faith which are necessary for
growth in sanctification.

First, Wesley's choice of texts for this concept
needs to be examined in the light of modern biblical scholar-

ship. In saying that sinful man is justified by faith, Wes-
ley means by faith a trust in the person Christ, and not
merely an assent to truth. This is his concept of the word
"believe" as it is used in John 3:16 and Acts 16:31. John
3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his
only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him may not
perish but have everlasting life." Acts 16:31 states, "And
they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved,
and thy household." Modern scholarship supports Wesley's
view: "Belief in Jesus we take to mean both an intellectual
assent to the principles which he made plain in his teachings
and in his living, and also a surrender of the will to the
love of God as it was made manifest in Jesus."¹ It also
supports Wesley's idea that faith brings a new birth or a
new way of life to man.² Wesley uses Romans 8:16 to support
his view that conversion is accompanied with two assurances:
"The same Spirit beareth witness with our spirits, that we
are the children of God." Wesley maintains that one can know

that he is a Christian. John Knox agrees with this. "We know we have received the Spirit and that the Spirit is the Spirit of adoption because we actually find ourselves saying, Abba, Father." Wesley and modern scholarship agree on the witness of the spirit. "There is no question that modern scholarship supports Wesley’s view that sin remains in believers. An example passage for Wesley is I Corinthians 3: 1-3:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat: for ye were not able to bear it, nor are ye now able. For ye are still carnal: for while there is among you emulation, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk according to man?

Wesley says that these Corinthians are Christians who are weak in grace. They need to grow in faith. The International Critical Commentary carries the same interpretation stating that such are Christians, but not ideally Christians. "They are not on a level with the heathen. They are babes in character, but 'babes in Christ.'" They are giving way to the desires of the flesh "above which they ought by this time to have risen." That believers need to continue in repentance and faith for growth in sanctification is supported by Wesley with II Corinthians 7:1: "Having therefore, beloved, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all

2 Alfred Plummer and Arch Robertson, "I Corinthians," The International Critical Commentary, (1911), pp. 52-55.
3 Ibid., p. 54.
pollution of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This is a strong text for Wesley. F. V. Wilson, in his exegetical work on II Corinthians of The Interpreter's Bible, declares that "Paul pleads for complete renunciation of evil and full consecration to God; to avoid giving offense, he includes himself among the Christians who must cleanse themselves from, i.e., resolutely put away, every defilement of body...and spirit."¹

Second, there is the comparison of Wesley's view with the membership manual and the catechism. Both of these works maintain that justification is by faith and brings a new life to man. The manual says that this new life is achieved by "accepting through faith the promises, teachings, and person of our Saviour."² The concept of faith is the same as Wesley's. The catechism vividly sets forth Wesleyan thought on the justification and the new birth of sinful man. Here are some questions and answers which candidates for membership are asked to study and know:

116. What is Repentance?

Repentance is the turning from sin to God, the surrender of every principle and motive of conduct that is contrary to the law of love and the welfare of the kingdom of God....

117. What is Saving Faith?

It is belief in the divine promises, implicit

²Chubb, op. cit., p. 19.
trust in Christ for salvation, and a sure confidence that God for Christ's sake forgives my sins and owns me for his child....

118. What is Justification?

It is the forgiveness of sins on the conditions of repentance and faith....

119. What is Regeneration?

It is the new birth by the Holy Spirit wherein I am made a child of God and enter into his kingdom....

120. Are Justification and Regeneration distinct?

Justification is a work done for me, by which my sins are forgiven; regeneration is a work done in me, by which I am born of the Spirit; but these two divine works always go together, so that when my sins are forgiven I am in the same moment made a child of God.

121. What is the witness of the Spirit?

It is the divinely wrought conviction, by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, that I am a child of God.

122. What is the witness of my own spirit?

My personal consciousness that I have met the conditions of salvation; that I have been born of the Spirit; and that God accepts me as his child.

125. What is Sanctification?

It is the work of God begun in regeneration purifying the heart from the defilement of sin.

The manual does not emphasize the witness of the spirit, but the catechism does. Both works state that the believer needs to grow in sanctification.

Third, there is the comparison of Wesley's concept with

---

that held by the three theologians. From the works of these three people, there is almost entire agreement with Wesley's view concerning justification by faith and the changed life that it brings to sinful man.¹ There is one difference, and that is the lack of emphasis on the witness of the spirit. This same lack is revealed in the membership manual.

This brief comparison reveals that Methodist thinking today is essentially the same as Wesley's on this concept except the witness of the spirit. Bishop Paul B. Kern states that the church has lost this emphasis on the Spirit's witness. In his book, Methodism Has A Message, he says that the reason for this absence of assurance "must in part be laid at the door through which many of them entered the Christian life. They knew no transforming renewal of their hearts and wills. They held up their hands or signed a card or answered church vows to whose deeper meaning they were strangers."²

A Comparison With Wesley's View Of The Christian Perfection Of Man

Wesley has a dual perfection. Adamic perfection, which applied to Adam before the Fall, and Christian perfection. The believer can never achieve Adamic perfection, but he can obtain Christian perfection. By Christian perfection, Wesley means perfect love, and such love implies the cleansing from

¹Compare with Rall, op. cit., pp. 54-60; and with Harkness, op. cit., pp. 109-112; and with Lewis, Great Christian Teachings, pp. 67-71.

all willful sinning; sin to Wesley is a voluntary transgression of the known will of God. Man never reaches the state where he can no longer fall into sin again. His perfect love can be lost.

First, Wesley's supporting texts need to be examined in the light of modern biblical scholarship. In support of his view that one can become perfect in love, Wesley uses the command found in Matthew 5:48: "Therefore shall ye be perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." The RSV puts a "must" in this command: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Father is perfect." G. A. Buttrick, commenting on this verse, says:

When Jesus says that his followers must be perfect, he probably does not expect that they will be absolutely flawless. "Straight" or "square" would be more accurate, and the sense is given by Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1; Jas. 1:4; and especially Deut. 18:13. In other words, the religious man's attitude toward other men must be like that of God: candid, sincere, constant, not turned aside toward vengefulness no matter how great the provocation.¹

The entire thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians is used by Wesley to support his belief in obtainable perfect love. Agape love is what Wesley calls perfect love. Without this love, Paul or any other Christian would be nothing, for man can "only respond to God's love by loving his fellow men in the same way."² And does not God love them with a perfect love? Also, Wesley uses I John 4:17: "Hereby is our love

made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world." He claims that John has been perfected in love. E. A. Brooke supports Wesley's interpretation and says that "love is made perfect, not in fellowship generally, but in perfect fellowship."¹

Wesley supports his view that perfect love cleanses from all sin with at least three key texts. One is Philippians 2:5, which says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Wesley interprets this as having to do with the whole disposition of man's mind. Man needs a disposition like Christ's. Modern scholarship gives this same thought. Christians need "an inward disposition which will direct them in all they do without their knowing."² Although Wilson gives this same interpretation, he does not imply that it involves a cleansing from all sin. Wesley does. He believes that if one is to be like Christ in disposition, then it means that he will have to be cleansed from all evil tempers, all sin. Another text is I John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Wesley interprets this as a cleansing from all inward and outward sin. This is the


same concept that The International Critical Commentary gives: "Sin in all its forms and manifestations....The writer is apparently thinking of sin as an active power showing itself in many forms, rather than of specific acts of sin."¹ Another text is I John 3:8: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end the Son of God was manifested, to destroy the works of the devil." Wesley says that this means to destroy all sin. In comparison, The International Critical Commentary asserts that the Son was manifested to destroy "the works of the Devil, i.e., the sins which he has introduced into the lives of men."² Destroy "generally includes the suggestion of destroying, undoing or dissolving, that which forms the bond of cohesion."³

Wesley's key texts for the concept of perfect love and cleansing from all sin show fair interpretation. He saw the foundation for his doctrine in such texts, and deduces from them the framework.

Second, there is the comparison of Christian perfection with the membership manual and the catechism. Nothing is said in the membership manual about perfect love. Growth in sanctification is mentioned, but not the achievement of entire sanctification, perfect love, and the cleansing from

²Ibid., p. 89.
³Ibid.
all sin. Where the manual fails to do this, The Standard Catechism does with the following statement:

126. What is entire Sanctification of Christian perfection?

It is that attainable grace in which the believer, having been made free from the guilt and bondage of sin in justification, and from the death in sin by regeneration, becomes a servant of God and has his fruit unto holiness; the inward conflict between flesh and spirit is finally overcome, so that duty becomes privilege, and God's child loves him with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, and his neighbor as himself.

Third, there is the comparison of Christian perfection with the concept held by the three contemporary theologians. Rall agrees with Wesley on the meaning of this term, Christian Perfection. It "may mean (1) giving our lives to be ruled by the pure spirit of love; (2) 'growing up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ.'" Harkness gives only a brief paragraph to this Methodist doctrine. She refuses to use the term of sanctification and says, "But if one wants to use it, it should mean the dedication of oneself to God and the hallowing of all life through the power of the Holy Spirit." Lewis conceives the idea of a perfect love. In place of the word love, he uses "loyalty."

But no understanding of Christian holiness is correct which does not make it a possible experience for everyone. The original meaning of the word

---

2. Rall, op. cit., p. 61.
"holy" carries with it the idea of "separateness." The holy is that which is "set apart." But there are two ways of being set apart: one is to retire from the world and its occupations; the other is to mingle in the life of the world, but while doing that to cultivate the sense of God and seek perfect loyalty to the spirit of Jesus Christ.¹

Although these theologians mention the concept of perfect love, they never clearly state that such is attainable in this life, and neither do they advocate that one is cleansed from all sin. Harkness goes as far as to say, "To assert such a view is very dangerous, for it leads to self-righteousness and a false sense of moral security. Even the best Christians must fight moral battles which they sometimes lose and must repeatedly ask for forgiveness."² Lewis comes closest to it, but still he does not vividly declare that such is obtained in this life.

The hope of any man's ultimate deliverance from sin and evil is in the fact that, as was shown above, he may accept the responsibility for the sinful "other-self" and at the same time declare of it, "Not I." This is the very essence of penitence, and is the reason why the penitential mood must continue until that day when sanctity is complete. For when sanctity is complete, the sinful "other-self" is dead the duality is ended. Every man is tied to his total self, and he can never escape from it; he can only seek such a relation to God as will assure the coming of the time when his total self is also his true self.³

This refusal to accept the concept of attainable perfect love and cleansing from all sin is probably because of

¹Lewis, Great Christian Teachings, p. 73.
²Harkness, op. cit., p. 113.
³Lewis, The Creator And The Adversary, p. 252.
a much broader concept of sin, such as expressed by S. Paul Schilling, theological professor at Boston Theological School, who writes:

Levels (or concentric circles) of sin

1. Voluntary, conscious disobedience to the recognized will of God.
2. Acts springing from failure to keep basic attitude and purpose in harmony with God's will.
3. Acts and attitudes inextricably intertwined with those of others, so that the degree of individual responsibility is hard to trace.
4. Situations in which some choice is necessary, though any choice involves some conscious violation of God's will.
5. Unconscious, unrecognized, unintended, unsuspected violations of God's will.¹

It is not hard to see that this concept of sin is much different from and broader than Wesley's limited concept that sin is a voluntary transgression of a known law of God.

Contemporary Methodist thinkers do not believe in an attainable perfect love and a cleansing from all sin. In speaking of the present church, Bishop Kerns says, "This doctrine of sanctification is not preached today. It has almost been lost to the evangelical pulpit and hence is passing in the attention of Christian believers."² There is such a lack of this belief that Bishop Kerns calls for a new emphasis of this doctrine: "We need a new and modern interpretation and proclamation of the redeemability of these human natures of ours from all sin, and the possibility of

¹ Personal letter from S. Paul Schilling, Professor of Systematic Theology, Boston School of Theology, March 28, 1957.
² Kern, op. cit., p. 184.
The Problem

The present Methodist Church holds, legally and historically, the same doctrine of man and sin that its founder, John Wesley held. Wesley's doctrine is the church's legal doctrine. Yet, in the thinking of some popular contemporary Methodist theologians and leaders, and laymen as well, there is a deviation from some aspects of this legal doctrine. The basic changes have been in the concept of the creation and the Fall of man and of Christian perfection. Some Methodists do not accept the historical account of the creation story in Genesis, neither do they advocate attainable perfect love and a cleansing from all sin. One Methodist professor says, "No one ever attains perfect love or complete cleansing from all sin in this life. Anyone who claims to have attained perfect love is simply not honest."  

These conflicting views create a basic problem. That problem is: "Are those, who deviate from the legal doctrine of the church, true Methodists or not?"

From the standpoint of doctrine, the answer is no. No person can be doctrinally Methodist who does not accept the

---

1 Ibid., p. 186.
2 Personal letter from McKendree M. Blair, Professor of Religion, McMurray College, Jacksonville, Illinois, April 1, 1957.
standard of doctrine set forth by the church. Take for example the concept of perfect love. This is one of the unique doctrines of Methodism. It was the cardinal belief and daily pursuit of early Methodism. Bishop Harmon says, "At any rate the doctrine of Christian perfection has been the one specific doctrinal contribution which Methodism has made to the Church universal. John Wesley called it, the 'peculiar doctrine committed to our trust.'"¹ For a Methodist to deny this doctrine is to deny one which, in a sense, has made The Methodist Church.

A Methodist can be expelled from the church if he preaches doctrines contrary to the established doctrines of the church. Notice the section of the Discipline concerning bishops and preachers:

Par. 921. A bishop or traveling preacher or preacher on trial in an Annual Conference shall be liable to accusation and trial upon any of the following charges:

a) Unchristian tempers, words, or actions.
b) Disobedience to the order and discipline of the church.
c) Imprudent or unministerial conduct.
d) Habitual neglect of duties as a member or officer in the church.
e) Disseminating doctrines contrary to The Articles of Religion or other established standards of doctrine of the church.
f) Immorality or crime.
g) Maladministration in office in the church.²

One should notice No. "e" of this paragraph. This same

¹Harmon, op. cit., p. 73. No reference for quote from Wesley.
²Discipline Of The Methodist Church, 234.
charge can be brought against lay members as well as against bishops and ministers.¹

Yet, The Methodist Church never enforces this rule. There are no heresy trials in the church today, even though it is possible to have one. Why is this? It is because of the spirit of liberty for every member to think for himself which has developed in the church. Even Wesley, a victim of expulsion, advocates such a spirit. "But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that, whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist."²

It is an established fact that some Methodists have deviated from certain legal concepts of the church and are ignoring the provision that can expel them from the church because of doctrinal deviation. The following incident reveals this. The writer was attending a particular annual conference of The Methodist Church. At this conference, there were several ministers being received into full connection with the church. Before they could be admitted, they had to answer disciplinary questions which were formulated by John Wesley. One question was, "Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?" When the bishop came to this question, he passed over it, adding that many

¹Ibid., p. 247.
²The Standard Catechism, pp. 43-44.
Methodists do not believe this today, and he emphasized that such a question would be unfair to ask. The bishop left the impression that such a deviation from the doctrine of perfect love exists within the church, and those persons who hold such a position are justified in doing so.

But the provision for expulsion because of doctrinal deviation is in the Discipline. Any time that the church wants to use it, it can. A man can be expelled for doctrinal deviation as well as for acts of immorality.

Because of this deviation from its legal position, Methodism finds itself in a contradiction. Legally it states that it believes certain truths. In practice, it lets its members hold beliefs contrary to these truths. In this state, Methodism is faced with the decision of what to do concerning its statement of beliefs. There is only one adequate answer, and that is, there must be a restating of its doctrinal position by a reinterpretation of the doctrines of John Wesley, especially Wesley's concept of sinful man and of Christian perfection. The church must come to accept the doctrines set forth by Wesley rather than accept his interpretations of them.

There are at least two reasons why Methodist beliefs need to be restated. One is because the church believes in the ecumenical movement. Yet, parts of ecumenical theology are not in harmony with Wesley's concept of man and sin. If Methodism is legally bound to certain theological concepts, then how can it truthfully enter into the ecumenical movement
unless it is willing to restate its legal concepts so that its doctrinal position can harmonize with the ecumenical church. The other reason is because the life and growth of The Methodist Church depends upon restating its truths, for "no faith could grow were there no possibility of restating its truths in the thought forms which each new age demands."¹ A reinterpretation and a restatement of the beliefs of Methodism should be the concern of every Methodist.

¹ Harmon, op. cit., p. 27.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Holy Bible, (KJV).


Kern, Paul B. Methodism Has A Message. New York: Abingdon Press, MCMXLII.
Lee, Umphrey. **John Wesley And Modern Religion.** Nashville: Cokesbury Press, MCMXXXVI.

__The Lord's Horseman.** New York: Abingdon Press, MCMLIV.


Luccock, Halford E. and Hutchinson, Paul and Goodloe, Robert W. **The Story Of Methodism.** New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, MCMXLIX.


Pike, G. H. **Wesley And His Preachers.** London: T. Fisher Unwin, MDCCCCIII.


Welch, Herbert. **Selection From The Writings Of John Wesley.** New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, MCMXLIII.


__Sermons On Several Occasions, Vol. I.** New York: George Lane, 1840.

__Sermons On Several Occasions, Vol. II.** New York: George Lane, 1840.


Booklets


Commentaries


The Interpreter's Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Personal Letters

Blair, McKendree, Professor of Religion at McMurray Methodist College, Jacksonville, Illinois, April 1, 1957.


Gilmore, R. E. Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Westminster, Maryland, March , 1957.


Schilling, S. Paul. Professor of Systematic Theology, Boston School of Theology, Boston, Mass., March 28, 1957.