

Does the Blessing Involve Sinlessness?

by Bishop W. F. Mallalieu

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu explores the possibility of living a sinless life through faith and the teachings of John Wesley on Christian perfection.

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, John 1:7, Colossians 1:19, Titus 2:11, Hebrews 13:20

Topics: "Sanctification", "Faithfulness"

Description

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu preaches about the possibility of living a sinless life through faith in Jesus Christ, emphasizing the power of faith to bring divine transformation and the importance of surrendering to God's will for sanctification. He highlights the need for God to create a new heart within us, leading to a life free from sin and filled with love. The sermon encourages believers to rejoice in the hope of being freed from all sins through trusting in God's faithfulness and cleansing power.

Transcript

But is it possible that I
Should live and sin no more?
Lord, if on thee I dare rely,
The faith shall bring the power.
On me the faith divine bestow
Which doth the mountain move;
And all my spotless life shall show
The omnipotence of love.
-- Charles Wesley.
The thing my God doth hate
That I no more may do;
Thy creature, Lord, again create,

And all my soul renew.

My soul shall then, like thine,

Abhor the thing unclean,

And, sanctified by love divine,

Forever cease from sin.

-- Charles Wesley.

Ye ransomed sinners, hear,

The prisoners of the Lord,

And wait till Christ appear,

According to his word:

Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me,

We shall from all our sins be free.

Let others hug their chains,

For sin and Satan plead,

And say, from sins' remains

They never can be freed:

Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me,

We shall from all our sins be free.

In God we put our trust;

If we our sins confess,

Faithful is he and just,

From all unrighteousness

To cleanse us all, both you and me,

We shall from all our sins be free.

-- Charles Wesley.

Come, in this accepted hour;

Bring thy heavenly kingdom in!

Fill us with the glorious power,
Rooting out the seeds of sin;
Nothing more can we require,
We will covet nothing less:
Be thou all our hearts' desire,
All our joy, and all our peace!

-- Charles Wesley.

My heart, thou knowest, can never rest,
Till thou create my peace;
Till, of my Eden repossessed,
From every sin I cease.

-- Charles Wesley.

Holy Lamb, who thee receive,
Who in thee begin to live,
Day and night they cry to thee,
"As thou art, so let us be!"
Jesus, see my panting breast;
See, I pant in thee to rest;
Gladly would I now be clean;
Cleanse me now from every sin.

-- Tr. by John Wesley.

Come, then, for Jesus' sake,
And bid my heart be clean;
An end of all my troubles make,
An end of all my sin.
I can not wash my heart,
But by believing thee,

And waiting for thy blood to impart

The spotless purity.

While at thy cross I lie,

Jesus, thy grace bestow;

Now thy all-cleansing blood apply,

And I am white as snow.

-- Charles Wesley.

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. -- I John i, 7.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. -- Matt. viii, 48.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself: by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel. -- Col. 1, 19-23.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave him self for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. -- Titus ii, 11-14.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. -- Heb. xiii, 20, 21.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. -- Jude 24, 25.

CERTAINLY these quotations from the Word of God could be multiplied indefinitely. The constant thought in the great and wonderful plan of redemption is, that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, to save to the uttermost all who avail themselves of the privileges of the gospel. When he was upon earth he commanded the forces of nature, he healed all bodily diseases, he cured the incurable lepers, he called Lazarus back to life, and he forgave the sins of all penitents who trusted in him. All this ought to assure us that, in the range of gracious possibilities, a soul that has experienced the fullness of the blessing of the gospel may live in this world without the commission of sin.

There is a wide difference between voluntary and involuntary transgressions. The one brings condemnation on the soul, the other does not. Observe what Wesley says:

They are not condemned for sins of infirmity, as they are usually called. Perhaps it were advisable rather to call them infirmities, that we may not seem to give any countenance to sin, or to extenuate it in any degree, by thus coupling it with infirmity. But (if we must retain so ambiguous and dangerous an expression) by sins of infirmity I would mean such involuntary failings as the saying a thing we believe true, though in fact it proves to be false; or the hurting our neighbor without knowing or designing it, perhaps when we designed to do him good. Though these are deviations from the holy, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, yet they are not properly sins, nor do they bring any guilt on the conscience of "them which are in Christ Jesus." -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. I, pp. 70-73.

The longer I live, the larger allowances I make for human infirmities. I exact more from myself and less from others. Go thou and do likewise. -- John Wesley.

I want you to be all love. This is the perfection I believe and teach. And this perfection is consistent with a thousand nervous disorders, which that high-strained perfection is not. -- John Wesley.

To set perfection too high, is the surest way to drive it out of the world. Whereunto you have attained, hold fast; never cast it away through a voluntary humility. -- John Wesley.

I still say, and without any self-contradiction, I know no persons living, who are so deeply conscious of their needing Christ, both as Prophet, Priest, and King, as those who believe themselves, and whom I believe, to be cleansed from sin; I mean from all pride, anger, evil desire, and unbelief. -- John Wesley.

To expect deliverance from wandering thoughts, occasioned by evil spirits, is to expect that the devil should die or fall asleep. To expect deliverance from those which are occasioned by other men, is to expect, either that men should cease from the earth, or that we should be absolutely excluded from them; and to pray for deliverance from those which are occasioned by the body is, in effect, to pray that we may leave the body. -- John Wesley.

We continually declare that there is no such perfection in this life as implies either a dispensation from doing good and attending all the ordinances of God, or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood. -- John Wesley.

The proposition which I hold is this: a person may be cleansed from all sinful tempers, and yet need the atoning blood. For what? For negligences and ignorances; for both words and actions, as well as omissions, which are, in a sense, transgressions of the perfect law; and I believe no one is clear of them till he lay his body down. -- John Wesley.

What! never speak one evil word,

Or rash, or idle, or unkind!

O, how shall I, most gracious Lord,

This mark of true perfection find?

Thy sinless mind in me reveal;

Thy Spirit's plenitude impart;

And all my spotless life shall tell

The abundance of a loving heart.

-- Charles Wesley.

Shepherd Divine, our wants relieve,

In this our evil day;

To all thy tempted followers give

The power to watch and pray.

Long as our fiery trials last,

Long as the cross we bear,

O let our souls on thee be cast

In never-ceasing prayer.

-- Charles Wesley.

Sin, in the sense in which we are using it, is the voluntary transgression of a known law of God. Every justified person may and should live free from every such transgression; must, indeed, do so in order to retain the justified state. Much more may it be affirmed that one who has experienced the fullness of the blessing of the gospel may and should live a sinless life in harmony with the above definition. But it must be observed that Methodism has always emphatically pointed out the difference between voluntary transgressions of the known law of God and the infirmities and mistakes that are incident to our human limitations. The highest states of grace attainable in this life have never presupposed omniscience. And just so long as knowledge concerning many things is very meager, we must conclude that, with the best intentions, there may be errors of judgment, and so there may be mistakes in daily life. We live in a world where we are met by frequent incitements and temptations, but there may be these and yet no sin. We dwell in tabernacles of clay, and in regard to the care and use of our bodies we may make mistakes without committing sin, though we ought constantly to remember that our bodies are indeed the temples of the Holy Ghost, and no defilement of them should be tolerated.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. -- I Cor. iii, 16, 17.

We may be sure that the conditions which now surround us will continue practically as long as we remain in this world. Every one of the five senses is a possible avenue through which the tempter may reach the soul. We may never expect that measure of Divine guidance and control that will absolutely prevent us from making any mistakes. The light may grow clearer and stronger as our experience is enriched with the passing years of faithfulness; our scope of knowledge may broaden and become more accurate; we may find our faith growing stronger; the revelation of God's will concerning us may more and more unfold in his

Word; the path of duty in great things and small things may become more and more plain, but there will be many, various, and great limitations that will only be removed when we reach that world where we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. At the same time it is the constant duty of the strongest and the wisest, as well as the weakest and the most ignorant, to strive for all knowledge, wisdom, and power, so that the will of God may be perfectly performed by each.

In this respect, as in all others bearing on the experience of the great blessing of perfect love, John Wesley's teachings are worthy of the most careful consideration. He says:

Christian perfection does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus, every one that is holy, is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may observe that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man has attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need "to grow in grace," and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Savior. -- Wesley's Sermons Vol. I, p. 358.

The essential part of Christian holiness is giving the heart wholly to God; and certainly we need not lose any degree of that light and love which at first attend this. It is our own infirmity if we do; it is not the will of the Lord concerning us. Your present business is not to reason whether you should call your experience thus or thus; but to go straight to him that loves you, with all your wants, how great or how many soever they are. Then all things are ready; help, while you ask, is given. You have only to receive it by simple faith. Nevertheless, you will still be encompassed with numberless infirmities, for you live in a house of clay, and therefore this corruptible body will, more or less, press down the soul, yet not so as to prevent your rejoicing evermore, and having a witness that your heart is his. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VII, p. 51.

In this [Sermon on Christian Perfection] I endeavored to show, (1) In what sense Christians are not, (2) In what sense they are, perfect.

(1) In what sense they are not. They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such in another kind are impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behavior. From such infirmities as these none are perfectly freed till their spirits return to God; neither can we expect till then to be wholly freed from temptation; for "the servant is not above his master." But neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase. -- John Wesley: "Plain Account."

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 eternal damnation. (5) It follows that the most perfect have continual need of the merit of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves, 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 highest 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 judgment. But they do not know, or do not observe, that this is not sin if love is the sole principle of action.

Q. But still, if they live without sin, does not this exclude the necessity of a mediator? At least, is it not plain that they stand no longer in need of Christ in his priestly office?

A. Far from it. None feel their need of Christ like these; none so entirely depend upon him. For Christ does not give life to the soul separate from, but in and with himself. Hence his words are equally true of all men, in whatsoever state of grace they are: "As the branch can not bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me; without [or separate from] me ye can do nothing."

In every state we need Christ in the following respects: (1) Whatever grace we receive it is a free gift from him. (2) We receive it as his purchase, merely in consideration of the price he paid. (3) We have this grace not only from Christ but in him. For our perfection is not like that of a tree which flourishes by the sap derived from its own root, but as was said before, like that of a branch which united to the vine bears fruit, but, severed from it is dried up and withered. (4) All our blessings -- temporal, spiritual, and eternal -- depend on his intercession for us, which is one branch of his priestly office whereof therefore we have always equal need (5) The best of men still need Christ in his priestly office to atone for their short comings (as some not improperly speak), their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For these are all deviations from the perfect law, and consequently need an atonement. Yet that they are not properly sins we apprehend may appear from the words of St. Paul: "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law ... for love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. xiii, 8-10) Now mistakes and whatever infirmities necessarily flow from the corruptible state of the body are no way contrary to love, nor therefore, in the Scripture sense, sin.

To explain myself a little farther on this head (1) Not only sin properly so called (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law), but sin improperly so called (that is, an involuntary transgression of Divine law, known or unknown), needs the atoning blood. (2) I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. (3) Therefore "sinless perfection" is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. (4) I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. (5) Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please; I do not, for the reasons above mentioned. -- John Wesley: "Plain Account."

The holiest of men still need Christ as their prophet, as "the light of the world." For he does not give them light but from moment to moment; the instant he withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King. For God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment nothing but unholiness will remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ. -- John Wesley: "Plain Account."

O make me all like thee,

Before I hence remove;

Settle, confirm, and stablish me,

And build me up in love.
Let me thy witness live,
When sin is all destroyed;
And then my spotless soul receive,
And take me home to God.
-- Charles Wesley.

With solemn faith we offer up,
And spread before thy glorious eyes,
That only ground of all our hope,
That precious bleeding Sacrifice,
Which brings thy grace on sinners down,
And perfects all our souls in one.
Acceptance through his only name,
Forgiveness in his blood, we have;
But more abundant life we claim
Through him, who died our souls to save,
To sanctify us by his blood,
And fill with all the life of God.
Father, behold thy dying Son,
And hear the blood that speaks above!
On us let all thy grace be shown;
Peace, righteousness, and joy, and love, --
Thy kingdom come to every heart,
And all thou hast, and all thou art.
-- Charles Wesley.

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