

BRISTOL, SEPT. 10, 1784.

To Dr. COKE, Mr. ASBURY, and our Brethren in *NORTH-AMERICA*.

1. **B**Y a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of *North-America* are totally disjoined from their mother-country, and erected into Independent States. The English government has no authority over them either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of *Holland*. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

2. Lord KING's account of the primitive church convinced me many years ago, that Bishops and Presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our travelling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace' sake: but because I was determined, as little as possible to violate the established order of the national church to which I belonged.

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3. But the case is widely different between England and North-America. Here there are Bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none, neither any parish ministers. So that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's supper. Here therefore my scruples are at an end: and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.

4. I have accordingly appointed Dr. COKE and Mr. FRANCIS ASBURY, to be joint *Superintendents* over our brethren in North-America: As also RICHARD WHATCOAT and THOMAS VASEY, to act as *Elders* among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's supper. And I have prepared a liturgy little differing from that of the church of England (I think, the best constituted national church in the world) which I advise all the travelling-preachers to use, on the Lord's day, in all their congregations, reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the supper of the Lord on every Lord's day.

5. If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way, of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly

gladly embrace it. At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

6. It has indeed been proposed, to desire the English Bishops, to ordain part of our preachers for *America*. But to this I object, 1. I desired the Bishop of *London*, to ordain only one; but could not prevail: 2. If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. 3. If they would ordain them *now*, they would likewise expect to govern them. And how grievously would this intangle us? 4. As our *American* brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State, and from the English Hierarchy, we dare not intangle them again, either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty, wherewith God has so strangely made them free.

JOHN WESLEY.



Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY'S

JOHN WESLEY

AND THE EARLY METHODIST REVIVAL



A Kingswood Course

Christian Perfection



- John Wesley believed that the biblical teaching on Christian perfection was the most important gift the Methodists had to offer the wider church.
- This teaching goes by different terms: Christian perfection; entire sanctification; full salvation; full sanctification. For Wesley it is the logical goal of all holiness of heart and life.
- Perfection is grounded in biblical teaching and a belief about the willingness of God to make good on all his promises.

Christian Perfection



- In his belief around Christian perfection, we see how optimistic Wesley was about the power of God's grace (Wesley's "optimism of grace")
- Perfection is that state of soul where the love of Christ has become the ruling temper of the heart, thus excluding all willful sin.
- A heart perfected by love is, for Wesley, the very image of present salvation in a human life.

Salvation | *Salus* = health



“By salvation I mean, not barely ... deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.”

—John Wesley, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion”

Wesleyan Characteristics of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

Friday 6, being the quarterly day for meeting the local preachers, between twenty and thirty of them met at West Street and opened their hearts to each other. Taking the opportunity of having them all together, at the watch-night I strongly insisted on St. Paul's advice to Timothy, 'Keep that safe which is committed to thy trust,' particularly the doctrine of Christian Perfection which God has peculiarly entrusted to the Methodists.

— John Wesley, *Journal* for February 6, 1789

Wesleyan Characteristics of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

... 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; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.

I congratulate you upon sitting loose to all below, steadfast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free...

Your affectionate friend and brother,
John Wesley, Sept. 15, 1790

Wesleyan Characteristics

of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

- 1) Wesley argued that he preached the doctrine of perfection because it was biblical.

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”

— Philippians 3:12-15 (cited in “Christian Perfection” ¶3)

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, **making holiness perfect** in the fear of God.”

— 2 Corinthians 7:1

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Herein 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.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

— 1 John 4:15-18

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God,
and of Jesus our Lord,

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain
unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to
glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious
promises: that by these ye might be **partakers of the divine nature**, having
escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue
knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and
to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly
kindness charity.”

— 2 Peter 1:2-7

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

— Matthew 5:48

Point to Consider

Critics of the Wesleyan view on Christian perfection typically make arguments suggesting that it is mistaken in a couple of ways:

- It is Pelagian. It leans on “works righteousness” in thinking that we can earn merit for our own works or that we can be saved apart from grace.
- It is unrealistic or even blasphemous. It believes we can be free from sin even while living in a sinful world. Tends toward “perfectionism.”

The Wesleyan response to these criticisms would be that they have fixated on a word (perfection) while ignoring the underlying rationale for using it.

A better approach looks like this: Give that the New Testament speaks frequently of perfection in conjunction with the Christian life, how *should* we be talking about it? (And the actual content of the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection is an attempt to do just that.)

Wesleyan Characteristics of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

2) For Wesley, the doctrine of perfection should always be understood as a perfection in love.

“In the evening, I preached at Bradford, where I was well pleased to find many, both men and women, who had never suffered any decay since they were *perfected in love*.”

— John Wesley, *Journal* for February 6, 1789



Perfection does not mean a freedom from...

- Ignorance—There is no perfection of knowledge, as in omniscience.
- Mistake—There is no perfection from errors of judgment or opinion. And there is always the possibility of unintentional sin.
- Infirmary—There is no perfection from conditions of the body or mind resulting from living in a fallen world, such as physical or mental handicap.

Wesleyan Characteristics of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

3) The Wesleyan account of Christian perfection is less about defining a doctrine in abstract language and more about the transformation of the believer's character in holy love.

“It is the giving to God all our hearts: 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...”

— John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766)

Wesleyan Characteristics of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection



“... 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 God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.”

— John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766)

Wesleyan Characteristics

of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

4) Perfection can be understood in both gradual and instantaneous ways.



“A man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die till the instant the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet he is not dead to sin till sin is separated from his soul; and in that instant he lives the full life of love.”

— John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766)

Wesleyan Characteristics

of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

5) Perfection is never a static state. Growth in grace is always possible ... even unto eternity!

“There is no ‘perfection of degrees’, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to ‘grow in grace’, and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.”

— John Wesley, “Christian Perfection” (1741)

“[T]he change wrought when the soul dies to sin is of a different kind [than the change of bodily death], and infinitely greater than any before, and than any can conceive till he experiences it. Yet he still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity.”

— John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766)

Wesleyan Characteristics

of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection

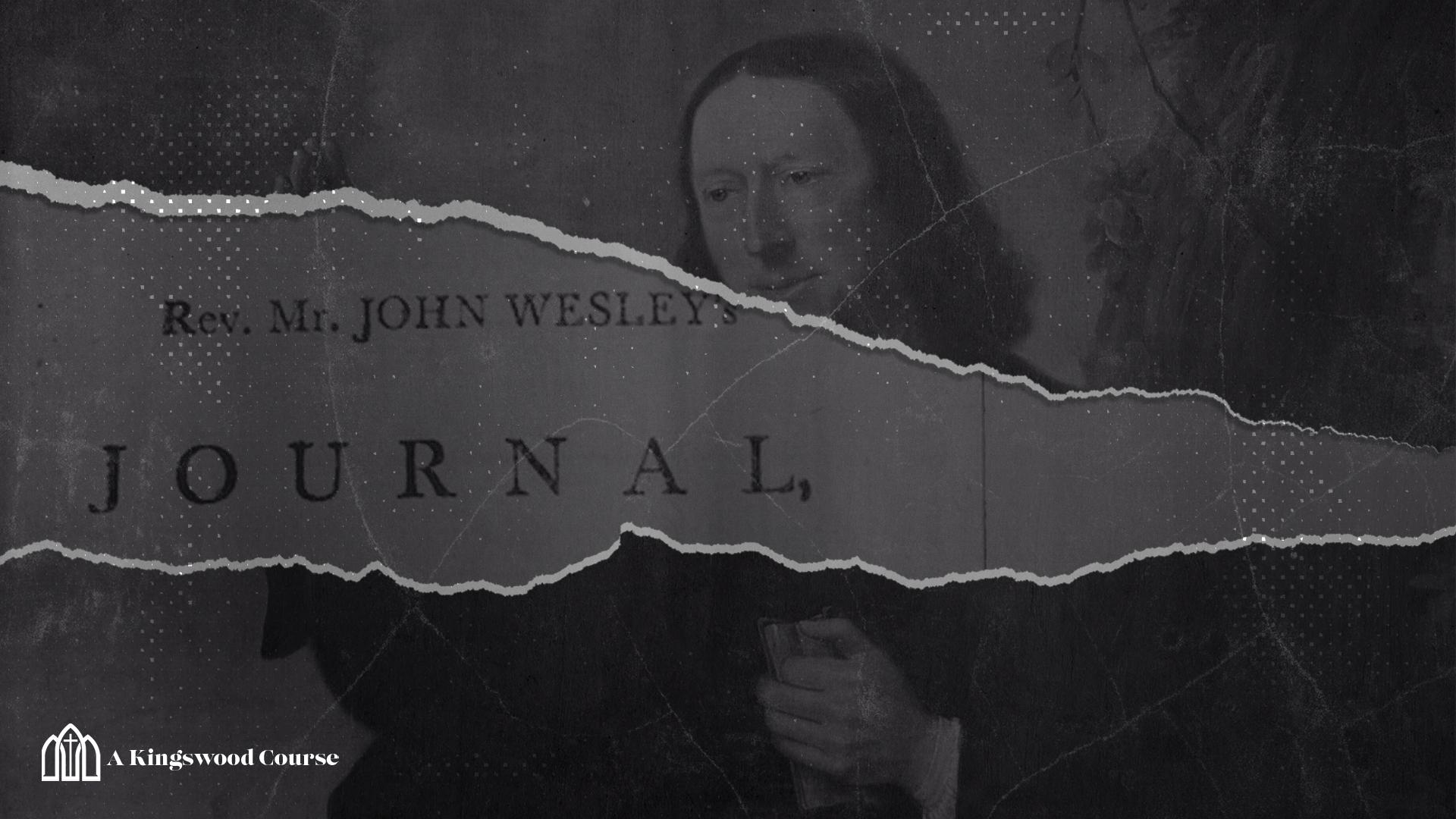
6) Wesley believed that in embracing perfection, the Methodists were simply emulating the primitive church—and thus were seeking to be “true Christians.”

“Five- or six-and thirty years ago I much admired the character of a perfect Christian drawn by Clemens Alexandrinus. Five- or six-and twenty years ago a thought came into my mind of drawing such a character myself, only in a more scriptural manner, and mostly in the very words of Scripture; this I entitled *The Character of a Methodist*, believing that curiosity would incite more persons to read it, and also that some prejudice might thereby be removed from candid men ... ‘These are the principles and practices of our sect; these are the marks of a true Methodist’—i.e. a true Christian, as I immediately after explain myself: ‘by these alone do those who are in derision so called desire to be distinguished from other men’...”

— John Wesley, Letter to the Editor of the *Lloyd's Evening Post* on March 5, 1767



“The Holy Triumph of John Wesley in His Dying” (1842)
By Marshall Claxton



Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY'S

JOURNAL,



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