

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Exploring John Wesley's Theology



SESSION 11

The Way of Salvation, Part 2

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PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTOR



NOTES

The principal contributor for this module is Dr. Diane Leclerc. Dr. Leclerc is professor of Historical Theology and Homiletics at Northwest Nazarene University where she has taught since 1998. She is an ordained clergy in the Church of the Nazarene and has pastored two congregations, in Maine and in Idaho. She received a Bachelor of Arts in religion from Eastern Nazarene College, a Master of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and both her Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Drew University.

She has published articles in the Wesleyan Theological Journal and has contributed to two books, including *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*. Her full-length book, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective*, won the Wesleyan Theological Society Book of the Year Award in 2002. Leclerc is an active member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Association. She resides in Nampa, Idaho, with her husband and son.

The Way of Salvation, Part 2

SESSION OVERVIEW

Wesley's Sources

Definition: What Is It?

Occurrence: How Does It Happen?

Summary Statements

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- define Christian perfection.
- define sanctification—initial, entire, and gradual toward glorification.
- identify summary statements regarding Wesley's understanding of holiness.

The Way of Salvation, Part 2

INTRODUCTION



Wesley distinguishes two aspects of salvation:

“This is sanctification, which is, indeed, in some degree, the immediate fruit of justification but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God and of a totally different nature. The one [justification] implies what God does for us through his Son; the other [sanctification] what he works in us by his Spirit” (Sermon, “Justification by Faith,” Outler, p. 201).

Perhaps no other doctrine of Wesley’s has been so lauded, so influential, and so debated as his doctrine of Christian perfection. There is no consensus among Wesley scholars about how Wesley envisioned holiness. The following reflections are by a Wesley scholar, Dr. Diane Leclerc, who interprets Wesley through a lens greatly influenced by the concerns of the Holiness Movement, of which the Church of the Nazarene is a part.

WESLEY'S SOURCES



NOTES

Wesley believed in Christian perfection because it was biblical and because he believed it was rooted in the Christian tradition. Wesley was extremely familiar with Early Church writers who offer an understanding of holiness; such persons as Ignatius of Antioch, the Shepherd of Hermas, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius, John Chrysostom, Ephraim Syrus, and others.

From these writers Wesley gained great insight into the potential of God's grace to empower and enable a holy life. When Wesley read Macarius, he said his heart sang. Overall, these writers provided Wesley with an intense optimism about the possibility of human transformation through the cooperation of grace and human response.

There are writers from the Middle Ages as well as from the later Catholic and Pietistic traditions who influenced Wesley's thought. He encouraged his preachers to read deeply from the Christian tradition and often provided them with excerpts to aid their understanding. In 1725 Wesley named three significant authors who greatly influenced his understanding of holiness: Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law. From them Wesley garnered important insights into the nature of perfection, such as the real potential to live out pure intentions, the need to imitate Christ as the model of holy living, and love for God and neighbor as definitive and normative of perfection.

The following quote comes from Wesley's, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. It acts as a summary of Wesley's gleanings from à Kempis, Taylor, and Law.

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

DEFINITION: WHAT IS IT?



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In 1741 Wesley wrote the sermon, “Christian Perfection.” He attempted to define Christian perfection by first examining what it is not. However mature Christians might become in this life, they do not approach the absolute perfections of omniscience, infallibility, or omnipotence. Their understanding remains limited, their judgments are subject to error, and their actions are sometimes limited by infirmities of the present human condition.

Christian perfection does not at all imply a Christian is free from ongoing temptation in this life. On the positive side, Wesley believed even newborn Christians are perfect in a sense they need not commit outward sin. Later, Wesley modified his beliefs about the relationship of Christian perfection and sin and stated that Christians are never made incapable of sin, but that sin no longer need rule in the heart of the believer.

In 1761, Wesley wrote “On Perfection,” in which he stated Christian perfection is:

- having the mind of Christ.
- the renewal of the image of God in us.
- perfect love.
- inward and outward holiness.

Wesley’s primary definition of holiness is that of love. It is love that excludes sin from the Christian life. According to Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, we have misunderstood holiness if we see it only as the absence of sin or sinlessness. Holiness is not an absence but a presence, the presence of love.

OCCURRENCE: HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?



NOTES

When Wesley uses the word sanctification he is referring to the whole Christian life and the therapeutic or spiritual healing that occurs throughout the spiritual journey. He also uses the word salvation in the very same sense. However, sanctification has various descriptive words that have different meanings.

Wesley refers to what we call initial sanctification to make clear that the imparted righteousness of Christ begins to take effect in the new believer. Here God begins the process of actually making us righteous or holy. What we might call growth in grace is the progressive or gradual sanctification that occurs between new birth and entire sanctification, and between entire sanctification and final sanctification (also known as glorification). Wesley strongly emphasizes the need for progressive sanctification.

By entire sanctification Wesley means a deeper experience of God's grace. In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he offers some explanation. He says this experience is not so early as justification, nor so late as death. He stresses the gradual work must both precede and follow the experience. He emphasizes it is amissible, or capable of being lost. He also tackles the question of instantaneousness by making his classical comparison to a person who may be dying for some time, but inevitably a moment of death does occur.

Wesley scholars are most divided by the question of how Wesley envisions entire sanctification to transpire. Some claim the Holiness Movement's stress on instantaneousness goes well beyond Wesley's intentions and rigidifies his more fluid and dynamic theology. Others claim a definite, second crisis experience is very much in line with Wesley's own paradigm and should not be seen as a 19th-century renovation. Dr. Leclerc's interpretation is that Wesley hoped both an instantaneous experience and gradual growth would receive equal emphasis.

The Holiness Movement's interpretation of sanctification would emphasize Wesley's words here:

It is of importance to observe that there is an inseparable connection between these three points—expect it *by faith*, expect it *as you are*, and expect it *now!* To deny one of them is to deny them all. To allow one is to allow them all. Do you believe we are sanctified by faith? Be true then to your principle and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse;

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as a poor sinner that has still nothing to pay, nothing to plead but 'Christ *died*.' And if you look for it as you are, then expect it *now*. Stay for nothing! Why should you? Christ is ready and he is all you want. He is waiting for you! He is at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out,

Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest!
Nor hence again remove;
But sup with me and let the feast
Be everlasting love" (Sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation,"
Outler, p. 282).

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

**NOTES**

1. Wesley holds to love for God and neighbor as descriptive and normative of the Christian life. Love is not only present but “ruling” in the heart of Wesley’s mature Christian (Maddox, pp. 176-91).
2. Wesley came to equate entire sanctification with a level of Christian maturity and was cautious about claiming it too soon in the Christian pilgrimage, but he also exhorted persons to seek the experience now.
3. Holiness, or perfect love, is a work of grace that is both progressive and instantaneous.
4. Holiness, or perfect love, is synergistic; it is lived out in a dynamic relationship with God who provides the grace we need to be holy as we cooperate with such grace.
5. Wesley became suspicious of terms such as the destruction of sin, because this implied an impossibility of sin’s return; but Wesley was highly optimistic about how love shed abroad in our hearts through faith can exclude sin. He tired of the debate over whether or not Christian perfection was sinless. His emphasis was on love, not sinlessness as the goal of Christian maturity.
6. One of Wesley’s major points was that the Christian life did not have to remain a life of continual struggle. For him, to deny this type of victorious transformation was to deny the sufficiency of God’s empowering grace—to make the power of sin greater than the power of grace.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Write a reflection paper on what Wesley defined as Christian perfection.
2. Define sanctification—initial, entire, and gradual toward glorification.
3. Choose two of the summary statements and write a reaction paragraph for each.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Wesley believed in Christian perfection because it was biblical, but also, in no small part, because he believed it was rooted in the Christian tradition.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. In 1761, Wesley wrote "On Perfection," in which he stated that Christian perfection is _____.
 - A. having the mind of Christ
 - B. the renewal of the image of God in us
 - C. perfect love
 - D. inward and outward holiness
 - E. all of the above
3. The term Christian perfection does NOT imply a Christian is free from ongoing temptation in this life.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Wesley wrote about the relationship of Christian perfection and sin and stated that Christians are never made incapable of sin, but that sin no longer need rule in the heart of the believer.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Wesley's primary definition of holiness is that of love. It is love that excludes sin from the Christian life.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. According to Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, we have misunderstood holiness if we see it only as the absence of sin, or sinlessness. Holiness is not an absence, but a presence, the presence of _____.
 - A. love
 - B. perfection
 - C. joy

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7. When Wesley uses the word sanctification he is referring to the whole Christian life and the therapeutic or spiritual healing that occurs throughout the spiritual journey.
 - A. True
 - B. False

8. Initial sanctification according to Wesley is _____.
 - A. what begins to take effect in the new believer at the point of entire sanctification
 - B. the imparted righteousness of Christ that begins to take effect in the new believer
 - C. a deeper experience of God's grace
 - D. a gradual process of growth in Christ

9. By entire sanctification Wesley means _____.
 - A. a deeper experience of God's grace
 - B. the experience that is not so early as justification, nor so late as death
 - C. the gradual work that must both precede and follow the experience
 - D. an instantaneous work of grace
 - E. all of the above

10. Dr. Leclerc's interpretation of sanctification is that Wesley hoped both an instantaneous experience and gradual growth would receive equal emphasis.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Wesley holds to love for God and neighbor as descriptive and normative of the Christian life. Love is not only present but ruling in the heart of Wesley's mature Christian.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. Wesley came to equate entire sanctification with a level of Christian maturity and was cautious about claiming it too soon in the Christian pilgrimage, but he also exhorted persons to seek the experience now.
 - A. True
 - B. False

13. Holiness, or perfect love, is a work of grace that is both progressive and instantaneous.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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14. Holiness, or perfect love, is synergistic; it is lived out in a dynamic relationship with God who provides the grace we need to be holy as we cooperate with such grace.
- A. True
 - B. False
15. Wesley's emphasis was on love, not sinlessness as the goal of Christian maturity.
- A. True
 - B. False
16. One of Wesley's major points was that the Christian life did not have to remain a life of continual struggle. For him, to deny this type of victorious transformation was to deny the sufficiency of God's empowering grace—to make the power of sin greater than the power of grace.
- A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Your reflection paper on what Wesley defined as Christian perfection.
2. Your definitions of sanctification—initial, entire, and gradual toward glorification.
3. The two of the summary statements and reaction paragraphs you wrote.