Why John WesleyÂ's View of Christian Perfection Was Not Considered Serious Heresy - posted by Oracio (), on: 2012/6

John Wesley, co-founder of Methodism in the eighteenth century, believed in what he termed Â"Christian PerfectionÂ" or Â"Entire SanctificationÂ". He believed that a believer could reach a certain state of spiritual maturity in which he/she was governed solely by pure love for God and others.

But by Â"Christian PerfectionÂ" Wesley did not mean complete sinless perfection in this life. He called certain Â"smallÂ" sins Â"mistakesÂ", Â"ignoranceÂ", or Â"infirmitiesÂ", while at the same time acknowledging those Â"infractionsÂ" as transgressions of GodÂ's perfect Law(confusing if you ask me). And I believe that is why he got away from being considered as a total heretic by many in that area of his beliefs and teachings.

He did not advocate the serious heresy which some advocate today, namely complete sinless perfection in this life. But he did espouse and teach a dangerous view of sanctification in my opinion, by calling certain sins something other than sin. So that you can see I am not misinterpreting WesleyÂ's beliefs and teachings, the following is from his writing titled Â"A Plain Account of Christian PerfectionÂ"(Chapter 19):

Quote:
----------"QUESTION. What is Christian perfection?

"ANSWER. The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love.

"Q. Do you affirm, that this perfection excludes all infirmities, ignorance, and mistake?

"A. I continually affirm quite the contrary, and always have done so.

"Q. But how can every thought, word, and work, be governed by pure love, and the man be subject at the same time to ignorance and mistake?

"A. I see no contradiction here: 'A man may be filled with pure love, and still be liable to mistake.' Indeed I do not expect to be freed from actual mistak es, till this mortal puts on immortality. I believe this to be a natural consequence of the soul's dwelling in flesh and blood. For we cannot now think at all , but by the mediation of those bodily organs which have suffered equally with the rest of our frame. And hence we cannot avoid sometimes thinking wr ong, till this corruptible shall have put on incorruption.

"But we may carry this thought farther yet. A mistake in judgment may possibly occasion a mistake in practice. For instance: Mr. De Renty's mistake to uching the nature of mortification, arising from prejudice of education, occasioned that practical mistake, his wearing an iron girdle. And a thousand su ch instances there may be, even in those who are in the highest state of grace. Yet, Where every word and action springs from love, such a mistake is not properly a sin. However, it cannot bear the rigour of God's justice, but needs the atoning blood.

"Q. What was the judgment of all our brethren who met at Bristol in August, 1758, on this head?

"A. It was expressed in these words: (1.) Every one may mistake as long as he lives. (2.) A mistake in opinion may occasion a mistake in practice. (3.) Every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law. Therefore, (4.) Every such mistake, were it not for the blood of atonement, would expose to et ernal damnation. (5.) It follows, that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for t hemselves, as well as for their brethren, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'

"This easily accounts for what might otherwise seem to be utterly unaccountable; namely, that those who are not offended when We speak of the high est degree of love, yet will not hear of living without sin. The reason is, they know all men are liable to mistake, and that in practice as well as in judgm ent. But they do not know, or do not observe, that this is not sin, if love is the sole principle of action.

As you can see, regarding so-called Â"mistakesÂ" Wesley writes, Â"Where every word and action springs from love, suc h a mistake is not properly a sin.Â"

Then right afterward he writes, Â"However, it cannot bear the rigour of God's justice, but needs the atoning bloodÂ", and then Â"Every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law. Therefore, (4.) Every such mistake, were it not for the bl ood of atonement, would expose to eternal damnation. (5.) It follows, that the most perfect have continual need of the m erits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves, as well as for their brethren, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'Â"

A huge concern I have regarding this teaching is that sin is minimized or trivialized, when GodÂ's Word never, ever mini

mizes or trivializes any sin, whether Â"bigÂ" or Â"smallÂ".

I cannot over-emphasize how serious a deception this can be in the life of true believers as well as false converts.

Re: Why John WesleyÂ's View of Christian Perfection Was Not Considered Serious Heresy - posted by Areadymind (),

Thank you for posting that Oracio.

Re: Why John WesleyÂ's View of Christian Perfection Was Not Considered Serious Heresy, on: 2012/6/28 14:31

What Wesley called mistakes were errors of judgement and not infringements of the holy law. Where he made a mistake , I believe, was to claim that they needed the blood of Christ. This is due to Calvinistic influences on him due to being a member of the Church of England. I do not believe they do. We cannot be free from errors of judgement as we are not o mnipotent. And due to the fallen creation, our brains cannot function as well as they could. But we can be led by the Sp irit and kept from falling Jude 23.

Wesley did not like to use the term sinless perfection due to the disputes. He did teach and led many people who believ ed that man can be without sin, as in keeping the law perfectly.

There is a lack of logic in the criticism that Wesley would not call sins sin but then say he would not call his theology sinl ess perfection.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2012/6/28 14:34

Though there were defences in Wesley's little book on Perfection. The emphasis was in the love of Christ shed abroad i n our hearts to love one another in the body of Christ and in the world. I really feel that his aim was noble and his attemp t to get people in his day primarily in the dead church of england to allow religion to affect and enflame the heart was of God.

I see the followers of Wesley in his day to have a tremendous fear of the Lord, hatred of sin, and holiness of life. I suppo se he wrote these things to encourage the brethren that were seeking intensely after God because we will always have s uch sinful faults, we will never be perfect in action and thought. Even this post I am writing is mingled with small doses of pride, self-sufficiency, lack of love and all other types of imperfection. We simply have to realize we are not God and alw ays fall short of that standard.

I believe he wrote these things to encourage the saints not to become discouraged as they progressed deeply into the re alm of sanctification that they will always see their faults. And these "faults" and "sins" are not damning for the child of G od, the son of God. But he rightly states that apart from Christ they are, apart from the atoning blood they are.

So his stance on upholding the blood of Christ as a daily and hourly need is really farther and better then most evangelic als are today in this doctrine. The doctrine of trusting in the efficacy of the blood of Christ daily has been lost in almost all the churches in North America.

So rather then seeing warnings in this I see much good that we actually need recovered. If you are not seeking after hol iness of life then that is a dangerous place to be in. For the Spirit of God will point us continually in this direction.

I close with a clip of an article I wrote on George Fox and his reaction to dead formal religion in his day:

Holy Men's Words

George Fox taught one subject very strongly which he faced much opposition even from some of the godliest puritans of the day such as Owen and Bunyan, and that is purity and holiness of the Christian life. In that day there were puritans w ho were formed to face the dead orthodoxy of the day and encourage their churches to holiness of heart and life. Yet tho ugh there was much teaching on holiness there was little appropriation of these truths by the followers of the puritans he nce they opposed movements like the quakers who walked in the truths they taught. Hear the lament of Fox over this op position to the truth: "But they could not endure to hear of purity, and of victory over sin and the devil. They said they cou

ld not believe any could be free from sin on this side of the grave. I bade them give over babbling about the Scriptures, which were holy men's words, whilst they pleaded for unholiness. Then I bade them forbear talking of the Scriptures, whi ch were the holy men's words; "for," said I, "the holy men that wrote the Scriptures pleaded for holiness in heart, life, and conversation here; but since you plead for impurity and sin, which is of the devil, what have you to do with the holy men' s words?"

He had a boldness before men because he had a familiarity with God. He feared God more then men. And was partial to no man (James 2:1). Therefore he could say: Â"When the Lord sent me forth into the world, He forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low.Â" To live for the glory of God was his supreme desire over worldly vanity and success. The Lord spoke directly and clearly to his heart and he walked in that revelation. Â"The Lord showed me, so that I did see clearly, that he did not dwell in these temples which men had commanded and set up, but in people's hearts . . . his people were his temple, and he dwelt in them.Â" Oh how we need many George FoxÂ's to rise up and proclaim fearlessly the apostol ic truthÂ's that have been long lost in evangelical circles.

from: https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=27157

Re: - posted by Oracio (), on: 2012/6/28 15:54

Areadymind, you're welcome brother.

brother Greg, I appreciated reading your thoughts on this topic. You wrote:

Quote:
----------I suppose he wrote these things to encourage the brethren that were seeking intensely after God because we will always have such sinful faults, we will never be perfect in action and thought. Even this post I am writing is mingled with small doses of pride, self-sufficiency, lack of love and all other types of imperfection. We simply have to realize we are not God and always fall short of that standard.

Amen brother. That simple truth is the reason for my opening post here. It is a simple truth which is sometimes attacked here. When I see that I get concerned at times for new believers who can get caught up in a trap of Satan.

I am all for encouraging and exhorting others and myself to strive for holiness in the fear of God, with a serious hatred of sin.

When I am on the streets witnessing or discipling someone I try to explain clearly that a true believer will show such mar ks of mortifying the flesh in their life. I try to make sure not to lower God's standard of holiness which He calls all of us to walk in. But I also try to make sure I don't give the impression that I mean sinless perfection in this life.

I used to be involved with a small Spirt-filled group based in Riverside CA within which the doctrine of sinless perfection caused much harm, and eventually the group was completely destroyed by that doctrine. Brother Greg, you know of this group which I am referring to.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2012/6/28 16:05

Quote:
----------When I am on the streets witnessing or discipling someone I try to explain clearly that a true believer will show such marks of mortif ying the flesh in their life. I try to make sure not to lower God's standard of holiness which He calls all of us to walk in. But I also try to make sure I don't give the impression that I mean sinless perfection in this life.

I used to be involved with a small Spirt-filled group based in Riverside CA within which the doctrine of sinless perfection caused much harm, and event ually the group was completely destroyed by that doctrine. Brother Greg, you know of this group which I am referring to.

Also to re-clarify I believe John Wesley's position though not perfect was very biblical in many respects. It was his follow ers and others after him that put the doctrines into a very perfect system which led into error. Even the errors you are sp

eaking about in that home fellowship you were apart of.

It is sad that many who know Christ powerfully and attempt to write and understand their experience is twisted and malig ned by the next generation into a heretical system or belief that would have grieved the founder or the original believer w ho had the ideas.

I do not want to believe John Wesley's doctrines 100% but rather I want to experience the God of John Wesley 100% th e God that changed His life. May we seek the source and not the tributaries only.

I find I need a "sinless perfection" experience daily when I confess my sins and trust in the blood of Christ afresh. We will never be done with this battle over sin until our dying day when we meet the Lord in the air.

I am glad we can agree on these things dear brother. But I hope this does not turn anyone off from John Wesley, he has so much to offer modern evangelicals.

Re: - posted by brothagary, on: 2012/6/28 16:10

amen and amen

there greg is showing the spirt of whitfied ,and weasly

he is such a strong believer holiness but sees his weakness thats humily

i think the main problem is god didnt make us clones

we are differnt ,and he define our experance through our own personl shaded glasses ,,and smome call a spade an spa de and thores cl it soming else

form reading wesly sermen at whitfield funarel ,,you could see the love and agreement with weasly concering his brother s

i think whitfield ,as my self ,,define sin as anthing thought deed or word ,that doesnt give god the glory HE DESERVES ,, weasly may have seen scertaint things as faults and faling short ,,but not as sin in this respect

it s just down to intepratai on of our life and the word of god ,and we are fallable ,so we will never infalable be able to un derstand and explain our walk with god perfectly

if was sin for whitfield ,and falts for weasly ,,so be it pick wich suits you ,,but lets fellowshipp in the bond of peach ,alway s agknowlaging as greg just did in similar word ,we are falable creatours with falts ,or sins ,
but lest seek perfection ,as we are called to be perfect ,as perfct as a creatour of god be in a body ,and love ne another , ,,for we are gods propertys ,and unique

love and blessings ,from a brother who deserves nothing i have not even breath

Re: - posted by learjet, on: 2012/6/28 16:25

Quote:
----------It is sad that many who know Christ powerfully and attempt to write and understand their experience is twisted and maligned by the next generation into a heretical system or belief that would have grieved the founder or the original believer who had the ideas.

This is very sad indeed, we can codify (i.e: methods) and then use the form as a blueprint for the next generation, but wit hout the heart and presence of the Spirit all we end up with is ink soaked pages that are meaningless.

Great point brother.

Re: - posted by Oracio (), on: 2012/6/28 18:16

Quote:
----------What Wesley called mistakes were errors of judgement and not infringements of the holy law.

Wesley did not like to use the term sinless perfection due to the disputes. He did teach and led many people who believed that man can be without sin, as in keeping the law perfectly.(krautfrau)

Again, I will quote Wesley: Â"Every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law. Therefore, (4.) Every such mistake, were it not for the blood of atonement, would expose to eternal damnation. (5.) It follows, that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves, as well as for their brethren, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'Â"

Wesley is clearly calling such mistakes "transgressions"(sins), though not willfull sins. To him they were sins of ignorance or infirmity but still sins, therefore still needing the atonement of Christ.

It is indeed sad to see some twist Wesley's views to promote the heresy of sinless perfectionism.

Re: - posted by Oracio (), on: 2012/6/29 1:23

Quote:
----------I am glad we can agree on these things dear brother. But I hope this does not turn anyone off from John Wesley, he has so much to offer modern evangelicals.(sermonindex)

You are right brother. After prayerfully considering my opening post I think I may have been a little to hard on Wesley regarding this topic and I regret it.

I have been tremendously blessed in the past by reading Wesley's biography and sermons. And I definitely do not want to give anyone the impression that I am against Wesleys writings in general. I agree that he has left us with much we can all benefit from spiritually.

Re: , on: 2012/6/29 2:03

"The pure love of our neighbour, springing from the love of God, thinketh no evil, believeth and hopeth all things. Now, this very temper, unsuspicious, ready to believe and hope the best of all men, may occasion our thinking some men better than they really are. Here then is a manifest mistake, accidentally flowing from pure love."

"For it has been allowed, that all who are in the body are liable to mistake; and that a mistake in judgment may sometimes occasion a mistake in practice; though great care is to be taken that no ill use be made of this concession. For instance: Even one that is perfected in love may mistake with regard to another person, and may think him, in a particular case, to be more or less faulty than he really is. And hence he may speak to him with more or less severity than the truth requires. And in this sense, (though that be not the primary meaning of St. James,) 'in many things we offend all.' This therefore is no proof at all, that the person so speaking is not perfect."
(quoted from Christian Perfection Q & A)

Here Wesley is saying that the man who is perfected in love, thinks no evil thoughts which is no other than sinless perfection. He has no lustful thoughts, he has no jealousy, he is fair with all men, but he cannot read the thoughts of other men. This is the area where a perfect man cannot be like God. Mistakes will frequecntly be made here, and it is often the case that the perfect man will err on the side of thinking the best of others. How much purer can a man be if he thinks no evil?

Many did not believe in perfection because they saw these mistakes in others and called them sins because they set the bar too high that man could not attain. If we did not make these errors we would be gods.

Calvinism sets the bar too high and says that everything that is not in accordance with Gods own behaviour is sin, but G od made us to be dependent on Him for knowledge not to have divine knowledge ourselves and the growth in perfection is the gaining of this knowledge which will still be incomplete till we die. For this reason I do not think that the blood of Ch rist is needed because it is how God intended. He did not give Adam divine knowledge but intended him to look to God f or it.

The blood is needed for cleansing the heart AND IN ORDER FOR IT TO REMAIN CLEAN. This is a day by day action a nd needed by the perfect man as his righteouness is not his own. The cleansing is not for the mind. The mind will show what is in the heart but the function of the brain is not to be the same as God`s. Obedience however, is. Perfect obedien ce to the light the Holy Spirit gives so that a man can do the complete will of the Father as did Jesus so that he walks as He walked and keep the moral law perfectly in love.

Re: George Fox, on: 2012/6/29 2:31

Good to have the words of Fox, preacher of sinless perfection, quoted on this forum. Thank you Greg.