

4-1-1980

# Wesleyan Primer: A Layman's Guide to Wesleyan Theology

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WESLEYAN PRIMER  
A LAYMAN'S GUIDE TO WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

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A GRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT  
PRESENTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF ARTS

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APRIL 1980

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May 1980*

### FOREWORD

This work was written for the express purpose of informing the Christian layman of the basic structure of Wesleyan theology in a relatively short and simple format. It is more a summary with support material than it is an attempt to present an exhaustive study. Because of the length and the requirement for simplicity only a cursory examination of any controversial problems can be afforded. It should also be understood that this work involves evangelical Wesleyan theology, and not just specifically the thought of John Wesley. But Wesleyan theology today still holds firm to the original teachings of John Wesley, in both spirit and letter.

In order to stay true to the original purpose of this work, references to other writers are scarce and avoided if possible. In this manner only that material which is accepted and historically proven is presented, avoiding any new and disputable concepts. This shows no lack of respect for the work of recent writers, but only a solid attempt to remain within the mainstream of the thought surrounding historical Wesleyan theology.

The format is one intended for adaptation to the Christian education or Sunday School program. Because of the outline and the form of presentation, worksheets can easily be adapted for use in the classroom, and the material can adequately be presented within the span of an eleven to thirteen week quarter. Naturally, this is not a definitive work by any stretch of the imagination. So, should anyone wish to research further, a bibliography is available at the back to direct the individual to a useful source or starting point.

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### INTRODUCTION

"Theology" is one of those words generally neglected by the Christian layman. Theology seems a distant and nebulous discipline which is restricted solely to the somber halls of the seminary. Even the definition of Theology is somewhat misleading, meaning in a restricted sense "a study of God". In practice, though, theology really means "the study of how God relates to his Creation." Any attempt to study God falls very short of completion. After all, the subject, God himself, is not available for direct examination. Within Christian theology the only concrete evidence available with which to work with is the Holy scriptures, and it is the evidence of how God has dealt and will deal with his creation. The person of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and recorded in scripture is also only evidence of how God deals with his creation. Though Jesus Christ is God incarnate, his physical presence on the earth was created as a response to the need of mankind. So even Jesus Christ, referred to by the Swedish theologian Soren Kierkegaard as "God Incognito", does not reveal the ultimate reality of God. This ultimate reality would be as hard for man to comprehend as are infinity and eternity.

In the same sense as theology, the various subdivisions within theology, and their associated terminology, are equally unknown or misunderstood. Hopefully, the language of theology will not be so cumbersome in this study as to dissuade the reader from going any further. When language is a problem definitions or explanations will be offered to aid the reader.

JOHN WESLEY, 1703 - 1791

Because John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, will not be dealt with directly in the text, some introductory comments are in order. He was raised in a traditional Christian atmosphere for the eighteenth century, his father being an Anglican priest, and himself continuing education through to his ordination as a priest in 1728. It is most important to the understanding of the man that he valued tradition very highly, and was cautious about anything that might break down those elements of Christianity which were proven by tradition. Because of this, Methodism developed into a Christian discipline which took the best from tradition and history, while making changes only where absolutely necessary.

While a student at Oxford Wesley associated with a small group of young men with similar religious feelings. This group came to be known as the "holy club." He and his fellows took much abuse at the hands of fellow students, though they managed to bear up under pressure. During this time many derogatory names were applied to Wesley and his followers. One of these was "methodists", which was ultimately adopted as the official name of Wesley's movement. Even though he disliked the name he decided to be bolder than those who chose to label him, and by doing so he took the weapon out of their hands.

In 1735 John Wesley accepted a mission from the Church to the British Colony in Georgia. This mission proved disastrous for the most part, and he returned to England in 1738. But two important things did come out of this journey. First, he met a group of German Christians called the "Moravians" who were to have a marked influence on his thought in later years. They were a very pietistic group who took much time for

quiet meditation and spiritual aspiration. The other important item to come out of this journey was that he started his "Journal." He kept this journal until 1790, and is the single most important work that he wrote. In it he traced his travels, people he met, and most importantly the progression of his religious thought.

The most famous incident in Wesley's life has been referred to as the "Aldersgate experience." This is generally considered to be the moment of his conversion, or at least the moment in which Wesley himself felt so. In an excerpt from his journal he describes the experience:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle of Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

(Parker, P.L., ed., The Heart of John Wesley's Journal, N.Y., Eaton and Mains, p.43.)

After this Wesley began his open air preaching, and subsequently the growth of his Methodist society started. As he experienced growth and the demand for more "methodist" preaching he found it necessary to employ Lay preachers. In this he was very cautious, not allowing his preachers to administer the sacraments due to their lack of ordination. He maintained this position for many years, and held steadfast to his belief in the sanctity of the Anglican Church. In later years he finally separated himself from the Church to some degree and began ordaining ministers himself to perform all of the priestly functions. It was at this point that his brother Charles, famous in his own right as a hymn writer, had

to separate himself from John, being very opposed to separatism from the Church in any way.

John Wesley lived to be eighty seven years old. Upon his death in 1791 there were nearly 80,000 Methodists in England, along with 312 ministers. In North America there were nearly 50,000 Methodists. In just two years from his death membership had grown to over 7 million, with 50,000 ministers. All of this was the result of Wesley's years of faithful labor for the Lord. In his later years he continued to preach daily, as many as four times a day, until he was in his eighties. He arose each morning at 4:00 a.m. and meditated, prayed, and studied the Bible until it was time for him to go to work preaching the gospel. All in all, he was a man of great inner strength and spiritual power. hopefully, this short work will do honor to doctrine of theology for which he laid the groundwork.



## CHAPTER I

### INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY

The purpose of this chapter is to establish an understanding of the true intent and purpose of the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. In doing so we must understand how God has spoken to man, and why he chose to use these methods.

### REVELATION

Revelation, in Christian usage, refers to that particular point at which God touches man, in any of a number of ways: physically, emotionally, intellectually, etc. Within the text of Genesis we have the record of God's first revelation to man in which he walked and talked directly with his subject, Adam. Since then mankind has not had nearly so direct and perfect a revelation of God. Even in the person of Jesus Christ God chose to keep his identity partially veiled. Throughout the Old Testament we have the record of the various methods God has employed in order to speak to His subjects. If one traces the Old Testament records he will see a pattern in which God develops His revelation toward the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ.

In the age of the Patriarchs, the fathers of Judaism, God worked with individual leaders in a direct way. Although he did not reveal himself in the sense that he did to Adam, he did speak directly to these individuals: the "still small voice" which Abraham heard, the voice at the "burning bush" for Moses, among others. These occurrences are sometimes referred

to as "Theophanies", meaning "a manifestation or appearance of God to man." The age of the Theophanies dwindled as the Law given to Moses was instituted and the priesthood of Judaism established.

As the period of the Priesthood and the Kings progressed God chose to speak to Jewish leaders more indirectly, through his priests and prophets, although he did not completely sever himself from communion with these leaders. As this period progressed the kings became more and more corrupt, the nation divided, and ultimately the priesthood became corrupt. This corruption led to the downfall and subsequent captivity of the Jewish nation as God tried to bring his people back to his way. ————— Corruption, downfall, and captivity was a pattern repeated by the Jewish race within which God attempted to realign his chosen Israel with himself.

The third period, that of the Prophets, was the final stage in God's Old Testament revelation. It also provided the function of setting the stage for God's ultimate revelation, Jesus Christ. During this third stage God used his prophets to speak condemnation, destruction, and judgement. There were few kind words to be spoken, God was issuing his final ultimatum. By the time of the birth of Christ the Jewish nation had been reduced to a second class state, under forced submission to the Roman empire. About the year A.D. 70 Israel ceased to exist as a nation, with the destruction of Jerusalem, and is now, 2000 years later, just being gathered together again. But, just before this judgement came to pass, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to the world.

To Christianity and in reality, to the world, Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation. In him we have God revealing himself in the form

of a human being, both as an example of the perfect nature and as a sacrifice for our sins, the "righteous requirement of the law." Through this skeletal history of revelation we are able to see how God has employed differing ways to reach man. In each Old Testament instance man failed to respond to God, thus the final revelation in his son, Jesus Christ, by whom he gave mankind the means to respond to his call. This history of God's revelation is provided for is in the scriptures, the evidence of God's dealings with mankind. The next step in discussing is to evaluate the validity of the Holy Bible from an evangelical point of view.

### THE BIBLE

Some people believe in the Bible, some people don't believe in it. Some people view it as a history, while some view it as an inspired archive of God's words to man. Different opinions of Biblical inspiration and relative value abound. Today it isn't just enough to say that one believes in the Bible. Around every corner is a pitfall seeking to destroy confidence in the inspired record of God's revelation. It is important here to take a look at the various trends in theological thought which effect inspirational opinion, and to establish the Wesleyan position.

### CURRENT TRENDS

In this half of the twentieth century we hear such descriptives as "liberal", "fundamental", "orthodox", "neo-orthodox", "evangelical", and "neo-evangelical", being used to describe the various camps of thought concerning Christianity. Though most of these words have been in use for some time, they have more recently been used to identify specific

concepts of Biblical inspiration. This usage has not been in keeping with the restricted definitions of the terms, but it is the major pattern of use which has developed. It also is our only specific interest in them at this time.

Liberal. The "liberal" concept of Biblical inspiration is relatively easy to grasp. It is as the name implies, a very loose concept: the Bible may or may not have value here, depending on the circumstance of its application. It is ranked equally with other religious writings outside of Christianity. The inspirational level of the Biblical authors is considered no greater than that of the other religious authors outside of Christianity, with possible weighting depending on the religious bias of the individual. Many "Christian liberals" choose the Bible as their main religious tool because it simply satisfies their pattern of beliefs. Regardless of this looseness, some liberal theologians have offered many valuable insights into Christian thought. If they are heard they can often act as checks against radical ideas from other extremes.

Fundamental. At the other end of the spectrum is what is referred to as "Fundamentalism." This term has been used of recent in an occasional derogatory sense. None is intended here. Fundamentalism is at the ultra-conservative end of the scale. Inspiration is pictured here as absolute and complete: the Bible is the infallible, totally reliable, and absolutely inerrant word of God. There is no real problem here, except that it may generate a tendency to over emphasize the Bible, and rank it somewhere in value with the trinity. This is not a widespread difficulty, but more a reaction to extremes which attack this position.

Evangelical. Within the spectrum bounded by the two previously mentioned theological camps are all the other trends and their various modifications. Individual opinions run the entire scale, leaving no gaps, but the general trends are relatively well defined. What has been identified as the evangelical position is nearly identical with the fundamental position, except that it takes more pains in identifying the value of the Bible as intended by its maker. The Bible is valued as the complete record of God's revelation to man, infallible and inerrant. But it is kept more within the realm of the Christian religion. The main purpose of the Bible is to reveal God's total revelation to man with its object being the promotion of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Though it may be a test of natural science, it was not created specifically for that purpose, and this aspect is not emphasized.

Neo-Evangelical. A variation of the evangelical position is sometimes referred to as the neo-evangelical position, and is a relatively new term. It is nearly identical to the evangelical position, except that it further deemphasizes the application of the scriptures outside of the area of religion. In its definition of inspiration the word "inerrant" is dropped for this purpose. There has been a great deal of recent argument and discourse over this issue, as the trend has just recently developed. The central focus of debate is over the use of the word "inerrant", in that it makes the Bible a measuring tool for the natural sciences and history among other things. The impact of this problem is very great, and we could not begin to deal with it here, so for our purposes we will let the issue lie.

Neo-Orthodox. A final position to be discussed here is that of the neo-orthodox movement. Neo-orthodoxy is a relatively loose knit category

of Christian thought, encompassing the relatively diverse ideas of a handful of early twentieth century theologians. The term "neo-orthodox" was used originally to identify those who were neither liberal nor orthodox. "Orthodoxy", in a broad sense encompasses both fundamental and evangelical thought. It is a term used to identify the main stream of religious thought within a variety of religious applications, including Judaism and Islam among others. Neo-Orthodoxy, or "new" orthodoxy, then, should be relatively close to the Orthodox if it is to stay true to its definition. But in practice it is closer to liberal thought. There is no "one" neo-orthodox position, due to the wide range and independence of thought of the theologians in this group, but a reasonable definition of rather broad scope has been developed to describe the view of inspiration issuing from it. Simply stated, the Bible is pictured as "containing" the word of God. Not all of the Bible is inspired, and in some applications none of it is. But the Bible is considered the way to God. If the reader experiences a moment in which he "meets Christ", he has personally witnessed the inspiration or revelation of God. More specifically, the Bible is not the word of God, but rather it contains the "Word of God", this "Word" being the person of Jesus Christ as he is referred to in the first verses of the gospel of John. This moment of meeting Christ has been identified as "crisis", a level of experience within the individual. It is in this concept of "crisis" theology that neo-orthodoxy has provided Christianity with an important contribution. Emphasis on the experience of meeting God through Jesus Christ has permeated all of Christianity, and though it is a historically proven fact, it was brought out again through this movement in part.

## THE WESLEYAN POSITION

The previously stated concepts of inspiration were necessary in this study in order to assist in understanding and confirming what Wesleyan theology sets forth as its view of inspiration. In the years since John Wesley all of these trends have contributed in both strengthening and refining his original thought, and though great changes have occurred elsewhere, Wesleyan theology has stayed true to the ideas of John Wesley.

The Wesleyan position concerning Biblical inspiration is basically identical to the evangelical position. It pictures the Bible as the "inspired" record of the acts of God, his revelation of himself and his plans for mankind. The Bible, here, is considered infallable and inerrant in its original manuscripts or "autographs". In expanding on this, it is understood that God worked through the human writers of the Bible to produce the desired effect. He did not simply dictate his words to be copied and distributed. This is evidenced by the Biblical authors themselves: their style, the evidence of their personalities at work, and the fact that it is mainly an historical account involving men. It is not just a book of doctrine and principles handed down to man by God.

The Wesleyan position emphasizes the utility of the Bible. In order to properly understand and utilize the Bible one must understand its intended purpose and value. The first thing to be understood is that the Bible is not just a book of religious rules and guidelines. True, these rules and guidelines may be discerned by studying the scriptures, but this aspect is secondary to its real purpose. If this function is overemphasized then the "law" and the keeping of the law become the focus, and the value of faith and grace lose their primary position. They, and not the law, are the means by which man grasps God's plan for him.

In form the Bible is primarily a history, tracing the unfolding revelation of God to man, and establishing the grounds for the appearance of Jesus Christ. Rather than just issuing broad statements of fact, God chose to demonstrate those qualities of his nature that are germane to his relationship to creation. In this history we are able to see these qualities at work. They are the qualities of justice, grace, and love, coupled with his desire for man's reciprocating with obedience, faith, and love.

God has revealed himself in history, with the scriptures being the living evidence of this revelation. The ultimate revelation, Jesus Christ, is the cumulative answer to the difficulty which God experienced in dealing with man throughout history. He gave his people rules for "righteous" living, and set into motion a plan by which mankind, having fallen away from him, could come back into a harmonious relationship with him. We see by tracing through the history that mankind ultimately proved itself incapable of raising itself to the requirements of God. Thus the reason for Jesus Christ. In him the requirements of the rules, the law, were all met, and they were met in such a way as to include all of mankind. We often hear of the death of Christ as being the "vicarious" atonement for man's sins. This means that he died as a substitute for mankind:

And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (I John 2:2)

This concept is pivotal for much of Wesleyan theology, that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was universal in its atoning nature. It does not mean, though, that salvation is universal. Salvation must be appropriated by the individual by the required act of faith as stated in John 3:16:

". . . that whosoever believe in his name should have everlasting life."



So what we have in the Bible is the indisputable truth of the acts of God, written by men, wholly inspired by God, as a means of instructing mankind in the way to eternal salvation and harmony with God. This is accomplished in the form of a history that demonstrates this truth in action, and points directly to the only means of our salvation, Jesus Christ. These concepts have been stated as the Wesleyan position, but by no means are they restricted to the Wesleyan tradition. As stated previously, the Wesleyan position is primarily the evangelical position, and is also considered the true orthodox position as established at the beginning of Christianity.

## CHAPTER II

### BEGINNINGS: THE DOCTRINE OF THE CREATOR AND THE CREATION

The concept of the creation has been with us throughout history. But through the years science has attempted to displace the idea of creation with a variety of evolutionary concepts. The purpose of this chapter is not to prove creation, though, for it has been argued in all quarters at far greater length than is possible here. Rather, we will agree that creation is a historical reality because of our Biblical beliefs, and discuss the who and the what of God, the creator, and the nature of the universe and man, the creation. Christianity universally accepts the creation, in some variation, and evangelical/fundamental Christianity accepts the Biblical account of Creation as recorded in Genesis. This account has been given to us for religious purposes, and it is unreasonable for us to expect it to be historically and scientifically complete. This is an area where the evangelical attitude toward keeping the Bible within the realm of its intended purpose can be seen.

Though science has historically attempted to disprove the fact of the creation, it is even now going through a period where it is assessing the validity of that position. Many accepted and qualified scientists and astronomers are beginning to see the necessity of something other than an evolutionary concept in order to explain the physical evidence that the universe is yielding. Theorists are even now developing explanations that involve the necessity of a moment of creation. The ultimate outcome of science's re-viewing of the creation concept is yet to be seen, but

it seems to press closer and closer to a widespread acceptance of creation as the most logical answer to the existence of the universe.

### THE CREATOR

In this section we will first approach the various evidences that men have used in an attempt to prove the existence of God, then we will deal with the nature of God, as much as is humanly possible. In the following subsection a great deal of help was received from W.T. Purkiser, Exploring Our Christian Faith (Kansas City, Beacon Hill Press, 1960)pp.39-59.

### EVIDENCES OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

Philosophers and theologians alike have labored to come up with undisputable "proofs" for the existence of God. These proofs in the end all fall somewhat short of being able to convince categorically of the existence of God. John Wesley himself avoided using any of these proofs in his ministry. He felt that the evidence of God's existence had to be felt in man's heart before it had any validity or impact. This point is well taken, for no man can be convinced to join in the acceptance of God's salvation unless he first believes in his heart. No amount of evidence concerning God's existence can produce this condition in a man's heart. But if these proofs or evidences can encourage any man of weak faith who feels the existence of God from his heart, or who needs only a slight push in order to accept God's plan of salvation, then they are worthwhile and should be stored in the mind for that purpose. The following evidences, though not exhaustive, are used extensively as proofs for the existence of God.

The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God. The ontological

evidence involves the "idea of God. The argument used here is that the "idea" of God could not exist in the mind of man without its being a reality. Without a real God there could not possibly be any idea of God. Man is incapable on his own of thinking up the idea of a being or a state of existence greater than he himself is capable of. To some theologians this argument carries so much weight as to be conclusive evidence to them that God does exist, while to others its value seems to completely slip by them. The concept is abstract enough to elude the ability of many to grasp it, and in discourse it can become even more abstract. In Purkiser's account he uses the statement of St. Anselm, one of the early church fathers, which was the earliest written argument for this concept:

God is that Being than whom no greater can be conceived;  
 But a God existing in fact is greater than a God existing  
 only in idea;  
 Therefore, God must be thought of as existing in fact.

As you can see it has elements of both logic and illogic, and will seem perfectly plausible to some while seeming ridiculous to others. But the argument has validity if it is agreed that man has no ability to create concepts on his own, and that he only visualizes that which he has seen, experienced, or felt in some way.

The Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God. The cosmological

evidence is one of the most basic proofs for the existence of God, and is basic to many people who don't know it by this name. It reasons that the existence of the universe demands the existence of God as its Cause. It follows the scientific pattern of cause and effect, and the subsequent reasoning that the greater the effect the greater the cause. Therefore,

the awesome scope and magnitude of the universe, considered as the effect, would need a cause of equal importance. This argument is limited, though, in that it does not allow for any nature of God beyond that of being the first Cause.

The Teleological Argument for the Existence of God. Here we find an argument quite similar to the cosmological argument, and which goes hand in hand with it. This evidence involves the concept of "purpose." Many things exist which have a purpose, such as eyes to see with, ears to hear with, and this purpose leads to the necessity of a "Purposer." At first this line of thinking doesn't seem to have too much value, but given the proper light it has weight even with the negative mind. If the existence of things with a purpose, and there are a multitude, were given wholly to chance, the odds of their occurrence would be astronomical. Not even the evolutionary time scale of the most optimistic anthropologist could account for the time needed for evolution to construct all of these purposeful things. Still, this argument can be viewed as speculative, and shrugged off by those who wish.

The Moral Argument for the Existence of God. This argument was developed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, partly because he had rejected the other arguments for the existence of God. He particularly disliked the ontological argument. In the moral argument Kant argues that the facts of moral law and man's moral agency presupposes the existence of God as the supreme moral being. He felt that in a natural, unemotional, and irrational universe man could not have become a moral agent without something to make him such, as a moral God. This argument has been expanded on by others since to include other aspects of man's nature, such as reason, judgement, the psychological, and the emotional.

The Empirical Argument for the Existence of God. In scientific use empirical evidence is that which is gathered by observation and experience. In this argument we have the same concept at work, but it only has value to the Christian, one who has personally experienced God. If a person has experienced God in prayer, conversion, worship, and meditation, then other arguments for the existence of God function merely as window dressing. Alternately, the empirical argument would not begin to satisfy the cold, sterile mind of science, which has no means of measuring the result. To a person who has not experienced God this argument is useless, but within the circle of Christianity it should carry the greatest weight.

The Weight of the Evidence. Regardless of how hard Christianity works to prove to the world that God does exist, the world resists. To the world none of the arguments for the existence of God are acceptable. But all we have to do is look back through history to a time when God was even more evident to see that man resists God as a rule, and the simplest way to resist God is to pretend that he does not exist. So, no matter how conclusive our arguments are they would not be suitable to the world. The Gospel must first be presented on a level where it offers mankind an answer to an inner need, and not on an impersonal, scientific level.

#### THE NATURE OF GOD

As stated in the introduction, in practice theology is the study of how God relates to man, and not simply the study of God. The whole nature of God is not visible or comprehensible to man. But through the scriptures we are able to gain glimpses of the nature of God, especially those aspects of his nature which relate to us. Though God has graciously allowed us

to know these aspects of his nature, we still have a clouded picture. God has never revealed his complete nature to man, and even if he did it would be incomprehensible. What we are going to do in the following section is attempt to delineate what we do know of God's nature.

Three characteristics of God's nature which have been well established are those of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. In layman's terms these terms mean respectively "all powerful," "all seeing," and "all present." Peculiarly enough, though we reason that these are all characteristics of God, they are also characteristics of his incomprehensible nature. They are aspects of his infinite nature which finite man cannot totally understand. Who can understand how God can be in all places at one time and yet be capable of dealing individually with each situation and each individual man? What person, in prayer, hasn't wondered how God could possibly be paying attention to his prayer while listening to millions of other prayers simultaneously? These questions must, by reason of man's finite nature, go unanswered until we find ourselves finally in the presence of God. Only then will we fully comprehend the awesome nature of God's being.

Through the scriptures we also know that God is a moral being, having set forth the Law and required man's compliance with it. We know that he is a God of justice, always holding himself true to the laws which he established. We know that he is a God of mercy, as evidenced in both the Old and New Testaments. And we know that he is a God of infinite love, having given his own son as the due sacrifice for our sins, in order to meet the requirements of the law which he set forth. Understanding these characteristics of God is absolutely essential if the Christian is to begin to take full advantage of all that God has promised us.

One word used throughout the Bible carries with it connotations of all of the endearing aspects of God's nature which relate directly to mankind. This word is Father, and it relates to man on a level which he is capable of understanding and comprehending. Though we may not be able to understand all of the erudite expressions use to describe God, if we know that God is our father then we know enough. It conveys to us that God loves us and that he desires that all of his children come to him as their father. It is no wonder, then, that this word has found its way into nearly all of the prayers that men make to God. The most poignant expression of this father relationship is recorded in the Gospel of Mark, ch. 14:36, and in Paul's letter to the Romans, ch. 8:15. Here, the term "Abba-Father" is used, and it translates most closely to our twentieth-century expression "Daddy." In this sense we can imagine more of God's nature as it relates to us than from any other position. All Christians should consider most deeply this most beautiful insight into the nature of our Heavenly Father. We are to view God as our father with the same trust and adoration that a young child would his earthly father. In this we are reciprocating the act of God in being the perfect father to us. This fatherly love of God extends to all men, and not just those who are Christians.

The final aspect of God's nature with which we will deal is that of his threefold being: more commonly referred to as the Trinity. We believe in One God, but one God with a threefold nature: that of being God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Though the word "Trinity" was never used in the Bible, it was employed as a peculiar word in order to specifically identify this aspect of God's nature. The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to the Christian faith, it is considered a



foundation doctrine. Because it involves the persons of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit we will expand on this doctrine in the two following chapters. It is necessary to discuss the characteristics of all three persons of the Trinity before we can completely deal with their relationship to each other.

### THE CREATION

"In the beginning God created. . . ". These first words of the book of Genesis are the most famous and universally known words of the Bible. What evangelical Christianity believes is that this creation of God was the entire universe, and not just a part of it. What many fail to see, though, is that there is a twofold nature to this creation. In the first part God created the universe with all of its material implications, and along with it the animal life. In the second part he created Man to be its master, and to be his companion. Man was created in his own image for this purpose.

The Universe. We believe that God created the entire universe, matter from non-matter. We have no idea how he accomplished this, and we have no idea what the nature of existence was before the creation. We do know that God has existed from before the creation and that he is a spiritual being. The term "spiritual" has always been used in Christian language, but it is even hard for man to comprehend. All we can really say about spiritual existence is that it is non-material. The universe and all of its trappings, save mankind, is absolutely material, and has no spiritual nature. Mankind alone has the qualities of being both material and spiritual. Whether or not the material universe will ever be terminated we cannot say for sure, even from the Biblical evidence. Though we believe

that the physical resurrection is evident in scripture, and that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, we cannot say absolutely that these are of the material of this universe. Nor can we say that they are not. In this area we must take a wait-and-see attitude. To over interpret scripture does no one any good, and the scriptural evidence is just not clear enough in this area. To understand this problem all one has to do is look around at the variety of opinions concerning the Second Coming and its surrounding events. All of these opinions are held to be based on the scriptural evidence, yet they all differ in either some or all details.

Good and Evil. Another thing that we know from Genesis is that the Creation was perfect when it was created, though it became imperfect when mankind disturbed its fabric through disobedience; the sin of Adam. But how could a perfect universe have become imperfect? How could man have been disobedient when he too was a perfect creation? Here we have a major theological dilemma: if God created a perfect universe in all respects, and was present to watch over and care for it, how could it have become imperfect? This problem relates not only to sin, but also to the existence of evil. Evil here is used in the sense of "natural" evil, that which has befallen man due to no fault of his own, such as accidents, destructive acts of nature, etc. Even Satan, once Lucifer, the most beautiful and powerful angel in the heavens, is a creation of God. So the answer that Satan created evil is not completely adequate. He was merely a vehicle for the introduction of evil.

What we will propose here as an answer will be the current textbook solution, which is by no means the final statement concerning this matter. This is one of the most irritating problems confronting the theologian,

and if one dwells on it too long then seeking a solution can become obsessive. So offering to you the mass of weakly proposed solutions would only be an unnecessary burden.

The solution: Imagine that in God's creation of man, and in order to make him a free moral agent, there was the possibility of disobedience and contradiction. Imagine also that the creation of something "good" would automatically create at least the possibility of something "bad" or evil. In other words, without the possibility of evil there could be no way of judging whether or not something was good. The combination, then, of man's free moral agency with the possibility of evil were present at the time Adam chose to be disobedient. As a result of this original disobedience the factors of gradual and continual deterioration of God's perfect natural creation were set in motion. — The major difficulty here is that the inference concerning evil could be carried too far. That would be to say that evil exists concurrently with God. This is not the case, though, God is always before evil, always greater than evil. Hopefully this solution will offer illumination and demonstrate at least the possibility of solution.

Man. "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness,... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he them: male and female created he them." Here we have the account of the second phase of God's creation, mankind. Once again we have a perfect creation, which eventually became imperfect of its own will. This perfect creation was a being which walked and talked with God, and God was happy with this. It has been speculated that Adam was a magnificent being in all respects, a superman if you will. He was possessed of a perfect bodily form and mental capabilities beyond our imagination. He existed at first in

perfect harmony with his creator. Then through his free will agency he chose disobedience, God cast him from his presence, and since that time mankind has experienced the consequences of that disobedience.

All men are possessed of the disobedient nature of Adam, and all men have made the choice of disobedience. In this sense we experience what is referred to as "original sin." It is said that this nature of sin is inherited from Adam, though we must be cautious not to blame Adam and thus remove the blame from ourselves for our own sin. We are all directly responsible for our disobedience. In attempting to identify this sin nature it has been described in theology as "total depravity" for want of a better phrase. Total depravity does not mean that man is depraved in the sense of a criminal who harbors nothing but evil destructive thoughts. Rather it references a condition in which man's heart is turned downward, like a water logged object that slowly sinks, though it retains some buoyancy. The Biblical history evidences the truth of this condition: man attempting on his own to do good (some buoyancy) but continuing ever downward without God's help (slowly sinking). Men were not just utterly sinful, and thinking only of ways to disobey God without consideration of anything else. Men do not spend every waking moment devising ways to disobey God. There are, of course, certain Biblical figures who, after years of continuing this downward trend, seemed to sink to the bottom: the evidence of the ultimate outcome of the sin condition.

If this is true, then it would follow that man needs God in order to correct this condition. This need is absolute and universal, all men must have God's assistance for this purpose. Today we have the onset of salvation and the presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit for this

specific need. Naturally, the dynamics of this are far greater than this simple statement, but it does encompass the principal.

Peculiar to man is his dual nature. He is the only creature of God that is both material and spiritual. This nature has led to a great deal of speculation as to its implications. We know that St. Paul said that the flesh wars with the Spirit, and we know that certain physical needs lead to temptation and sin. But this does not mean that our physical nature is evil. The "flesh" that Paul spoke of was actually a part of man's spiritual side, his own self will to satisfy his needs or wants in a method which is disobedient to God. This is man's predisposition to sin. The tendency to blame the body for sin has been around for a long time, and is not something that has been recently devised. At the time of Christ's death there were certain religious orders which were referred to as "gnostics". One of their doctrines was that all material things were evil, and only spiritual things were good. This led to their conclusion that as long as man's Spirit lived in his physical body he could never conquer evil because he lived in an evil body. But this line of reasoning is absolutely wrong. Our bodies are the creation of God, and all things created by God are good. Our bodies may be corrupted by sin, but they are still worthy in the sense of their being created by God.

Finally, we must realize that God's primary focus is on man himself. The world was created for mankind, and mankind was created for God's benefit. This is still his purpose, and his redemptive plan is always leading toward the ultimate goal of realizing that purpose. It is against the nature of scripture for a man to think of himself as worthless to God. If this were true then the scriptures need never have been written.

God would have abandoned us to proceed toward our own destruction with all possible speed. What we have in ourselves is Man: created of God for his benefit; created in the natural image of God, having the characteristics of intellect, conscience, moral capability, abstract reasoning, etc., and also having "personality;" created in the moral image of God and therefore being responsible for the use of his abilities. But man is corrupted by original sin, and therefore is in need of a specific plan to regain his original estate. Thus, God's redemptive plan, culminating in the sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ.

### CHAPTER III

#### JESUS CHRIST AND THE ATONEMENT

To humanity Jesus Christ is the most important person in history, and his life and death is the most important event in history. Because of this, this chapter will go into greater detail than ordinary in order to present the facts of the Wesleyan position. This chapter will discuss first the historical purpose and importance of Jesus, and secondly the person of Jesus Christ from a Biblical perspective. In appreciating the immensity of the life of Jesus it is essential to know who he really was.

#### THE PURPOSE OF JESUS CHRIST

Christians understand that their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their savior provides for their salvation, and they understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But beyond this there is often a great void when it comes to understanding him. We will first deal with the purpose of Jesus Christ; why he exists and what he did.

From the point of Adam's sin God has been trying to bring man back to himself, back to a place where he can fellowship with his creation. Through the accounts of the Jewish nation in the Old Testament we see how God set up a plan whereby he could retrieve humanity. He showed us his work in the world through a particular "race." He chose Abraham as the founder of this race and made plans for its growth and prosperity. He granted them a land of their own, promised them prosperity and happiness if they would follow his ways, and established his Law to show them how to follow him. But these especially blessed people continuously failed

God. Again and again they utterly failed him. But rather than destroying them as the law established was his right, he provided instead for a lesser judgement. But even the prolonged captivities under enemy nations failed to serve as a deterrent to sin. Once the Jewish people were reestablished and prospering after captivity they again fell away from serving God, back into sin and idolatry. Though God's protection and mercy were continuously evidenced in the Old Testament, the underlying purpose that is traced throughout is to demonstrate that man is not capable of coming to God under his own power.

The importance of the law runs concurrently with the theme of man's inability to save himself. In the law we see the value of sacrifice. For every sin there must be made an offering. This offering is a sacrifice to demonstrate repentance, the sorrow for and turning away from sin. But we also know that "the wages of sin is death", and no sacrifice short of man's own life could satisfy the law completely. So at the end of the Old Testament account we see the pattern of failure proved by the Jewish nation, and we see the law still unfulfilled.

At this point you may wonder why God didn't just change the rules, and by a wave of his all powerful hand change mankind into creatures of obedience. But God, in creating the rules for man, gave his own promise to abide by them. In order for man to trust the law of God they must be assured that he would also abide by it. Therefore he had but two choices: one was to call the judgement due and declare the penalty immediately payable by the death of humanity; and the other was Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)



The love that God had for mankind was so great that he gave his own Son life on this earth as a man for the ultimate purpose of being the sacrifice for our sins.

Now that it is established why Jesus Christ came to us, we will examine the functions that he performed. We know, of course, that because of sin he served the function of being the ultimate sacrifice for those sins. But there are also thirty-three years of his life which served a function. His life came before his death, and we will discuss this life in the following section.

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS' LIFE

Though the law of sin and death has been demonstrated in the Old Testament, men still complain that they never had a chance. They claim that they were cast into a world of sin where they were forced to follow in sin. Though God, by reason of his being God, his sovereignty, did not have to answer this complaint, he chose to anyway. In Jesus Christ he provided a man that was subject to the same needs and temptations of other men. This specific quality is attended to in the Bible in the account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. In Matthew 4:1-11 we see that Jesus was required to spend forty days in the wilderness without food, at which time he was tempted by Satan. This temptation was real, and not just the meeting of a mandatory requirement. While he was weak from hunger Satan tempted him to break the fast by turning stones to food, and he was tempted to demonstrate that he was the Son of God by throwing himself down from the top of the temple so that the angels would rescue him. Finally he was offered the rule of the world if he would worship Satan. These temptations were intended to be greater than

that which any other man could withstand in order to quiet all claims that this was just a token enterprise. In this sense Jesus showed his manhood while remaining free from sin, in order to be the perfect sacrifice.

Besides demonstrating the reality of his manhood, Jesus also set the example as to how a Christian should live: "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15) Here Jesus expressly referred to his being a servant by washing the feet of the disciples, and implies that we should also be servants. But this analogy carries into the rest of Jesus' life. Though he was the Son of God, he remained respectful and humble, he loved all men, and he subjected himself to humiliation for our sake. To be like Jesus is to seek to conform ourselves to the pattern which he gave us, a pattern of love, servitude, humbleness, and obedience. No man could find a higher example to live by.

### THE ATONEMENT

At the end of his life here on earth Jesus was required to die, as all men are, and not escape death as he had the power to. But he did not die a quiet, peaceful death, nor did he die because of his own sin. He died for our sin, because of all the sin which the world was responsible for and would be responsible for: "And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:2) And his death was far from ordinary: he was condemned to death by his own people, and forced to give his life in the same manner as the worst criminal offenders did, on a cross. ———— Though we weep at the account of Jesus' death, we must at the same time rejoice, for in his death our sins were paid for and we can now meet our savior face to face in glory.

There are several elements to be considered in the atonement of Jesus Christ. These include: The vicarious sacrifice, the reconciliation, and the redemption. In the vicarious sacrifice we see the law fulfilled, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." ( Matt. 5:17 ) The term "vicarious" references the substitute quality of Jesus' death, his death was the substitute for ours. By the reconciliation it is meant that man is brought back into a state where he can come before God directly. The curtain of sin is dropped, as is represented in the Biblical account of the rending of the temple veil upon the death of Jesus. No longer is a priest or earthly mediator necessary, Jesus Christ is now our High Priest. Finally, the redemptive nature of the atonement is important. We, as sinners, have not come back to God. Jesus has bought us with his blood, redeemed us from death as if it were a pawn broker. Remember that the atonement means to be at one with God, the at-one-ment of man with God.

#### THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

In the early period of the Church development the question over the person and nature of Jesus Christ was causing a great furor. Because of this, the Emperor Constantine, in A.D. 325 called a council to settle the issue. This council has been known as the Council of Nicea, and is the most famous of the early Church Councils. Its decision has had a tremendous impact on theology, and that decision is still discussed in theological circles today. The result of this decision is known as the Nicene Creed, which still states the Orthodox position today. In many churches it is recited regularly in their catechisms as one of their essential doctrines. Wesleyan theology accepts this creed as stating the

true nature of Jesus Christ. In the remainder of this section we will attend to a discussion of the person and nature of Jesus Christ by examining this creed in light of the Biblical evidence.

### THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, there was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

(Reproduced from Justo L. Gonzales, A History of Christian Thought, 'Nashville: Abingdon, 1970.' p. 274.)

The Nicene Creed was the statement against what was labeled as the "Arian heresy," a belief concerning the person of Christ which subjected him to the position of extreme subordination to God: as coming from God, but not being of the same substance as the Father, and not being able to "know" the Father in all of his mystery. Consequently, the paragraph at the end of the creed pronouncing the curse on those who believe or teach differently. (note that "anathematizes" means "to accurse") Had the "Arian" position not become so extremely opposed to the Godhood of Christ it is likely the Nicene Creed would have been less emphatic in stressing its position, especially as relates to the "homoousios" of the Father and the Son. The word "homoousios," oddly enough, came by way of suggestion from Constantine, who probably received it from his counselor, Bishop Eusebius of Cordova, and is interpreted as meaning "consubstantial."

But, in its fight against Arianism, was the Council guilty of going beyond the intent of scriptures in stating its position on Jesus Christ? Or is it possible that the entire scenario leading up to the decision at Nicea was the device of God in establishing and preserving the truth about Jesus Christ the Son of God? ————— Of course, these questions are rhetorical, but this chapter should lead to an understanding of the true person and nature of Jesus Christ.

### THE SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE

There are many scriptural references in the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament which testify to the fact that Jesus Christ was more than a man. For instance, he is often referred to as the Messiah, the Lord, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, etc. But all of these references deal with Jesus as he relates to man. What we are interested in here are those scriptures which deal with Jesus as he relates to God.

The earliest reference to the person of Jesus Christ as he relates to God is found in the prologue to the Gospel of John, in Ch. 1:1-18. Though this is the beginning of the Gospel, the statement here is actually a conclusion which John makes concerning Christ which he has drawn from what he saw and heard from Jesus. Let us proceed in this examination to see what Jesus said of himself to lead John to draw this conclusion.

Within the Gospel narratives the first piece of useful revelation which we encounter is found in Matthew 1:23; "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which translated means 'God with us' ". This quotation refers back to Isaiah 7:14. The name "Immanuel" is most important, for it indicates that Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming Messiah held an extremely

high view of him. In this case, as in many others, the subtle nuances of words and their meanings are important to a few, but the real emphasis should be on their overt meaning and historical use.

Following this we have the revelation of Christ at his baptism by John the Baptist. This passage of scripture is found in Matt. 3:1-17, Mark 1:2-11, and Luke 3:3-23. Here John the Baptist reveals that "He who comes after me is mightier than I," "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt. 3:11) "And his winnowing fork is in his hand to thoroughly clear his threshing floor. . ." (Luke 3:17) Here John hints at the person of Christ, referring to his greatness and to his capacity as the judge of the world. The judgement capacity is one of the stronger early revelations, for it is one of the characteristics held solely by God.

Upon the baptism of Jesus we have the account of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, and the voice from heaven, saying "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17) Here we have one of the many references to the "Sonship" of Christ. Within this area we must keep in mind that the manhood of Jesus is essential to the Salvation plan of God; Jesus must be a man and live as a man in order to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. This is evidenced in Matt. 3:15; as John tried to convince Jesus that he did not need baptism, Jesus said "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Later incidental accounts include Nathaniel's reaction to Jesus upon his calling, "Rabbi; you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." (John 1:49). In many places, as in John 1:51, Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man", a designation chosen by Jesus, drawn from the Old

Testament canon, (Daniel 7:14), which both identifies Jesus from an historical reference while veiling the true nature of Christ by its peculiarity. In John 3:18 we see Jesus referred to as the "only begotten Son of God." Some have spent a great deal of time elaborating on the possibilities of the word "begotten," and the Council of Nicea was very careful to point out that Jesus was "begotten not made of God."

Throughout the Gospel accounts the various references to Christ as the "Son of God," "Son of Man," "Messiah," "Saviour," "King of Kings," etc. are used randomly, one or the other being more familiar to a particular book than to a particular point in time in Jesus life. Having introduced these terms into the examination we will proceed to examine the two major accounts which Jesus makes of himself concerning his true nature and person. Both are found in the Gospel of John: "The discourse concerning the Son's equality with the Father" found in John 5:19-47, and "The upper room discourse" found in John 14:1-31.

Discourse Concerning the Son's Equality with the Father. This passage and the "Upper Room" discourse are the two most valuable texts to be used in determining the true identity of Jesus Christ. The closest that Jesus ever came to specifying his exact person can be found in the statement "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) All of his other statements, although not difficult to understand, seem to approach the whole truth while never quite encompassing it entirely. Consequently, it is left to the individual to draw the final conclusion.

In this first discourse we find Jesus attempting to "demonstrate" himself to the Jewish contingent, which was seeking to condemn him for his work on the Sabbath. The following scriptures are from John ch. 5:

v.19: Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.'

This verse demonstrates both the equality of Jesus to the Father, and yet his subordination to the Father. Jesus can only imitate the Father, yet what he does is of equal value.

v. 21: For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he wishes.

This verse demonstrates the equality of the Son with the Father in that they both possess "creative" power. The ability to give life to anyone is an ability possessed solely by God.

v. 22: For not even the Father judges anyone, but he has given all judgement to the Son.

Referring to Luke 3:17 we find another account of the authority of Jesus to judge. This authority to judge has been assigned unequivocally to the Son by the Father, and the Father no longer exercises this element of Godhood, at least as far as this verse is concerned. In other words, the authority of the Father has been subordinated to the Son in this particular matter.

v. 23: In order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

The equality of honor which is due both the Father and the Son is demonstrated here; Jesus is deserving of no less honor than the Father. This also indicates that honor given to the Son is automatically given to the Father, indicating not only equality but oneness. This idea of "oneness" of the Father and the Son shows up very subtly here, but is revealed more strongly in later passages.

V. 26: For just as the Father has life in himself, even so he gave to the Son also to have life in himself.



To have "life in himself" is to be God. This characteristic given to Jesus by the Father is one of the highest traits that we could comprehend concerning God. Yet here we see that the characteristic, as in other cases, is assigned from the Father to the Son, which still equates some subordination of the Son to the Father. He owes the Father for the "Godliness" he has received from Him.

v. 27: And he gave him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man.

Here we see the usage of the "Son of Man" in a peculiar sense, where he has been using just simply "the Son", presumably indicating his sonship to the Father. Once again we see the capacity to judge that has been assigned to the Son.

v. 30: I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Here we see that the will of Jesus is completely subordinated to the will of the Father. This is not unreasonable, even with total equality of the two. God in two places at one time, with one will controlling the situation. This is conjecture only at this point in time, for Jesus begins unfolding the revelation of himself and then folding it back up as if he is not quite ready to reveal himself completely at this time.

v. 36: But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father has sent me.

Jesus, slowly folding the revelation back up, now speaks of the accomplishments which the Father has sent him to earth to do, indicating his earthly subordination to the Father. This pattern continues until nearly the close of this discourse, and then Jesus adds a little twist to the revelation:

v. 44: How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?

Jesus stresses monotheism in the statement "the one and only God,"

which would have left the audience questioning how there could be two and yet only one? The answer to this puzzle comes much later, at the Upper Room discourse where we find the final aspects of Christ's unfolding revelation of himself.

The Upper Room Discourse. In the final speech to his disciples Jesus answers lingering questions about where he is going, who he is, who the Father is, and who the Holy Spirit is. Probably the most important verses for this examination are John 14:7-10:

v. 7: If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; from now on you know him, and have seen him.

v. 9: . . . He who has seen me has seen the Father; how do you say show us the Father?"

Jesus could not have made much more direct a statement, other than "I am God". But that is essentially what he was saying. He did not say "If you have seen me you have seen what the Father looks like," or "If you have seen me you have seen a reflection of the Father." Rather he said that they have seen the Father. . . that he was him. . . in person. And yet the disciples didn't seem to comprehend. It wasn't until later that the full impact of what Jesus had said about himself was felt. It is easy to see in the last passage presented that the intended meaning was the oneness of Jesus Christ with the Father. Actually, if one is willing to accept this passage and its implications, it isn't really necessary to be too concerned with the rest. But to answer the question concerning the true nature of Christ, the two discourses deal with every area of comparison between it and that of the Father. If the true nature

of Christ was as has been presented here, though, why did Jesus present himself as he did? Why did he choose to veil himself as he did, and then provide glimpses of his real self from time to time?

The Manhood of Jesus. As mentioned previously, this aspect of Jesus was essential to the accomplishment of God's plan of salvation. Here we should refer back to his baptism, where Jesus says to John the Baptist "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. 3:15) Jesus had to preserve his manhood in order to experience manhood, and to be a valid sacrifice for the sins of the world. Therefore he didn't just appear on the scene and declare himself God by demonstrating all of his power.

The Unfolding Revelation. The revelation of Jesus as God was a slowly developing, unfolding of his secret to the world. This seemed orderly and well planned. The unfolding revelation also supports the four gospel narratives in an unseen harmony. Where they don't always seem to agree on the surface, the revelation of Christ ties them together. They seem to meld together more smoothly in this respect.

The Nicene Creed in Light of the Unfolding Revelation of Jesus as God. The various characteristics of the Creed include "One God-maker of all things visible and invisible;" "One Lord Jesus Christ;" "From the substance of the Father;" "God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made;" and the various characteristics of the vicarious nature of Christ's life and death. Most of these are in keeping with the nature of the revelation by Jesus as we have examined. The only area where the Creed overstated itself was in the conclusion that anyone who didn't follow this line of reasoning was accursed. As we have seen the revelation made by Jesus was hard to comprehend, it is

beyond man to comprehend the reality of Jesus being God. So, though that is our conclusion we should not be too harsh in condemning those who have difficulty grasping this reality, as also the disciples did.

This chapter has taken a relatively complete look at Jesus Christ. It has touched on the example of his life, the nature of the atonement, and the nature of his existence. Jesus Christ is the final and complete revelation of God to man. He is the only means of man's passage from condemnation to salvation. He is the single most important person and event in history. Too much could never be said about him. The focal point of Christianity must always be Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever, Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (John 14:16-17)

### THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, and as such deserves equal attention with the other two. But often the Holy Spirit is not conceived of as a person, an individual character of the Godhead. Instead he is seen as being a presence or a force. Don't misunderstand the term "person" here, it refers to the individual nature of will, thinking, emotion, and other characteristics which are present within God and man, but it is not just the simplistic concept with which we label other men. Orthodox Christianity has established that the Holy Spirit is a person, and that he is equal to God in the same sense that Jesus Christ is.

### THE ORTHODOX PROBLEM

As Christianity was rising from the ashes of what appeared to be its destruction in the death of Jesus Christ, a problem in doctrine surfaced. The Jewish orthodox position was violently monotheistic: there was only one God. This position had gained its tremendous strength because of the many instances of polytheism and idolatry in Jewish history. The problem, then, was how to accept the person of Jesus Christ and subsequently the person of the Holy Spirit and yet retain the oneness of God's nature.

Judaism, of course, still refuses to accept Jesus Christ in the Christian sense. But many Jewish followers of Christianity in the early church had a great deal of difficulty accepting the three persons of the Godhead because of their concept of monotheism. Today, many so-called Christian groups also promote a monotheism which reduces Christ to a position less than God, thus preserving the old idea of monotheism. They also deal with the Holy Spirit as an even lesser entity, often as a kind of impersonal force. This is the case with the contemporary religions of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science. The Worldwide Church of God, though, promotes a view of Jesus Christ as God, but completely disavows any belief in the Holy Spirit.

At the other end of the scale is the problem of polytheism, the belief in more than one God or god. The reasoning here is that if all three persons of the Godhead are equal and distinct, how can there be only one God? But rest assured, there is only one God:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;  
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,  
One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Who we worship, then, is one God in three persons, which we call the Trinity. The word "Trinity" is not a biblical term, but one coined to express that relationship of the three-in-one. To totally grasp the concept of the three-in-one is impossible for mortal man. Such great early Church fathers as Augustine and Tertullian, revered theologians, wrestled with the concept. Each had his own peculiar method of describing what his impression of the Trinity was. Thus, the Church settled for formulae such as the Nicene Creed to stress the oneness of the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Nicene Creed, mentioned in the previous chapter, demonstrates the answer of the Church to the problem of the person of Christ. The debate over this problem, which included the person of the Holy Spirit, was very intense during the period of the early Church. Such great leaders in Christian thought as Augustine, Irenaeus, and Tertullian developed opinions of their own with individual peculiarities. Irenaeus viewed the Trinity as God being Father, Son, and Spirit, while he explained that God created the world by means of his two hands. He saw Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as being the "two hands of God." Tertullian, in arguing against a particular opponent, spoke of God as a "Monarchy" where the rule was one, yet handled by three distinct individuals. A monarch may have a son, and he may manage his kingdom as he pleases. Augustine was especially adamant on our lack of ability to understand the Trinity: the distinctive between the persons of the Trinity is not due to their external actions, but due to some inner relationship. Though we may speak of the different actions of each individual, these acts are really acts of the whole God. ————— Therefore, let us not conclude that the final statement on the person of the Holy Spirit has been issued, or that it ever will be. We must be content to speak of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, and accept and appreciate the great mystery of the triune Godhead.

#### THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Though, as Augustine would have preferred, all the acts of each individual person of the Trinity are actually acts of the whole God, we still choose to ascribe certain functions to each person individually. The scriptures themselves practice this, and thus tell us to do so.

But it is wise to remember that the scriptures also ascribe similar acts to each of the three. One will find a somewhat confusing overlap in the qualities and acts they are each responsible for. So if one Christian group today, for instance, speaks of the work of Jesus Christ in their hearts while another insists on calling it the work of the Holy Spirit, let us not be too concerned over the semantics of the situation, but remember that each is still speaking of God.

But in dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit he should be considered as God in the world today. For as Jesus said, even though he must go, he would pray the Father, and he would give us another comforter. This comforter is the Holy Spirit. In the second chapter of Acts we have the account of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Up until that point the followers of Jesus merely waited quietly without any outward activity. But upon the coming of the Holy Spirit they were empowered as witnesses and immediately began their ministry. The power of the Holy Spirit is also evidenced in the life and work of Jesus. Upon his baptism the Holy Spirit descended on him "like a dove" to reveal the person of Christ to the world. And Luke, speaking in Acts 1:2, speaks of the Holy Spirit as being the one through whom Jesus gave commandments unto the apostles.

There are two aspects to the new work of the Holy Spirit. Most New Testament passages refer actively to the power of the Holy Spirit, his overt work. But of equal importance is the more passive work of the witness of the Holy Spirit. Each of these will be dealt with consecutively in the remainder of this chapter.

The Power of the Holy Spirit. In speaking of the power of the Holy Spirit we are not referring to any display of his personal power, but to the power given to the believer:



But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

(Acts 1:8)

This was the promise given to the believer prior to the day of Pentecost, and is one to be grasped by each and every believer since that day. In the early period of the Church this power was manifested in signs, wonders, healings, witnessing, and the power to grow in number despite fierce resistance from Jewish authority. Wherever the Apostles preached the power of God was witnessed, and the number of followers grew with extraordinary speed.

Though this outward power of the Holy Spirit is still available today, it is not nearly so much in evidence. There are various explanations for this apparent weakening of spiritual power in the believer. Some say that we are in a different period, or dispensation, today and the power of the Spirit as revealed in the early Church is not available now. Another answer is that this power was given only to the Apostles, those who had direct contact with Jesus, and it is therefore not available to us. Yet another answer is that the overall faith of the believers today has been weakened to a point where this power cannot be utilized. A final possibility to consider involves the position of the Church in the world today: the Christian movement is no longer considered a rebel or an outlaw faction, something to be stopped or destroyed. Christianity has been acknowledged for centuries as a mediating power in the world. Therefore, miracles and signs are less in need today in order to witness to the reality of Christ. The general attitude in the world today, and its common mode of acceptance dictates a more quiet and subtle delivery of the Christian message. But whatever the case, the fact still exists that the miracles and signs of the early church are not nearly so evident today as in the early Church.

That the Holy Spirit performed so powerfully in an outward manner in the early Church is important indeed, but the real emphasis was and still is on the power of the Holy Spirit within the believer. A young, immature Church needed outward signs, but as Christianity and Christians matured the real staying power was in the heart. The major emphasis of the New Testament concerns the heart of man, and so should be our search for Spiritual power. In Galatians 5:16 we see the main emphasis of the teaching of Paul the Apostle: that we should walk in the Spirit in order that we might not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, which are manifested in "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, factions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and the like." Likewise, by walking in the Spirit we are empowered to experience the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance."

#### The Witness of the Holy Spirit.

Though here we separate the power of the Spirit from the witness of the Spirit, we will see that in reality the power is in the witness. The witness of the Spirit is a term we use today to describe the act of the Holy Spirit in convincing the believer of the reality of his relationship with God. This witness is manifested in two ways: speaking to the believer in his heart of the actual presence of the Spirit there, and performing a change in the believer which is manifested by growth and the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit.

The witness of the Spirit in the believer's heart is different in each case. At conversion some men feel a mighty power come over them while others feel little. Far more find themselves somewhere in between these two extremes. The Holy Spirit works in each heart as he feels necessary

and as he sees fitting. No particular way is greater than the other. It is the Holy Spirit's intention to do his best work in each individual and lead them to the closest possible relationship with Jesus Christ. To this end all of the Spirit's works are tendered.

As the believer grows in his relationship with the Lord he should see his personal life change. His old habits and ways should be replaced when necessary with new ways, the ways of the Spirit. These ways include the "fruit of the Spirit," delineated by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. Many misinterpret this list of spiritual "fruit" as being individual items of blessing, when they are actually the manifestation of one singular blessing. Spiritual growth is experienced in all these areas, though the full maturity of the fruit may be slow in coming. Once again we need to emphasize the individuality of experience: the Holy Spirit works as he will. The Holy Spirit's work is a patient work, the loving, gentle, and kind nudging and prodding of a loving parent attempting to show his child the right way. In this way we are gently led to grow in God's love and grace, to experience the fruit of the Spirit, and to lead others to the Same Lord.

Up until this point the "gifts" of the Spirit have been deliberately avoided. This isn't because there are no gifts, but because the concept of spiritual gifts is often misunderstood and misapplied. One area of misunderstanding involves who might become a recipient of a gift or gifts. If we look around we see that all men, Christian and non-Christian alike, are possessed of gifts or talents. It is up to the Christian to nurture and use his gift for the greater glory of God. Another misunderstanding is that the more spiritual a person is the greater are his gifts in both magnitude and multitude. Because of this some Christians seek after the

outward appearance of spirituality without looking after the inner need of their souls. In the letter to the Church at Corinth we see Paul speaking to this very problem. In the Corinthian Church we have an immature group with more than its share of sin, yet possessed of many of the most outward gifts. The major consideration of this group was of who had the greatest gift. The Apostle Paul expressed disappointment at this line of thinking, and indicated in his letter to them the grave need to remove the roots of evil from their midst. In the area of spiritual gifts we must accept the fact that the Holy Spirit gives as he sees fitting, and that the gift is not the measure of the man. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:22-23 that even though many will prophecy, cast out demons, and perform wonderful works in his name, that "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Should we possess a spiritual gift or talent we should consider it just that, a gift, given as freely as all of God's grace. The words of the Apostle Paul are most fitting here:

For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, So we being many, are one in the body of Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

(Romans 12:3-8)

John Wesley on the Witness of the Spirit. In his early essays Wesley insisted that saving faith was accompanied by the assurance of one's salvation, of God's favor. But because of some misinterpretation on this point he later changed his position to emphasize that this assurance should occur. His thought on the matter, however, had not changed at all. He

was just being cautious not to invite what was referred to in his time as "enthusiasm". In the area of religious enthusiasm there were factions in his time who sought overt religious experience without really having any idea of what it meant. He insisted that religious understanding was essential to real Christian experience. This understanding came in the area of an intellectual grasp of the facts of salvation, and not just the seeking of a transcendent experience. The necessity of the assurance of faith is born out by the testimony of the scriptures: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16) This witness, he felt, should normally be in the area of intuition, in that the believer should know intellectually that the salvation of God had been performed. After this, though, he also allowed for a wide range of experience wherein the witness of the Spirit might also be expressed. He certainly did not limit this witness to merely the intellectual intuition. Rather, he insisted that this must accompany any experience. Thus, he would agree that the Holy Spirit works differently in each individual. Likewise, we must admit that though one person's experience of salvation might differ from ours, it is perfectly acceptable as long as he expresses the understanding and acceptance of Christ's atoning death in his life. Beyond this we should all be very cautious to judge, "lest any man bring judgement upon himself."

## CHAPTER V

### GRACE AND FAITH

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by Grace ye are saved), And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; That in ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God— not of works lest any man should boast.

(Ephesians 2:4-9)

Grace has been defined as the "unmerited favor of God." It is the gift of God, given freely, without regards to the deservedness of the individual. Therefore, any gift we receive from God is given by his grace, and in almost every case grace and faith go hand in hand. As we see in the passage above, even salvation is appropriated by faith. But there is one instance in the life of every individual where grace is not coupled with faith, an area where God grants his grace before any faith is evident. This is what we call "prevenient grace", which is that grace given by God in order to enable the sinner to see the need for his salvation. Without this grace men are incapable of turning to God, their reprobation being so great as to totally obscure their senses to this need.

It is in this area that we find a dispute between Wesleyan theology and the reformed theology of John Calvin, which permeates much of Christian thought. Actually, the issue emerged before the time of John Wesley, and a small history lesson is in need here to explain the problem.

Over one hundred years before the time of Wesley a Dutch theologian named James Arminius took up defense of a particular doctrinal position which was opposed to Calvinistic concepts. This was in the area of the

extent of the atonement and the nature of grace. The debate in this area lasted over quite a period of time, and continued after the death of Arminius. In 1618 a conference was called by the Dutch Church in order to settle the issue. This conference, known as the Synod of Dort, addressed the specific issues clearly, and identified five points of difference between the Calvinist and Arminian positions. It should be noted that the Calvinistic position was accepted as the official position of the Dutch Church, while we today agree with the Arminian opinion.

Following are the five points of each position:

#### The Calvinistic Position

1. Unconditional election: All men are elected by God either unto salvation or condemnation, and this election was established before the foundation of the world.
2. Limited Atonement: The atonement through the death of Jesus Christ was not universal. It was only for those elected unto salvation.
3. Total Depravity: All men are totally depraved, sinful beyond any ability to turn to God.
4. Irresistible Grace: To those who are elected to salvation grace is irresistible, and they absolutely will conform.
5. Perseverance of the Saints: Better known as "eternal security", it is in keeping with the doctrine of unconditional election, and states that those elected unto salvation shall never fall from grace.

#### The Arminian Position

1. Election Conditioned on Personal Faith: The faith of each man by which he accepts Christ is the condition of his election. At this point he becomes the "elect" of God.
2. Universal Atonement: As stated in I John 2:2, Christ died for the sons of all mankind. This does not make salvation universal, though, salvation is available by faith.
3. Prevenient Grace: Man is unable to exercise saving faith on his own, as in the doctrine of total depravity, rather he is universally given the prevenient grace of God with which to be able.
4. The Sufficiency of Grace: Grace is sufficient to lead all men to salvation, and sufficient to preserve that salvation, but it is by no means irresistible.

5. The Possibility of a Lapse from Grace: The Christian may, of his own will, return to his old state, and thereby forfeit his salvation, not only partially or temporarily, but totally and finally.

The theological and scriptural foundation of the Arminian position

is far more stable than that of the Calvinist position. Calvinist thought in the area of grace and election developed from a tremendous awe and respect for the sovereignty of God, coupled with a weakness for certain scriptural passages. While these several short passages seem to somewhat substantiate an unconditional election, there are far more which stress the free will of man. In fact the entire context of the scriptures indicates a doctrine of free will, where man is both responsible and capable by grace of turning to God. That God would condemn some men to eternal damnation even before their existence seems to go against the very nature of the Bible, its theme and purpose. Because of this problem, we see many Christian groups today which claim a Calvinist background, but who practice an Arminian theology. They have accepted the concept of universal grace along with the free will of men to accept or reject the salvation of Christ.

Arminians agreed with the Calvinist position of man's total depravity, but disagreed with every other point. This is basically because the Calvinist doctrine of election and predestination is the basis for the rest of their doctrines here. Thus the perseverance of the saints, or eternal security, must follow if the doctrine of election is true. Let it be understood that the Arminians had a doctrine of election also, but it read that those who have chosen Christ as their savior are foreordained and elected to salvation by their choosing. There is a Biblical doctrine of election, as evidenced in scripture, but it is not nearly so simple or final as the Calvinist position has stated.



For the Arminians then, who reject the absolute foreordination of the saved and the reprobate, yet accept the total depravity of natural man, there must be a different way for the sinner to come to God than by an irresistible grace. Thus the doctrine of prevenient grace. This terminology is used to reference that grace which God sheds in the heart of each man which allows him the ability to accept or reject Christ. Without this grace man would be unable to respond to God's call due to his condition of sinfulness. In God's eyes any sin separates man from himself, and produces a condition wherein man is incapable of comprehending a relationship with him. So, in the doctrine of prevenient grace, there is a form of grace, though ultimately coupled with faith, that is given prior to faith. We must remember that grace has always preceded faith while more grace follows by faith. God always initiates spiritual activity between himself and man. Prevenient grace is given to all men whereby they might accept the salvation of Christ. No man has this grace withheld from him that he should be condemned without a chance.

The theology of James Arminius became the foundation for much of Wesley's theological thought. Thus, we often hear reference today to Wesleyan-Arminian theology, which is essentially what this book covers. the term "Wesleyan" is used within this text basically because he was the founder of Methodism, and we are dealing with concepts which he espoused, though many of those concepts came from men prior to him, such as Arminius.

### SALVATION

From Chapter III we see that the atonement through the death of Jesus Christ provided forgiveness from sin for all men, and that because of this

God shed his grace freely on all who partake of this atonement. But man must consciously accept salvation through the atonement, as God has given to each within himself the means to accept or reject.

The process of salvation, the steps taken to meet that point, is ordinarily not clear and conscious to the individual experiencing it. A man who desires to be saved can be so by simply accepting Jesus Christ as his savior, a formula believed by all true Christians. The simplicity and beauty of this act should not be disturbed by forcing a dose of doctrinal and theological material upon any sincere individual seeking salvation. But there is a clear progression of steps which a person goes through in obtaining his salvation, though generally without his awareness of them. Any attempt to define spiritual processes in an intellectual mode will never yield a perfectly satisfactory answer, and this holds true for the process of salvation. So, though we will list a series of steps and label them as to their component makeup, this systematization will not be perfect either. For the sake of this study let us label these steps in progressive order: Contrition, Repentance, Acceptance, Justification and Reconciliation, and Regeneration.

Contrition: The condition of a contrite heart is brought about by an individual awareness of sinfulness and subsequent guilt for it. The atonement came about because of sin, and a man must be aware of his sin in order to take part in it. To come before God with a contrite heart means that a man must feel the burden of guilt for his sinfulness, and not just have the guilty conscience of the libertine who feels the occasional twinge of guilt. Contrition is to see one's sin in the cold, gray light of dawn, without the shroud of night to conceal its ugliness. The act of contrition also implies a certain degree of repentance, which we will examine as the next step.

Repentance: This step involves the desire to change from that sinful state which the contrite heart is aware of. It also involves a positive move in the heart to correct the condition of sin, a move that the believer cannot accomplish alone. This move in the heart is the very center of the concept of prevenient grace. Without this grace the act of repentance would be impossible, while because of it the sinner can grasp for the salvation which God has offered to him.

Acceptance: The seeker can only respond to the salvatory information which he is aware of. The information of Christianity is "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) This passage of scripture goes on to say that he who believes is no longer condemned for his sin. An abundance of passages repeat this theme in order for it to be firmly grasped. The seeker who accepts this salvation in his heart has taken the step, made the move of faith by which God grants his next act of grace.

Justification and Reconciliation: Having accepted salvation through Christ we are all justified by his atoning act. At the same time we are all reconciled to God: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) To be reconciled simply means to be at peace with God. This is the promise of Romans 5:1, but it is a shame how few really grasp the magnitude of this step. Before we were reconciled we were as the Prodigal Son, away from and out of communication with the Father. But once reconciled we are back in the blessing of our gracious Father as he intended.

Regeneration: This is literally to be "born again," a term we are all familiar with. Jesus, in speaking to Nicodemus, said "verily, verily, I

say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Though we deal with regeneration in this section as a separate step in the process of salvation, it actually occurs simultaneously with justification and reconciliation. The only difference is in the nature of the step. Justification and reconciliation is the work which God does for us, while the new birth is the work which God does in us. This last step in the salvatory process transforms the believer into a new creature, no longer under the bondage of the law, but under the freedom of God's grace.

As mentioned earlier, the individual seeking salvation is not required to be aware of all these steps in the process in order to secure his own salvation. They normally occur in the depths of the heart, and exhibit themselves as a single motivation or act: the seeker desires salvation from his sinfulness, and accepts Jesus Christ as his savior. Salvation is thereby granted unto him. To tamper with this simplicity and require that a person have a complete understanding of the complexity of the relationship of sin and the atonement would endanger the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works individually with each seeker, and finds the area in each heart which can be touched in order to insure the greatest possibility of that person's salvation. But after a person is regenerated it then becomes necessary that he learn and understand just what God has done for him. John Wesley felt that immediately after salvation the new Christian should begin his learning of the doctrines and laws of scripture.

#### OBJECTIVE MEANS OF GRACE

After a person has joined in the gift of God through salvation he has only received the first, though the greatest, of God's many gracious gifts. His grace is shed on us often without request or need, and always when

really needed. We also receive grace as the result of Christian growth and maturation. In this age of loosely organized, experience oriented religious groups, the objective means to grace are often overlooked by the Christian. This has been especially true of the charismatic and fundamental wings of Christianity, which shun formality or ceremony in almost any form. But John Wesley was of Anglican origins, and extremely faithful to the decrees and practices of that Church. He saw in the sacraments of the Church a means to the grace of God which was scripturally valid. In the area of the sacraments Wesley held high the value of Baptism and the Holy Communion, along with the other practices of organized worship, prayer and meditation, and daily reading of the Bible. It is of absolute necessity that a believer maintain a proper balance of all of these things in order to expect growth and maturation. Of course, baptism is generally a one-time practice. But the others require regular attention.

God has provided these means as an inlet to his grace which the believer can receive daily. The Christian is not always on an emotionally high plain, full of excitement and enthusiasm. He will experience the same emotional peaks and valleys as are common to all humanity. But by regular maintenance of Christian living involving steady attention to all of the objective means to God's grace just touched on here, he will put himself in a position to receive this grace when needed, and as a special blessing when not needed. Christian growth is tempered absolutely by worship, prayer and meditation, and daily reading of the scriptures. They are the armor of the Christian, his offense and defense against a hostile world.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PERFECT WALK

Here, Wesleyan theology deviates somewhat from the mainstream of Orthodox theology today. John Calvin and reformed theology contended that from the point of a man's salvation he began the process of sanctification, or purification, which was completed upon his death and glorification. John Wesley agreed that upon salvation, or initial sanctification, a man began the process of sanctification, but he contended that a believer could experience entire sanctification while living, that he could be cleansed from inner and outer sin, perfected in holy love. The doctrine of entire sanctification is the benchmark of Wesleyan theology. It is also the source of the greatest confusion and controversy. Different arms of the Wesleyan movement practice varying opinions of this doctrine as do different individuals within each group. This chapter will not be an attempt to settle the differences and controversies, but a presentation of the doctrine of entire sanctification which reflects the thoughts and ideas of John Wesley.

### TERMINOLOGY

The practitioners of Wesleyan Christianity have their own separate language, as do many Christian groups, which includes such terms as: "holiness," "entire sanctification," "second blessing," "the baptism of the Holy Spirit," and the "infilling of the Holy Spirit," This terminology is not necessarily peculiar to Wesleyan theology, but it takes on a special meaning when associated with it.

The concept of a second work of grace is not peculiar to Wesleyan theology, although some who practice it may not admit it. They would be willing to say that they believe in and seek experiences subsequent to salvation, but would prefer to call them by terms such as "consecration," "dedication," "surrendered to Christ," "crucified with Christ," "Christ on the throne," etc. they would also deny the total cleansing aspect as stated in the Wesleyan position.

The key words here are "holiness," "sanctification," and "perfection." Understanding their historical meaning is a big step in understanding the Biblical concept of Christian perfection. The words "sanctification" and "holiness" actually share the same meaning, and involve the principal of setting apart for service to God. "Holy" has a strong Old Testament basis, and encompasses a concept which is religious in nature, without involving a legal nature. It was intended to identify something which had been set apart from other aspects of life, unto Godly service. It could identify something belonging to God, and even to God himself. The key phrase here is "separated unto God."

"Perfection," on the other hand involves an idea of legality, in that it requires the completion of a process or set of terms in the contractual sense. Today, "perfect" has taken on additional meaning, which clouds the doctrine of holiness. Many picture perfect as meaning absolutely faultless, or perfectly perfect. But if we view it in its historical context the we will better be able to understand the doctrine. In the contractual sense, an agreement comes between two parties which binds each to specific performances. Upon the completion of these performances the agreement or division of the two parties is declared perfected, the terms have been met and the division cancelled. By applying this concept to the

doctrine of Christian perfection we could say that the term "perfection" references the completion of the terms of salvation. Sometimes this idea is spoken of as "full salvation."

Though we have barely scratched the surface of the definitions of these words, it is not the intention here to give a complete analysis. Rather, it is intended that the pitfall of modern usage of historical terms be avoided. To allow this usage to influence one's idea of the doctrine here would be to misstate it altogether. Now that we have examined terminology we will examine what entire sanctification meant to John Wesley.

#### WHAT IS ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION?

Even within the Wesleyan tradition there is considerable variation in ideas concerning the nature of Christian perfection. John Wesley felt that the doctrine was basic to scripture and therefore wrote many articles on the subject. The most famous of these has been A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. This was originally written and distributed as a relatively lengthy tract. Periodically he revised this tract, and the complete title always reflected the last date of the revision. The revisions were not changes in his original stand on the doctrine, but new ideas which may help in understanding the concept. The last update of this tract was in 1777. In this tract he traced the development of his thought on Christian perfection to show how the doctrine became clear to him. Near the end of this tract Wesley wrote a short summary of what he deemed Christian perfection to be, a definition most useful in this book because of its length. The following is a reproduction of that summary.



26. In the year 1764, upon a review of the whole subject, I wrote down the sum of what I had observed in the following short propositions:

"(1.) There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.

"(2.) It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to 'go on to perfection.' (Heb. vi. 1.)

"(3.) It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect. (Philip. iii. 15)

"(4.) It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.

"(5.) It does not make a man infallible: None is infallible, while he remains in the body.

"(6.) Is it sinless? It is not worth while to contend for a term. It is 'salvation from sin.'

"(7.) It is 'perfect love.' (I John iv. 18.) This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks. (I Thess. v. 16, &c.)

"(8.) 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.

"(9.) It is amissable, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this, til five or six years ago.

"(10.) It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work.

"(11.) But is it in itself instantaneous or not? In examining this, let us go on step by step.

"An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers: None can deny this.

"Since that change, they enjoy perfect love; they feel this, and this alone; they 'rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.' Now, this is all that I mean by perfection; therefore, these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach.

" ' But in some this change was not instantaneous.' They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought. 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.

" ' But if they have this love now, they will lose it.' They may; but they need not. And whether they do or no, they have it now; they now experience what we teach. They now are all love; they now rejoice, pray, and praise without ceasing.

" ' However, sin is only suspended in them; it is not destroyed.' Call it which you please. They are all love to-day; and they take no thought for the morrow.

" ' But this doctrine has been much abused.' So has that of justification by faith. But that is no reason for giving up either this or any other scriptural doctrine. 'When you wash your child,' as one speaks, 'throw away the water; but do not throw away the child.'

" ' But those who think they are saved from sin say they have no need of the merits of Christ.' They say just the contrary. Their language is, ———

'Every moment, Lord, I want  
The merit of thy death!'

They never before had so deep, so unspeakable, a conviction of the need of Christ in all his offices as they have now.

"Therefore, all our Preachers should make a point of preaching perfection to believers constantly, strongly, and explicitly; and all believers should mind this one thing, and continuously agonize for it."

(John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, from 1725 to 1777 (New York, Eaton and Mains, 1897), pp. 166-169.)

Wesley emphasized in this passage that a man is perfected in Holy Love, and though he also identifies perfection as deliverance from sin, he would not quibble over whether it was sinless or not (point 6). He was satisfied to say that it was "salvation from sin." This lack of difinitude has been a constant source of argument, to say the least. Some contend that sin must be removed entirely, maybe even so far as to remove the possibility of sin, while others submit to the possibility of sin in the sanctified person. Remember that even within Adam the possibility of sin existed, and we cannot hope to become any more perfected than he was in his original state. Even Jesus Christ in his physical state possessed the possibility of sin, otherwise the temptation in the wilderness would be a hoax.

Wesley contended for a state of human existence which was "perfected in holy love." He would have preferred to avoid arguing over the sin issue. He felt the burning desire to ring in a doctrine that had been lost somewhere in history, a doctrine which speaks to a condition of sweet communion with God where the believer was entirely filled with the Holy Spirit. This infilling is at the core of Christian perfection. The argument over sin keeps many from experiencing a meeting with the Lord which results in the renewing of the heart. It is a glorious moment, a state of rapture, when the believer is sanctified by the infilling of the Holy Spirit. To contend for a particular state of sin or sinlessness is to completely miss the point.

Wesley did recognize, though, that the doctrine of Christian perfection would require some type of answer concerning sin in the believer. Sin, in the Wesleyan tradition, is considered to be "a voluntary transgression of a known law," and not a compounding of all the mistakes and weaknesses that men are subject to by nature. We also take the trouble to separate "sins" from "sin." "Sins" are the individual acts committed by an individual against the known law of God. "Sin" on the other hand is the condition within man which predisposes him to the commitment of "sins". This condition is also referred to as "original sin" existing as part of natural man. When a man is sanctified he is changed in the sense that the condition of "sin" within him is cleansed by the total filling of the Holy Spirit. He no longer seeks the lower level of sin, as before, but seeks the higher level of God's righteousness.

Let it be understood that though a person be "cleansed from all inner and outer sin" he is not rendered incapable of sin. As already stated, even Adam in his original state was capable of sin. Yet the creation was

perfect, and Adam was sinless for a time. So though a man be cleansed from sin the possibility of sinning always goes with him.

(Note: in A Plain Account that most of item (11.) deals with questions which Wesley answers, and are not his opinion. Rather, they are opinions of others who were criticizing Christian perfection at his time.)

### CRISIS AND PROCESS IN SANCTIFICATION

The Wesleyan concept of Christian perfection involves the Holy Spirit. He effects the act of cleansing in the believer by what we call the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The believer is completely filled with the Holy Spirit and with holy love. It is at this moment that the believer is considered entirely sanctified. But the individual is not just mysteriously transported to this point. He arrives here by a cooperative effort in which his desire to attain spiritual maturity and sanctification is coupled with the work of the Spirit in effecting the transformation.

"Crisis" and "process" are two words sometimes pitted against each other in this area. While sanctification is viewed within the Reformed tradition of John Calvin as being a process only, with continual growth until the sanctifying moment of death, Wesleyan tradition considers it attainable within a man's lifetime. Process is still considered as a major part of sanctification, with growth happening up until the point of sanctification, and with even greater growth and maturity after that point. But there is a "moment" in which a man becomes cleansed and made perfect in "holy love." This moment is ordinarily wrought in a conscious manner, and is referred to as a "crisis" moment. This is when an individual makes the decision to yield entirely to the Holy Spirit, much like the moment a man yields to the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. John Wesley allowed that a man might reach this moment without having knowledge of it, but that there definitely is a moment when he is cleansed from sin.

## BIBLICAL MANDATE

The doctrine of Christian perfection is clearly and absolutely taught in the holy scriptures. This is what we will call the "Biblical mandate" to Christian perfection. The Bible teaches us that all men have sinned and therefore fallen short of the glory of God. We are also taught that the unsaved sinner is incapable of anything but continuing in sin.. But nowhere in the Word of God are we taught that the Christian is to continue in sin. Quite to the contrary, we are taught that the Christian is to cease from sinning and is empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. The knowledge that Christians do sin, though, is acquired by experience: we see that Christians sin, and we see generally that we sin. But experience is not wholly reliable\_\_\_\_\_ Wesley felt that experience was not the test of scripture, rather that scripture was the test of experience. Therefore, if our experience contradicts the Bible we should examine the experience further to test its reliability.

In addition to the fact that the Bible does not teach that Christians are to continue in sin, it does teach that we are to strive for holiness and sanctification.

Be ye therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect.

(Matthew 5:48)

Besides this passage there are literally hundreds of passages which command and call the Christian to sanctification.

He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me;. . .

(John 14:21)

But, as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life, because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

(I Peter 1:15-16)

Our experience tells us that we are hopeless sinners and that we must exist with this condition until we die. But scripture tells us that we

an and must cease from our sinful ways. This poses a dilemma which many Christians just avoid by overlooking or disregarding holiness teaching in the Bible. But we are not alone in our feeling of hopelessness: even the apostle Paul experienced this problem. In Romans 7:13-25 he outlines a period in which he experienced this same hopelessness. He describes a condition in v. 25 where with his mind he served the law of God, but with the flesh he served the law of sin. In chapter 8 he goes on to describe the release from this condition through the Holy Spirit.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. . .

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:2-4)

Let us allow the scriptures to test our experience, just as Paul proved in Romans 7 and 8. He tested his life with the scriptures, and the Holy Spirit produced within him the condition of being released from the bondage of sin. In our own lives let us apply the mandate of the scriptures, to seek sanctification and holiness, as commanded.

But whosoever keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; by this we know that we are in him. (I John 2:5)

## CHAPTER VII

### CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

All the truths in the Holy Bible are but religious data compiled in the library of our minds unless they are internalized by the individual. The Christian should seek not only to grow in his knowledge of how God deals with him, but should also seek to grow in God's grace by making this knowledge effectual in his life. The Father has given us the grace to see a glimpse of hope, and by grasping this hope in faith we are given additional grace to see more and grasp more. The grasping, the appropriation, is done by the individual. We are responsible before God for our actions.

Life is experience. Each day people grow in knowledge by experiencing new things, and by the knowledge of these new things are able to do more each day. Life is not just a static experience. Christian living is an added dimension to life, a fuller life in which there are far more things to experience and grow by. We experience the reality of Christ and the work he has done for us, we experience the Holy Spirit and the work he does in us, and we experience God and the complete universal work which he has done.

Though we must be careful not to seek experience to such a level that we invite disaster by doing so, we are obliged as Christians to see the entire spectrum of God's total work and working. We can look back today through history and see how Christianity itself has grown. We can see how Christians have slowly opened their eyes to the variety of experiences available to them. At the time of the Apostles Christianity seemed to

have its broadest base of experience, as evidenced in Paul's letters to the different churches. Yet Christianity quickly became narrow minded. Each group or sect refused to accept experiences other than their own. This attitude reached its peak during the end of the dark ages and into the age of the renaissance. But Christ prevailed, and new open minds came on the scene. Such men as Thomas Aquinas, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, among others, led the way to this reawakening.

Today we are able to draw on the work of these men and see the wide range of Christian experience available. And today people crave experience beyond the ordinary. They are looking for personal encounters with God, with the supernatural, with the extra-terrestrial. However, though we have drawn from the past, Christianity still has a long ways to go. Bigotry and narrow mindedness still infect the churches. Wesley felt that experience was essential in the Christian life, and himself allowed for a wide range of experience from among his constituency. Yet he always maintained that the test of experience was in scripture, and not the opposite. This rule is essential, lest one fall into allowing every type of radical experience, which is only inviting satanic and demonic interference. Though the world is hungry for experience, such experience must be limited to that which is truly of God.

The main divergence today seems to be between those groups which emphasize experience to the point where structure and program are dismissed, and those groups which emphasize structure and program to the opposite extreme. Both have their value, and a cooperative relationship between them is the Biblical way. Structure is necessary to the order of Christian activity, while experience is necessary to the soul. The Christian life should be one of both piety, the transcendant experience, and discipline.



### PIETY

Wesley considered piety to be in the realm of good works, and of faith worthy of grace. Piety involves the aspects of worship, prayer, and devotions: the seeking of the mystical, transcendent, spiritual relationship with God. The Roman Catholic Tradition has maintained a practice of worship involving both ascetic and liturgical characteristics. The great value of these has been all but lost by many protestant churches because they spurn the radical aspect of these characteristics, and the extent to which Catholicism had carried them in the past. Yet the greatest heights of fulfillment can be gained in the quiet worshipful solitude of this type of service.

Though evangelism and active service are stressed today there must be a place for patient solitary worship in the life of the believer. Growth takes time, and the Lord must be waited on. The mark of this age is that of impatience. People want everything now: instant success, instant coffee, instant salvation, instant sanctification, etc. But God wishes for his people to take the time to commune with him. He works at his own speed, and all of his work has its perfect place and time.

Let us for a moment examine the phenomenon of the altar call. This practice is really a twentieth century device, and though it has effectively called many to salvation, was not a practice during John Wesley's time. In his day the seeker was generally expected to spend many days, weeks, or even months seeking his salvation. Though salvation is instantaneous he felt that time was needed to grasp the truth and magnitude of the matter. We are told in Philippians 2:12: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Once again, the altar call has proven a successful method for calling the lost unto salvation. But there is much value in the concept of reaching salvation and subsequently drawing closer to God through patient prayerful seeking.

Reformed theology has seriously limited piety by its concept of human depravity. In this view God utterly condescends to man, and man cannot reach up toward God under any circumstances. The only relationship that this line of thought has room for is one of man's passive dependance on God. But Wesleyan theology contends that the Holy Spirit has entered and empowered the Christian to aspire to a holy state. In fact the cooperation of the spirit of the believer with the Holy Spirit is necessary to achieve any additional work of grace. Christian piety is the art of seeking God and his blessing in the quiet solitude of individual worship, prayer, and meditation. The entire book of David's Psalms is one of a pietistic nature, and just as men are commanded to seek holiness, men are also commanded to seek the face of God.

Train yourself in godliness. (I Timothy 4:7)

#### CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

Though piety is achieved through patiently waiting on the Holy Spirit, disciplining oneself to receive God's grace is also essential. To believe that one must wait for the Holy Spirit to work in him due to the inability of the believer to aspire to godliness is to use the Holy Spirit as a scapegoat for a lack of spirituality. We already have the grace within ourselves to move to the next step, as the sinner can move to salvation, and the Christian can move toward sanctification. The Holy Spirit has shed his grace on us to this extent.

To achieve each new plateau of spiritual growth the believer cannot merely wait for God to grab him by the ears and drag him up. This is where order and discipline in the Christian life can be beneficial. If the believer desires to experience an ever growing relationship with the

Father he must make himself available, adjust his eyes and ears to see and hear the Lord. His desire to commune with the Holy Spirit must be followed by reading and meditation on the scriptures, and by prayer and worship. God must be sought where he is. To accomplish these things daily the Christian must discipline himself in regular practice. The undisciplined mind will quickly fail, but discipline coupled with the grace of God through the Holy Spirit will yield spiritual growth and maturity.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION: THE WESLEYAN FOCUS

Now that we have touched on the various disciplines of Christian theology from the Wesleyan point of view, we have established a groundwork of Christian understanding. From this point the Christian can undertake further studies and seek new knowledge in this area. The purpose of this work has been to provide the reader with an outline of the major beliefs associated with Wesleyan theology.

### THEOLOGY COME FULL CIRCLE

Those of the Wesleyan school feel that Wesleyan theology is "theology come full circle." God's relationship to man started with Adam, a perfect man in both spiritual and physical aspects. Though the nature of physical perfection has been lost until Christ comes again, we feel that the spiritual nature can be cleansed of the effect and control of sin and restored to a state of perfect love, in harmony with God as Adam was before the fall. Even outside the realm of overwhelming Biblical evidence, the possibility of a man attaining this state seems the logical conclusion to a very logical and rational theology. All the pieces of theology fit together as an intricate puzzle would, and the last piece is that of Christian perfection.

John Wesley, oddly enough, was not a theologian in the pure sense of the word. He wrote no systematic theology, and little that could be classified as a theological treatise. Yet he wrote reams of material: volumes and volumes of books including his famous "Journal." From all of

could be no divergence. These areas to Wesley are the doctrines of Original Sin, the Deity of Christ, the Atonement, Justification by Faith Alone, the Work of the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. These doctrines are essential to any Christian group, and as long as they adhered to them Wesley considered them a part of the universal family of Christ.

This separation of essential doctrine from supportive doctrine and opinion allowed for Wesley and his followers to work alongside of Christians from other disciplines. His great friendship with George Whitefield, the evangelist, could never have existed were it not for this spirit. He and Whitefield contended sharply in areas of universal grace and sanctification, considering that Whitefield came from the Reformed tradition. But they both loved the same Lord and worked with each other most of their lives for the cause of Jesus Christ.

### CONCLUSION

Let us remember that though we technically dissect the Holy Bible and that theology at times seems unspiritual because of its technical emphasis, the intent of it all is to lead people closer to Christ. Let the truths learned from theology provide you with knowledge of God that will enable you to come closer to him. Through the clear understanding of theology the believer is afforded another piece of armor to protect him from those who would attack his faith. It is but a piece in the whole armor of God and should be given equal attention as the rest are. Let us practice a stable and balanced Christianity through constant seeking for the truth, and may this little study give you a glimpse at the truth which will whet your appetite to learn more about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

this we are able to construct the theological foundations which he adhered to. He was an extremely well schooled man, and was ordained in the Priesthood of the Anglican Church. He spent many years studying the writings of the early Church fathers, and developed a theological base which was second to none.

### EVANGELISM

John Wesley took his beliefs to the people. He practiced "applied theology." He saw the overwhelming evidence of God's dealings with man coupled with the Gospel call, and took the message to as many as he could reach. To John Wesley the evangelical outreach was the most important task to be performed by the Church. He preached each day, and up to four times a day. He preached salvation to the unsaved, and holiness to the saved. He practiced "prevenient grace" by being the instrument of God's grace to the unsaved. The evidence of the magnitude of John Wesley's beliefs is in the fruit of his labors. When he died there were nearly 80,000 Methodists in England and 50,000 in the United States, all as the result of his work. And this work didn't die with him. The growth of Methodism was phenomenal, in just ten years from his death these numbers had grown to over 7 million.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:16)

### CATHOLIC SPIRIT

Wesley believed in the "catholic" spirit, or the brotherhood of all Christians in the body of Christ; the universal Church. He also, as has been seen, allowed for a divergence of opinion among the various sects of the Church. This concept is embodied in his statement "We think and let think." In this area he did draw a distinction, though, between essential doctrine and opinion. In areas of essential doctrine there

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