The Scriptural Basis of Wesley’s Doctrine
of Christian Perfection*

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The place of Wesley in the history of Protestantism, along with Luther and Calvin, is widely appreciated. The central position of the doctrine of evangelical perfection in his system is often recognized as the distinctive feature of early Methodism. Wesley’s acknowledged indebtedness for this doctrine has not been seriously questioned, but little attempt has been made to ascertain the objectivity of Wesley’s own statements. Like most Christian leaders he claimed to base this doctrine entirely on the Bible as interpreted in the light of “reason and experience.” The proportion in which these several factors influenced him, and the extent to which his claim to Biblical authority can be substantiated, has been a matter of considerable dispute. Many within the Wesleyan tradition think that this part of his theological system is not true to the facts of human nature, that it is not founded on sound Biblical exegesis, and that the results of this emphasis have not justified the importance which Wesley gave to the doctrine. The central purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which Wesley’s claim to be “scriptural” can be substantiated.

In the original investigation, part of which is reproduced here, a study of the Biblical literature was followed by a brief survey of literature preceding Wesley giving special attention to some material not covered in other studies. A survey of Wesley’s own writings was followed by an attempt to provide a decisive answer to the question of his use of Biblical sources. A chapter dealing with the subject of perfection critically, in the light of recent theology, concluded the study.

I

Summary of New Testament Teaching: What Did the Christians Expect?

The Image of God. Later Judaism became increasingly aware of the universality of sin, and Adam’s sin was often mentioned in connection with it. The Greeks, from Hesiod to the Stoics, were also pessimistic about the prevalence of evil, and compared their present plight with stories of primeval innocence. While the Platonists spoke of the vision of God the Hebrews thought of that image of God in which man has been originally created. The doctrine of Christian perfection has always been associated with that of original sin and original righteousness. Salvation could not be complete until the lost image was restored. The Christians knew that salvation by grace did not fully restore man’s physical powers—not until the resurrection, but were his moral faculties fully restored in this life? Paul’s statements afford a basis for an affirmative answer. He spoke of being renewed or transformed in mind and spirit—restored to the image of God, and “conformed to the image of his Son.” Christians were to expect a

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restoration to the image of their Creator in this life and, in consequence of purity, a vision of God in the next.²

The Mind of Christ. Paul claimed to have the "mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16) and wanted all Christians to be "like-minded" (Phil. 2:5). Jesus was regarded as perfect and exemplary in every respect and disciples should be like their Master in attitude and deportment (Lu. 6:40). This ideal is completely ethical and is perhaps unique among world religions. The example of Jesus was summoned frequently as both a precedent and a motivation to generosity (II Cor. 8:9), to patience while suffering (I Pet. 2:21), to humility and service (Phil. 2:5-11), and to courage (Heb. 12:2). The perfect Christian would walk as He walked. The rabbinic "Imitation of God"³ is enriched and made more explicit in Christianity by the concept of the "Imitation of Christ."

As justification is concerned with the creation of a Christian, sanctification involves the "Christianizing of the Christian."⁴ It involved not only allegiance but likeness. They could not go beyond the Ideal Life, yet the Ideal Life was not entirely beyond them. They shared the Master's "passion for righteousness, conceived as a cosmic demand."⁵

The Fullness of the Spirit. Theologians of insight have often stressed the importance of keeping in proper perspective the "work of Christ for us" and the "work of the Spirit in us." An exclusive emphasis upon the former is likely to result in the error of Protestant scholasticism — that of viewing religion as purity of faith rather than purity of life. The danger of the latter is "a pragmatic abyss"—fanaticism.

By the doctrine of the Spirit Christians expressed their conviction that God is at work in the world through the Christian community. The life yielded to the control of the Divine Spirit was regarded as effective to the extent to which it was dedicated. Such a life was not only effective but consecrated and hallowed, and became an instrument used in divine service (II Tim. 2:21).

The life of self-indulgence, especially in Romans, stands in constant antithesis to the life in the Spirit. Victory came not so much by the reason dominating the appetites as by a decisive act of renunciation as a result of which the Spirit of God would dominate the life. No alternative is possible—"if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). As self is completely renounced the way is open for the complete "filling" of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The extent of one's consecration is the measure of the Spirit's hallowing and energizing.

Renewal. Only four times the words anakainoo and anakainosis are used in the New Testament to indicate the work of the Spirit in the moral transformation of the Christian, but the concept they convey includes the whole subjective side of salvation.⁶

Distinct from Regeneration. The expression, "washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5) suggests that "baptismal regeneration" and the work of the Spirit in sanctification are distinct. In many discussions of this subject "regeneration," "sanctification," and "renewal," are synonymous. In Wesleyan teach-

² Mt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14; 1 Jn. 3:2.
³ A rabbinic aphorism, "be ye therefore perfect" was a paraphrase of "be ye therefore holy." Hertz, Pentateuch and Haftorahs, quoted by Carrington, The Primitive Christian Catholicism, p. 96.
⁴ F. Platt, "Perfection (Christian)," Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, IX, 728.
⁶ II Cor. 4:16; Col. 3:10 and Rom. 12:1; Tit. 3:5; cf. Heb. 6:6. See B. B. Warfield, Biblical Doctrines, pp. 440ff.
regeneration is the positive side of justification and is instantaneous, while sanctification is the gradual work of the Spirit in inner transformation, although there is a time when this process may be consummated instantly in response to faith. If "regeneration" is taken to mean a new beginning and "sanctification" a process of making holy, then the two may be said to be distinct.

Completed in this life. This is the question on which all others depend and for which a final answer is most difficult and likely to be challenged. The preceding pages have indicated that the general trend of this investigation is towards an affirmative answer. The early Christians either did, or did not, believe that a deliverance from all sin was a possibility in this life. In the judgment of the present writer the authors of the New Testament did believe such a deliverance possible. The view that Paul taught that a Christian does not sin subsequent to baptism has not been generally accepted. There is also no ground for the view that the body is incurably evil and that sin must be mortified slowly until death completes the process. This belief did not gain ascendancy until the next century. Much depends upon one's definition of sin.

Mortification or faith. Sanctification was regarded as both a crisis and a process—as gained by both mortification and faith. Evil deeds were to be "mortified" but the dynamic of it was initiated by an act of faith. This "synergism" is well represented in Phil. 2:13 where the command to "work out" proceeds from an initial hallowing of the Spirit, "implicit in justifying faith," which extends to all relations of life. By making faith central Paul (and Acts) placed the emphasis on divine grace. If, like just-

ification, it is by faith, then it may be instantaneous, and a present possibility.

Conclusion. The total New Testament teaching, if a synthesis is attempted, may be condensed thus: the goal of the Christian in this present life is the fulfilling of Law by love to God and one's neighbor (Mt. 5:45; I Jn. 3:14ff). This necessitates a cleansing of the "heart" from selfish traits (II Cor. 7:1) or "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19) so that the sinful character of the emotional life is vanquished. This is a gift of grace, rather than a reward of self-effort, received by faith (Acts 15:9; 26:18), in Jesus as the sin-bearer (I Jn. 1:2), and is effected by the Holy Spirit, resulting in a complete integration of the personality in Christ and unity within the church (Gal. 2:21; Eph. 4:1-16). It is expressed in effective service (Rom. 12) and culminates in perfect love (I Cor. 13) and union with the divine (Jn. 17).

On the whole the New Testament ideal of perfection, is more of a conviction than an express assertion. It emerges from the following beliefs: (1) sin is not only an act but a principle; (2) this remains in believers; (3) believers have the alternative of either (a) maintaining the "status quo," or (b) going on to "perfection"—purification and maturity in love and grace; (4) God is holy and heaven a holy place, hence sin must be dealt with either in the next life, at death, or in this life; (5) it is during this life that God promises to "save his people from their sins" and to perfect them in love.

Among the world's literature the best represents an epoch in which a great deal has been caught and crystallized: that human nature is completely redeemable, that God's initiative in that process is the

8 N. B. use of the aorist in Rom. 13:14; Col. 1:9; Eph. 6:11.
 guaranty of its success, and that the theater of victory over evil is this present life. If these premises be granted, the question as to whether the New Testament teaches a perfection in this life is likely to receive an affirmative answer.

The answer, however, is not found primarily in certain words or passages (neither is it apart from them), but rather, in the import of the whole. The New Testament presents not a doctrine, but a conviction, that God can make His children like Himself, as they believe on His Son and respond to His Spirit, until every motive is unselfish and every action consistent with the end of holiness. This is not an absolute perfection, but a relative one—man can become well-pleasing to God, as a man. A life is possible in which, by the grace of God, sin is no longer operative and every action is in harmony with the law of love.

When Wesley told his generation that a holy life was the chief end of man, that perfect love was a present possibility, and that this entire sanctification of life was, like justification, received by faith, he had a precedent for it in the New Testament.

II

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IN PROTESTANTISM

The Pauline and Johannine emphasis on personal sanctity of life was conserved in almost every generation, but often submerged or perverted. The reformers, in their emphasis on the object of faith, and the forensic consequences of faith, stopped short of an adequate emphasis on the inner renewal and transformation of character. More precisely, the ideal of ethical righteousness, which the first reformers vaguely outlined, became obscured in the subsequent debates on doctrine. Some in the seventeenth century, amid doctrinal acrimony, fanaticism, and degeneration in morals, became aware of the need of personal holiness. This emphasis, while not absent from the Anglican church, became articulate in Fox and in German Pietism. Methodism sought to preserve the religious values of its Augustinian heritage, together with the ethical values of its Pelagian heritage, in its dual emphasis on justification and sanctification. It seized upon the motto of German pietism—"Christ in us as well as Christ for us," and by means of sermon, song, and testimony, embodied it in "a thousand witnesses." Holiness was taken from the monastery, and from the collegium (Herrnhut) and brought to the homes, shops, and chapels of an industrialized nation. It was a bold rebuttal of the assumption that sin and the body are inseparable. In addition, Methodism, as a result of pietistic influence, swung from the "moral influence" theory of atonement associated with Pelagius, the mystics, and William Law, toward the reformers' emphasis on a "vicarious atonement" with its correlative emphasis on grace and faith. Deliverance from sin, consequently, did not necessarily involve pride of achievement.

As in the New Testament the prophetic ideas of perfection were combined with priestly ideas of holiness, so in "the great revival" the priestly ideas of holiness, preserved in Catholicism, and the prophetic emphasis, preserved in Protestantism, converge. Wesley went a long way towards the demonstration that through grace, "du kannst denn du sollst," or, as his successors have said, "God's commands are His enablings." Wesley moralized the traditional Protestant conception of faith. The eighteenth century emphasis on freedom was now combined with the traditional emphasis on grace to form—"the most distinctive doctrine of Methodism."
III
THE UNIQUE FEATURES IN WESLEY'S
 Doctrine

Again and again Wesley defined per-
fection as the call of Christians "to
love God with all their heart, and to
serve Him with all their strength." It
was only the relatively incidental
points that were new with him and the
objects of controversy. The five points
in Wesley's doctrine which were
unique with him, were: (1) sanctifica-
tion may be completed in this life, (2)
it is distinct from, and subsequent to,
regeneration, (3) it comes entirely by
faith, (4) it is gradual but is often
consummated in a moment, and (5)
one may have the "witness of the Spir-
it" that this has been done in him. In
the three aspects of suddenness, its
reception only by faith, and the witness
of the Spirit, it is like regeneration.
The first four points are really one and
stand or fall together; they all rest
upon the element of entirety. If the
process of renewal can, in any sense,
be regarded as possible of completion
in this life, then all the other points
will follow quite naturally.

In this point of entirety alone was
Wesley unique. The Catholics said
entire sanctification occurred after
death—in purgatory. The reformers
said it occurred only after the soul
was released from an inherently sinful
body—at death. The Methodists be-
lieved that it could occur in this life
without departing from the world to a
monastery. Those who identified sanc-
tification and justification were few.

The Entirety of Sanctification.
The essential point is whether Wesley
was correct in saying that the Bible
teaches the possibility of entire sanc-
tification in this life. An affirmative
answer is based upon these considera-
tions. In Wesley's definition of terms
(1) Sin is (a) an act, (b) a condition,
but (c) not an infirmity of body or
mind—it is a defect of love.

(2) Perfection is not absolute but rel-
ative—that of a man. (3) Perfection
involves cessation from inward and
outward sin. (4) The Bible nowhere
states that the body is essentially sin-
ful and that deliverance from sin is
impossible until death. (5) The New
Testament does state that deliverance
from sin is possible and to be sought.
(II Cor. 7:1; I Thess. 5:23). (6) The
New Testament exhorts Christians to
be like God in holiness and love (E.g.,
I Jn. 4:12).

When Wesley is allowed to define
his terms, and state his qualifications,
the Biblical basis for this part of his
document is likely to be conceded. This
is borne out by the fact that contem-
porary objections to his doctrine were
based more upon theological than upon
scriptural grounds. The doctrine
stirred deep prejudices, and, in the
controversies which followed, there
were too few who exemplified the doc-
trine of perfect love. But Wesley's
Biblical basis for the entirety of sanc-
tification stands.

The Second Work of Grace.
This feature of Wesley's doctrine is de-
pendent upon the element of entirety.
Several factors lead to the emphasis
upon this point: (1) the fact that in
theory, and in fact, sinful dispositions
remain in those whose sins are for-
given; (2) the conviction that purity
of heart and perfect love is a gift of
grace and not merely a succession of
good works; (3) the inference that if
it is a divine gift it may come at any
time; and (4) the testimony of many
whose deeper religious experience fol-
lowed the pattern of regeneration, con-
viction for "inbred sin," full consecra-
tion, trust, and present experience of
purity, peace, and power.

The Biblical basis for this feature of
Wesley's doctrine is not extensive. It
is more implicit than explicit; more of
an inference than an assertion. In-
stances in Acts of the Holy Spirit com-
ing upon those already converted, to-

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gether with promises of full deliverance from sins remaining after the water baptism, i.e., "inward sins" such as pride, are taken as implying a second crisis comparable to regeneration. Wesley cited but little Scripture in support of this feature. It was enough for him that God often worked that way and it seemed entirely reasonable that if sin is ever entirely removed from a believer by faith it should be as epochal as forgiveness.

Sanctification by Faith or Works. The Catholics, in popular belief if not in theology, taught, in order, sanctification and justification by good works. Luther taught justification by faith alone and his followers made sanctification to follow. The Anglicans taught justification by faith and sanctification by works. Wesley was first to state explicitly that sanctification, as well as justification, is by faith alone. If it comes by faith it may come as conditions are met—that is now; if by faith it is a gift of God; if a gift of God it will necessarily be complete and entire. Wesley urged this both against contemporaries who taught that sanctification comes by works, and also those who said that it is completed at justification.

Thus Wesley did for Protestantism what Luther did to Catholicism—he recovered the Pauline emphasis upon grace and faith. Again, it may be said that Wesley taught the Christian, as Luther taught the sinner, that the way "into the holiest" is by faith in Christ alone. Thus, both the guilt of sin and the pollution of sin is removed by the grace of God in response to repentance and faith. In nothing was Wesley more in line with the tenor of the New Testament than in this feature of his doctrine.

Sanctification: Gradual or Instantaneous? No feature of doctrine gave Wesley more difficulty than this one. His answer was that it was both gradual and instantaneous; both a process and a crisis. Most of the time he dwells on the gradual work, probably as a carry-over from the tradition in which he grew up and partly to counteract the position of those extremists who said sanctification was complete at regeneration. Toward the end of his ministry he stressed the instantaneous aspect more, as has already been shown. In this he was influenced by the testimonies of many who professed to have entered into this experience by faith and found complete deliverance from evil tempers in an instant. In turn, his teaching influenced the movement. And, especially after 1760, this element came to occupy a prominent place in the typical pattern of Methodist experience.

Positively, it is reasonable to suppose that there comes a time when one's self-hallowing or consecration can be complete. Negatively, it is reasonable to suppose that there comes a definite time when sin censes to "subsist," especially if this cleansing is a gift of grace. In other words, as Wesley expressed it, one may be dying for some time yet there comes a definite time, when death is complete. In the New Testament this is a legitimate inference from what is explicitly stated.

IV
FACTORS, OTHER THAN SCRIPTURAL, WHICH WERE INFLUENTIAL

Tradition. By tradition is meant the church tradition in which Wesley was nurtured, chiefly the Established Church. As has previously been pointed out this influence was both conscious and unconscious and was probably more pervasive than Wesley himself realized. He retained his loyalty to the Church throughout life and ignored the popular demand

10 J. Wesley, Standard Sermons, II, 453.
among his Societies for separation. His brother Charles was even more of a high churchman than was John. Wesley never found fault with the Articles, or the Homilies, or the Sacraments; instead he appealed to them frequently, claimed that he believed in them, and acted upon them more faithfully than the average Anglican.

One unfortunate importation from this source was the Realistic Theory of Original Guilt which the Anglicans inherited from Augustine. Wesley accepted the belief that all sinned with Adam and incurred his guilt and punishment—that of spiritual guilt. Said he, "in Adam all died, all human kind, all the children of men who were then in Adam's loins."\(^\text{11}\) In another sermon he applies to the Christian the language appropriate for the condemned sinner when he says, "A conviction of their guiltiness is another branch of that repentance which belongs to the children of God."\(^\text{12}\) Elsewhere he distinguished more clearly between the sinner's guilt and the unsanctified believer's pollution, as when he says,

The repentance consequent upon justification, is widely different from that which is antecedent to it. This implies no guilt, no sense of condemnation, no consciousness of the wrath of God.\(^\text{13}\)

The language used by Wesley to describe the sin "cleaving to all our words and actions" came from his theological heritage—in this case from the Thirty-nine Articles.

The Prayer-Book also contributed to Wesleyan doctrine. From the "Morning Prayer" in the "Third Collect" Charles sang:

Vouchsafe to keep my soul from sin,
Its cruel power suspend,

Till all this strife and war within
In perfect peace shall end.

* * *

Though now to every sin inclined,
I would be as thou art,
Lowly as Thine, oh, make my mind,
And meek and pure my heart.\(^\text{14}\)

The section on Confirmation suggested these lines:

Purge me from every sinful blot,
My idols all be cast aside;
Cleanse me from every sinful thought,
From all the filth of self and pride.\(^\text{15}\)

The language came from the Church; the faith that the prayers would be answered came from another source—the Bible.

**Environment.** By environment is meant the immediate and contemporary influences as distinguished from past environment which has just been labeled tradition.

From a theological standpoint Wesley was less influenced by his contemporaries than by his predecessors. Evidence of this is his condemnation of contemporary habits of thought:

It is now quite unfashionable . . . to say anything to the disparagement of human nature; which is generally allowed, notwithstanding a few infirmities, to be very innocent, and wise, and virtuous.\(^\text{16}\)

His was not blindly reactionary or indiscriminate; he could speak of "the deists, Arians, and Socinians," as the "first-born of Satan,"\(^\text{17}\) but he welcomed the reflections of Locke and Newton, and referred to Bengal as "the most pious, the most judicious, and the most laborious. of all the modern commentators on the New Testament."\(^\text{18}\) He was scornful of the "merciful John Calvin" for burning Servetus with green wood for avoiding the

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\(^{11}\) J. Wesley, "Repentance of Believers," *Sermons*, I, 121.


\(^{15}\) J. Wesley, "Original Sin," *Sermons*, I, 392.

\(^{16}\) J. Wesley, "True Christianity Defended."
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term “Trinity” because it was not in the Bible.  

In general, Wesley was conservative but not blindly so; he did not accept the new uncritically because it was new, nor venerate the old simply for its age. Every current movement he tested by the Bible and its bearing on the Revival.

Reason. To the assertion that Wesley’s doctrine is logical but not scriptural there seems to be adequate room for the rejoinder that it is in the Bible and he freely used his reason to explain and apply it; there is much more evidence than can be cited in support of his claim than can be urged against it.

The implication that his doctrine of perfection grew out of the deistic ideas of his age seems entirely unwarranted; his belief in the corruption and helplessness of human nature was in direct opposition to deism.

Experience. On one hand, Wesley asserted that if the Bible taught perfection and no one exemplified it he would still insist upon it—“let God be true and every man a liar”; on the other hand, he indicated the importance of Christian experience to verify and interpret scripture, stating that if no one ever experienced what he preached he would conclude that it was not scriptural. Thus, the four factors contributed to his doctrine: the Bible, his own reason, his Christian experience, and the experience of others. All were important.

Summary. The question as to whether Wesley was scriptural may not be answered without qualifications. By “scriptural” it is here taken to mean, in general, accuracy in grasping the thought and intent of the several books of the Bible in their present form.

His use of the Bible is fragmentary.

He notes the context too infrequently, and instead, strings together passages from different parts of the Bible which have a “spiritual” association but no literary or historical connection.

The texts on which he builds are sometimes overworked, as, for instance, the use of Ps. 130:8, “and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities,” as a promise of entire sanctification. Likewise, such texts as Eze. 36:25, 29; 1 Jn. 3:8 and Rom. 8:3, 4 are used as proofs when it is legitimate to employ them only by accommodation, or as illustrative, or by inference, and not for direct “proof.”

There are other passages and emphases in the Bible which he failed to use as effectively as he might. For example, I Thessalonians, especially verses 4:13 and 5:23, could have been used more. He might well have devoted more time to Biblical exposition in his Plain Account even if it meant less space for argumentation.

On the positive side it may be affirmed that Wesley was “scriptural” when the following factors are considered.

He exhibits an intimate knowledge of the original languages, even though it is not conspicuous in his sermons and popular tracts. To those who accused him of superficial scholarship he admitted that he studied on the road, but, he added that the Scriptures were an exception—that he had examined “minutely” every word in the Greek New Testament, and that “it was not in running that I wrote twice over the Notes on the New Testament.” Facility as a linguist does not guarantee trustworthy interpretations but it does entitle one to respect when he speaks.

During fifty years of controversy,
when theological passions were high no one undertook to refute Wesley from a Scriptural standpoint, in any worthwhile effort. His requests that he be corrected from the Bible, and his challenge to prove him unscriptural, were never acted upon.

There are no instances where, in any major points, Wesley’s interpretation was plainly contrary to the meaning of the original. In many cases he took inferences for assertions but in few cases is he clearly in error. In no case can it be shown that he deliberately perverted the Bible to support a previously adopted position.

V

THE VALIDITY OF THE IDEAL

In recent years the challenge to this ideal of Christian perfection comes with renewed vigor from the same source and with nearly the same arguments that were heard in Wesley’s day. The “Theology of crisis” follows in the Reformed tradition and is characteristically suspicious of “pretentions” to perfection. So great is the Barthian polemic against sanctification that a Lutheran protests.25

This trend began with Luther: “The saints are always intrinsically sinners; that is why they are declared righteous.”26 Similarly Brunner says, that the sinner, “though justified, continues to the last days of his earthly life to be a sinner,”27—language that little suggests the eighth chapter of Romans.

Niebuhr’s polemic against perfectionism, like Barth’s, abounds in “paradoxes.” The dialectic is impressive, perhaps because incomprehensible. It acknowledges that the complexity does seem to offend “canons of consistency.” Essentially, like apocalyptic perfectionists, it deflects the hope of perfection and deliverance from sin until the next life.

To understand that the Christ in us is not a possession but a hope; that perfection is not a reality but an intention; that such peace as we know in this life is never purely the peace of achievement ... does not destroy moral ardour or responsibility.28

If the Pelagians, Arminians, and pietists, are never free from the temptation to Pharisaism, the Reformation thought is never free from the temptation to antinomianism. This tendency has never been fully mastered either in logic or in life. Niebuhr’s judgment that “man could not be tempted if he had never sinned” violates what Christians have always believed about Jesus and it ignores the origin of sin. In reality it destroys freedom, for if a man had never, at some time in his experience, had the power of contrary choice he never was free. The old doctrine of Original Sin is preferable to such an alternative since it has the advantage of supposing that, at least once, man was presented with a choice when he had real freedom. If sin must precede temptation, then man was always predisposed to sin and never had a fair chance. Niebuhr joins James’ definition of temptation to Paul’s concept of sin and yet ignores the exhortation of both to cleansing of the heart. However, he does credit Wesley with being more Biblical in his idea of perfection than other “sectarian perfectionists.”29

In spite of the resentment which a profession of sanctification always inspires, and notwithstanding the inaptitude of the term “Christian perfection,” Wesley’s plea for toleration breathes a sincere “catholic spirit” and is entitled to respect.

Are we your enemies, because we look for a full deliverance from that carnal mind, which is enmity against God? Nay, we are your brethren, your fellow-labourers in the vineyard of our Lord; your companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus. Although we do expect to love God with all our hearts,
"by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, that we shall perfectly love Him and worthily magnify His holy name."\textsuperscript{30}

Unlike theories of "imperfection," it refuses to believe that the final answer to sin is not faith without actual salvation but faith resulting in salvation. It is no accident that the practical effect of this tradition is "faith" with little of the fruits of faith. Compensation is suspected in the substitution of the "fact of Christ's presence" for the "consciousness of Christ's presence."\textsuperscript{31}

Opposition to perfection, such as those indicated, arises essentially from doctrinaire prejudices rather than from practical, scriptural, or logical grounds. Much of it is to be explained from defective ideas of God, of sin, and of grace. If sin is located in the will rather than in the body or mind; if victory over sinfulness is to be sought in God rather than in self-effort; and if the idea of redemption is primarily the rendering of the human spirit habitable by the Divine, then slight objection should be raised against the age-old conviction that this life is properly the theater of victory over sin and the attainment of full moral stature. If the Christian message cannot give assurance here it should expend less effort in explaining why.

The foregoing discussion has not been inspired primarily by a desire to defend Wesley or his doctrine, but rather to clear away the relevant from the irrelevant in the discussion and to permit Wesley to defend himself against his critics. In many of the cases just mentioned, Wesley's self-criticisms have been overlooked and his qualifications and explanations ignored. It appears therefore, that while there is much in Wesley's personal life which to find fault, yet perfection stands on solid ground. Much modern objection to the doctrine comes from a lack of understanding of what Wesley said, from the faults of its living witnesses, and from a lack of sympathy with the whole purpose behind it. Current neglect of this doctrine results from a neglect of regeneration. Much opposition comes from lack of a satisfactory nomenclature. There is no term or phrase, Biblical or otherwise, that expresses the whole doctrine, without partiality or ambiguity. Wesley's own central emphasis on love to God and man has never been improved upon. Even "perfect love" is but a partial expression of its content since it ignores the category of holiness.

In spite of inevitable cheapening and crystallization of the inner experience of the soul it is difficult to see how the ideal of holiness could be presented to the masses and captured by them without some mechanical standardization. The basic danger in the Wesleyan pattern is not a fundamental error within itself but is that danger inherent in any pattern—that of substituting the letter for the spirit. Wesley broke through the shell of eighteenth century dogmatism and found the "living water" as Paul, Augustine, and Luther had, and many followed him. Inevitably the forms which the new spirit assumed again became stereotyped and dogmatic. The present generation needs a prophet of similar caliber to teach the old lesson that constantly needs re-interpretation in the light of contemporary issues. Like previous generations too, this one needs not only light but a new incarnation of the ideal of pure love to God and man. It is well if a generation has only one such incarnation; it is much better if it has a multitude of them.

One partial but not insignificant aspect of the validity of a movement is expressed in the idea that the spirit tends to take itself a body. The idea of perfection as popularized and defined by Wesley has an impressive

\textsuperscript{30} J. Wesley, Plain Account, 28.
\textsuperscript{31} The Victorious Life, (1918), p. 854.
"body." The vitality of this ideal is illustrated by the formation in America of the National Holiness Association, which is still active on an international scale. The number of "holiness denominations" thoroughly Wesleyan in doctrine and emphasis is another evidence of the value of this ideal. Their combined membership, including that of missionary societies, numbers perhaps a million. In addition, the origin of such bodies as the Evangelical Church was directly caused by this feature of Methodist doctrine; as in the mother church, after a period of controversy, the doctrine was officially adopted and thereafter neglected. In addition, the influence of this emphasis outside of the Wesleyan tradition is reflected in "Victorious Life" movements which express a similar impetus in different phraseology. Practically all of the modern "holiness movements" can be traced to Wesley. The same desire, on the part of the common people, for the ultimate in Christian piety may be seen in the rapid growth of Pentecostal groups, especially in America. It is only reasonable to suppose that this doctrine, promising and promoting the ultimate in the life of the believer, answers to some sense of need among Protestant Christians.

The wholesome emphasis for the present seems to lie in emphasizing the aspect of growth rather than status, and keeping uppermost the positive aspect of love.

The Wesleyan doctrine of the ideal did not start off a new school of thought but rather a new life movement. While it did not provide a creed, it did furnish a discipline; in so doing it recaptured the Biblical emphasis on religion as a way of life—as "salvation by faith."

VI

General Summary

Two basic ideas were noted in the Old Testament as they apply to the ideal for man: holiness, associated with the priestly tradition, and righteousness, associated with the prophetic tradition. Gradually these two concepts, the religious and the moral, merged—to the enrichment of both.

Holiness, a quality peculiar to the divine, included, from the first, separation from the common and the "unclean" and dedication to Jahweh. The inclusion of righteousness, goodness, and mercy, in this concept, found its most explicit expression in Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. To the extent that these qualities were predicated of Jahweh they were thought to be demanded of all men and exemplified in some—Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and Job—to mention a few. A man thus whole-hearted in his devotion, justice, and integrity, was described as "perfect," meaning not freedom from all fault, but blameless, sound in character, as sacrificial victims were sound in body.

In later Judaism, devotion to the Torah, and a greater concern with intention, with the universality of sin, and with the importance of motive, is reflected in the popular literature of the post-canonical period. Rabbinic commentaries indicate an emphasis upon qualities of mercy and charity as essential in those regarded as "perfectly righteous." Theoretically, all could keep the law perfectly; actually, no one did. In both popular and rabbinic writings, final and full deliverance from sin and the "evil imagination" could be expected only in the Messianic age.

Early Greek thought associated perfection with physical prowess, the classical period made perfection to consist in knowledge, and in the Hellenistic period the body was regarded as the prison of the soul. These influences decisively affected Christian-
ity, after the first century, to the extent that, after the second century the "perfect" Christian was often regarded as a gnostic or an ascetic "athlete." Stoicism probably contributed to the ideal of martyrdom as the perfect end of a Christian life.

The New Testament, in general, represents the ethical ideals of the Old Testament. Here, for the first time, is to be found the complete fusion of the ideals of holiness and righteousness, in love. Perfection consists in love as the fulfilling of, not the substitute for, the law. This is seen in the Synoptic teaching, in Paul's letters, and in the Johannine literature. The priestly nomenclature of holiness is used only in a completely moralized and ethical sense. It contributes to the idea of ethical perfection the concepts of separation, consecration, sacrifice—the religious side of morality. Sanctification includes the negative aspect of cleansing from sin and the positive side of consecration to God and the service of humanity and involves the total personality, body, mind, and the self. Certain passages, particularly in Paul and John, imply that this sanctification may and should be complete and entire.

The New Testament breathes an air of optimism, not noticeable in other literature, that man's greatest enemies, sin and death, are, or will be conquered through Christ, and that deliverance from sin is not to be deferred to some future day or era but that "today is the day of salvation." This deliverance is not through observance of a rite or adherence to the law but is by faith, issuing in loyalty and love. Perfection is thus, not absolute but relative; it consists essentially in love and likeness to God and in love and service to man.

This Christian ideal only partly conquered the Roman world for it was partly conquered by a perversion, due mostly to "gnostic" influences, in to various forms of renunciation—chil-
clude tract evangelism, pastoral calling, lay leadership, open-air services, and such doctrinal emphases as "universal atonement," the love of God, the immanence of God, the validity of religious experience, and the emphasis on religion as purity of life as well as purity of faith.

There is a widespread conviction that Luther and the other reformers did not go far enough—that they emphasized justification by faith without saying much about sanctification and renewal of the inner man. This Wesley did, stressing that sanctification also is attainable by faith and that it may be entire in this life. Thus, he joined the Catholic idea of infused righteousness, as the goal, with the Protestant idea of faith, as the means, to obtain the idea of entire sanctification by faith. This he defined as pure love to God and man filling the soul to the exclusion of all sinful or selfish inclinations.

Wesley was in the middle of the road in most issues. Against the humanists in his own church he urged the depravity of man; against the Calvinists he urged the salvability of man. He stressed the limitations of reason to the rationalists, and its importance to the fanatics. He denied that entire sanctification comes at regeneration to the Moravians, and insisted that it may come before death to the Calvinists. To the antinomians he preached good works, to the sacerdotalists faith, and, to all others, both.

Wesley's retention of the Ninth Article and the traditional concept of Original Sin is often regarded as damaging to his doctrine of perfection, but in recent years there has come a new realization of social solidarity and the importance of heredity. The result has been in the direction of rehabilitation of the ancient doctrine. Wesley erred in retaining the Augustinian concept of Original Guilt and was never free from sacramentarianism, but, in the main, his view of human nature, its freedom and possibilities, and his view of grace were such as to make his doctrine of perfection valid today.

Recent studies of religious experience tend to validate its claim to trustworthiness as a source of religious knowledge. By using this as a check and a criteria of dogma Wesley anticipated many modern trends in inductive method. To the interpretation of Scripture by reason he added—"and experience," thus the authority of the Bible was liberalized and strengthened by the authority of the Spirit in Christian experience. The "Christ for us" of Protestant scholasticism became the "Christ in us" of the Revival. The emphasis shifted from doctrine to discipline; from belief to performance; from a future to a present salvation.

The relationship of mysticism and holiness to social service needs further exploration. There is a natural unity here which has hitherto remained unexplored. Wesley's beginning in this area needs to be carried forward.

**Conclusions**

1. In both Old and New Testaments there is a conviction that man can, and should be, well-pleasing to God.

2. This "perfection" is not absolute but relative.

3. Many passages in the New Testament imply that this "perfection" or "holiness" includes deliverance from all sin that is due to selfish direction of the will, i.e., exclusive of "infirmities" incident to body and mind.

4. Such a salvation from sin is regarded as a promised privilege in this life, and, in Paul especially, as coming by faith.

5. There is a valid distinction between restoration to God's favor (justification) and transformation to his likeness (sanctification).

6. The focal points in the Wesleyan emphasis are, that sanctification is entire, and, that it comes by faith; on these essential points the Scriptural
"proof" is the most explicit and emphatic.

8. In his definition of perfection as love excluding sin and selfishness, inaugurated by faith, Wesley was Pauline.

9. The emphasis upon faith led to a stress, in Wesley's later ministry, upon entire sanctification as a second work of grace distinct from regeneration.

10. Despite changed attitudes toward the Bible, sin, and human nature, the main elements in this doctrine remain valid.

11. The Bible should be interpreted by Christian experience.

12. The ideals of holiness and service have a natural affinity.

Upon the basis of the data considered, the conclusion is that the main elements of Wesley's definition of the Christian ideal are in accord with the major emphases in the New Testament. Wesley's claim to being "scriptural" can therefore be validated. It is not without significance that the Wesleyan phase of the pietistic movement has fostered a renewed interest in the Scriptures and has tended to check the influence of "destructive criticism," in evangelical churches. It affords additional confirmation to Wesley's claim that the Revival represented a return to primitive Christianity, and to his assertion that his "most distinctive doctrine" is only what he found in the Bible.

This generation needs another prophet of Wesley's caliber to carry forward the work of the Reformation by pointing the way to the fuller realization of this ideal—perfect love to both God and man, and its practical application to all the relationships of our complex civilization.