

Personal Holiness

by Olin Alfred Curtis

Olin Alfred Curtis's sermon emphasizes the centrality of personal holiness in Methodism, drawing on John Wesley's teachings and experiences to inspire believers towards a life of love and faithfulness to God.

Scripture: Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Personal Holiness"

Description

Olin Alfred Curtis delves into the essence of Methodism, emphasizing the unique theological focus on the holiness of the human soul, heart, mind, and will as the central theme. He explores John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, highlighting Wesley's personal experiences and teachings on purity of intention, love, and faith. Curtis discusses the transformation of motive from duty to pure love in personal holiness, addressing the exhaustion of wrong motives and the potential for growth into supreme love. He also examines the challenges and temptations faced in maintaining personal holiness, emphasizing the ongoing spiritual battle until death.

Transcript

I have made a little exposition of Methodism, but I see it will be too long to present in full. I sum it all up in one or two sentences. As to its theology, it takes the old theology of the Christian church, but it takes one element which no other Christian church has dared to put forward as a prominent feature of theology. In ours it is the very point from which we view all theology. Now listen; I want that to be understood. Knowing exactly what I say, and taking the full responsibility of it, I repeat, we are the only church in history, from the apostles' time until now, that has put forward as its very elemental thought -- the great central pervading idea of the whole Book of God from the beginning to the end -- the holiness of the human soul, heart, mind, and will. Go through all the confessions of all the churches, and you will find this in no other. You will find even some of them that blame us in their books and writings. It may be called fanaticism, but, dear friends, that is our mission. If we keep to that, the next century is ours; if we keep to that, the triumphs of the next century shall throw those that are past far into the shade. Our work is a moral work -- that is to say, the work of making men holy. Our preaching is for that, our church agencies are for that, our schools, colleges, universities, and theological seminaries are for that. There is our mission -there is our glory -- there is our power, and there shall be the ground of our triumph. God keep us true. - John McClintock, the first president of the Drew Theological Seminary; from an address delivered at the Methodist Centenary Celebration in New York, January 25, 1866; reported in the Methodist, issue of February 3, 1866.

Psychologically this doctrine belongs to the general subject of conversion, for holiness is really the completion of regeneration; but there are practical reasons for a separate discussion and formal emphasis.

Our wisest course is to avoid the many controversies, and go back to John Wesley himself. We could not fairly deal with the controversies without making use of certain books which, while very penetrating and suggestive, manifest a spirit so narrow and ungenerous as to create an atmosphere unworthy of the theme. Of all the places in Christian discussion, this is the one place where it is more wholesome to have a weak argument than to have a vitiating atmosphere. And, further, there are three positive reasons why it is of the larger importance to go back to Wesley: First, Wesley was the central point of Christian consciousness in a special doctrinal epoch. Historically, Wesley had almost the same epochal relation to the doctrinal emphasis upon holiness that Luther had to the doctrinal emphasis upon justification by faith, or that Athanasius had to the doctrinal emphasis upon the Deity of our Lord. Second, because Wesley was the leader in such an epochal movement, he had at hand quantity in data. The flaw in some of the modern discussions of Christian perfection is not so much in the reasoning as in the want of sufficient data to reason upon. The author is like a botanist giving out a dictum about a rare plant which he has cultivated in a hothouse. Every word he says is the truth, but it is not the typical truth. There is sometimes a genuine Christian experience which is so individualistic as to be almost worthless for theology. Third, quantity of data, however, is of small worth unless there be surety in Christian discrimination. There are several recent scientific studies of Christian experience which would be almost priceless in value had the authors only known the difference between reality and imitation. It is possible to obtain a thousand answers to a list of set questions and have only a hundred of them with any real Christian meaning. It is just at this point that John Wesley was a master in Israel. He did almost no fundamental thinking, not merely because he was ceaselessly occupied with practical affairs, but mainly because his mind, like that of Gladstone, was receptive and not creative. But Wesley had such extraordinary spiritual insight, and such sanity in judgment, that often his most casual statement, especially in his Journal, is more illuminating than many a profound monograph in theology.

The Wesleyan Doctrine of Christian Perfection

Wesley's Own Experience. John Wesley was always loath to reveal the deepest things of his Christian life. He freely gives you his opinions and delights to talk about his work; but it is only now and then that you can catch any glimpse of "the inner chamber of introspection." And yet, by careful search, we can discover a few very significant points of self-revelation.

1. It is significant that Wesley was greatly impressed by Jeremy Taylor's discussion of purity of intention. Forty years afterward, in his Journal, May 14, 1765, Wesley writes: "I was struck with the chapter upon intention, and felt a fixed intention 'to give myself up to God.'" For a young man twenty-two years of age, and having Wesley's ecclesiastical surroundings, to lift this one idea of intention into potent emphasis is not only remarkable, but also momentous. It is, indeed, Wesley's prophetic start.

2. About five years later we find another significant point. He has now become "a man of one Book," and he perceives that love is the key to the full Christian life. In his Journal, same date as already quoted, he says: "I then saw, in a stronger light than ever before, that only one thing is needful, even faith that worketh by the love of God and man, all inward and outward holiness; and I groaned to love God with all my heart, and to serve him with all my strength." Let us now note precisely what Wesley has: He has a clear idea that the person's central purpose is an important feature of the Christian life; but he perceives

that it is not enough to hold passively this purpose, it must be positively expressed in a faith which works by love. Further, he has a craving both for a supreme love toward God and for a life giving out that love in the largest service.

3. But did Wesley actually reach the experience for which he yearned? In his Journal, December 23-25, 1744, we read this: "I was unusually lifeless and heavy, till the love feast in the evening; when, just as I was constraining myself to speak, I was stopped, whether I would or no; for the blood gushed out of both my nostrils, so that I could not add another word: but in a few minutes it stayed, and all our hearts and mouths were opened to praise God. Yet the next day I was again as a dead man; but in the evening, while I was reading prayers at Snowsfields, I found such light and strength as I never remember to have had before. I saw every thought as well as every action or word, just as it was rising in my heart; and whether it was right before God, or tainted with pride or selfishness. I never knew before (I mean not as at this time) what it was 'to be still before God.' Tuesday, 25. I waked, by the grace of God, in the same spirit; and about eight, being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God as greatly confirmed me therein, so that God was before me all the day long. I sought and found him in every place, and could truly say, when I lay down at night, 'Now I have lived a day.'" To anyone familiar with John Wesley's careful, realistic manner of speech, it is evident that we have here the same sort of testimony to the experience of holiness that we have in his Journal, May 24, 1738, to the experience of conversion. If the one is not quite so near a full definition as the other, it surely is just as expressive of the fact. I find it almost impossible to read Wesley's words in the light of all his later utterance about the doctrine of Christian perfection, and not consider this date, December 24, 1744, as the probable time when he began to love God supremely.

4. In a letter (CCCLIII) from London, June 19, 1771, there is another important reference to Wesley's own experience: "Many years since I saw that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' I began following after it, and inciting all with whom I had any intercourse to do the same. Ten years after, God gave me a clearer view than I had before of the way to attain this, namely, by faith in the Son of God. And immediately I declared to all, 'We are saved from sin, we are made holy, by faith.' This I testified in private, in public, in print; and God confirmed it by a thousand witnesses. I have continued to declare this for above thirty years; and God hath continued to confirm the word of his grace." By using this passage as a supplement to all we had before, I think it would be possible to make out quite a probable history of Wesley's movement in grace from the point where he was impressed so deeply by Jeremy Taylor on to his own actual experience of holiness; but such a history is not what I am really after. I want these references by John Wesley to his own experience simply to prepare the way for our better understanding of his teaching, and for our better appreciation of the quiet intensity and certainty manifest in his demand that Christian people should be holy.

Wesley's Teaching Analyzed

1. The Name. It is to be noted, first of all, that Wesley called the experience of holiness "Christian perfection, or scriptural perfection." (See especially Letter CCCLI.)

2. As to Conduct. Such perfection does not mean perfection in conduct. "But these souls dwell in a shattered, corruptible body, and are so pressed down thereby that they cannot exert their love as they would, by always thinking, speaking, and acting precisely right. For want of better bodily organs, they sometimes inevitably think, speak, or act wrong"(Letter CLXXXVI; also see Letter CCXXIX).

3. As to Individual Character. The imperfection is deeper than conduct and belongs even to the individual character itself. "These very persons feel more than ever their own ignorance, littleness of grace, coming short of the full mind that was in Christ, and walking less accurately than they might have done after their Divine Pattern; and are more convinced of the insufficiency of all they are, or do, to bear the eye of God without a Mediator; are more penetrated with the sense of the want of him than ever they were before" (Letter CCCLI).

4. As to Temptation. Nor does Christian perfection secure freedom from actual temptation. In a letter to the Bishop of London (vol. viii, p.484) Wesley says: "There is no such perfection in this life as implies an entire deliverance from manifold temptations." And in commenting on the Journal of Elizabeth Harper (vol. xiv, p. 278) Wesley says: "She was exceedingly tempted, after she believed God had cleansed her from inbred sin." (Also see Plain Account, sec. 25, question 14.)

5. As to Sinless Perfection. Wesley himself avoided the phrase sinless perfection, because, in a generic sense, sin is any want of individual conformity to the law of God. But Wesley's own final definition of sin was strictly personal. In a letter (CCCCII) he writes: "Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God." But I have found no way of harmonizing all of Wesley's statements at this point; and I am inclined to think that he never entirely cleared up his own thinking concerning the nature and scope of sin. At first I believed that a path out of his seeming inconsistency might be found by means of an exact chronology, but a severer examination of all his writings forced me to give up even that hope.

6. As to Love. While again and again Wesley makes much of personal intention, this intention of the person is not enough; the intention must be gathered up into a positive fullness of love. To be a perfect Christian is nothing other than being perfect in love toward God and man. In his Journal, August 27, 1768, Wesley writes: "I mean, 'loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.' I pin all its opposers to this definition of it. No evasion! No shifting of the question!" And the same statement, in slightly varying words, can be found all through Wesley's writings.

7. As to Time. In Brief Thoughts (January 27, 1767) Wesley says: "As to time, I believe this instant is generally the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before. I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five months after it, I know no conclusive argument to the contrary." In another place (not taken from the London edition) Wesley says that "some of the most unquestionable witnesses of sanctifying grace were sanctified within a few days after they were justified." And in his Journal, September 7, 1765, there is an account of what Wesley deems a most remarkable case -- "a person convinced of sin, converted to God, and renewed in love, within twelve hours." And Wesley adds: "Yet it is by no means incredible, seeing one day is with God as a thousand years." I have found no testimony in Wesley's writings that justification and entire sanctification ever take place at the same time; but it is plain enough that in his last years he was unwilling to set any limit. As his experience with men widened, and his pastoral intuitions deepened, he became less conservative on all questions of divine grace -was more open to new and astonishing results in the work of the Holy Spirit.

8. As to Growth. On the surface there seems to be a contradiction in Wesley's teaching at this point. At times, apparently, he teaches that a regenerated man can actually grow into Christian perfection. In Sermon CVII, on God's Vineyard, we read: "And as, in natural birth, a man is born at once, and then grows larger and stronger by degrees; so, in spiritual birth, a man is born at once and then gradually increases in

spiritual stature and strength. The new birth, therefore, is the first point of sanctification, which may increase more and more unto the perfect day." There are a number of passages to the same effect. To harmonize this view of growth with Wesley's other statements, some have said that he believed Christian perfection is obtained either by growth or by instant and crucial faith; but the truth, I think, is that Wesley regarded the decisive stroke in attainment as always instantaneous, growth being but a preparation for the stroke, or an after work in utilization and enlargement. In the Minutes of Several Conversations, Wesley says: "The substance, then, is settled, but, as to the circumstance, is the change gradual or instantaneous? It is both the one and the other. From the moment we are justified, there may be a gradual sanctification, a growing in grace, a daily advance in the knowledge and love of God. And if sin cease before death there must, in the nature of the thing, be an instantaneous change; there must be a last moment wherein it does exist, and a first moment wherein it does not" (viii, 328). Again to the same purpose in the Plain Account (sec. 19): "Is this death to sin, and renewal in love, gradual or instantaneous?" His answer is in these very striking words: "A man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die till the instant the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet (he is not dead to sin till sin is separated from his soul; and in that instant he lives the full life of love. And as the change undergone, when the body dies, is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any we had known before, yea, such as till then it is impossible to conceive; so the change wrought when the soul dies to sin is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any before, and than any can conceive till he experiences it. Yet he still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity." Again in Brief Thoughts, Wesley touches upon the method of attainment: "I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant. But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant" (xi, 446).

9. As to Assurance. In the Plain Account, sec. 25, question 16: "How do you know that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption?" Answer: "I can know it no otherwise than I know that I am justified. We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit. And, first, by the witness. As, when we were justified, the Spirit bore witness with our spirit that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, he bore witness that they were taken away. Indeed, the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first (as neither is that of justification); neither is it afterward always the same, but, like that of justification, sometimes stronger, and sometimes fainter. Yea, and sometimes it is withdrawn. Yet, in general, the latter testimony of the Spirit is both as clear and as steady as the former."

10. As to Losing the Experience. At first Wesley believed that the experience of Christian perfection could not be lost, but finally he was convinced that it could be. In a letter to his brother (LXVII, London, February 12, 1767) Wesley writes: "Can one who has attained it fall? Formerly I thought not; but you (with Thomas Walsh and John Jones) convinced me of my mistake." In the month before (January 27) Wesley had said: "By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions. I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or in whole. Therefore, I retract several expressions in our hymns which partly express, partly imply, such an impossibility." In his Journal (July 25, 1774) Wesley writes: "I went on to Sheffield and on Tuesday met the Select Society. But it was reduced from sixty to twenty; and but half of these retained all that they once received. What a grievous error, to think those that are saved from sin cannot lose what they have gained! It is a miracle, if they do not; seeing all earth and hell are so enraged against them; while, meantime, so very few, even of the children of God, skillfully endeavor to strengthen their hands."

11. As to the Primary Compromise. "From long experience and observation, I am inclined to think that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus, whoever is justified, has then the choice of walking in the higher or the lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him the 'more excellent way,' and incites him to walk therein, to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way, to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness -- after the entire image of God. But if he does not accept this offer he insensibly declines into the lower order of Christians. He still goes on in what may be called a good way, serving God in his degree, and finds mercy in the close of life through the blood of the covenant" (Sermon LXXXIX, on The More Excellent Way).

12. Personal Conclusion. By constant association with an author we may come to have a conception of his real meaning in spite of all his inconsistencies. For our conception has been gradually formed by a number of features in a complex combination -- by his peculiar silences; by his spontaneous repetitions; by the way a certain paragraph closes, or a certain discussion culminates; by the instant and eager answer to an unexpected question; and even by his choice of phrase in a crucial situation. My view of John Wesley's meaning is of this indefensible sort. I am sure of his doctrine of Christian perfection, as sure of its essential import as I am that I walk the earth; but I am unable to relate my view, in an exact way, to all of his statements, or even to all of his very important statements. I will give my own personal conception without quotation and without defense. According to John Wesley, a sinner has three things the matter with him: First, he is guilty; second, he is morally powerless; and, third, his inherent and inherited disposition is wrong. Or, as I would say, the individuality is out of harmony with the ideal of the moral person. When a sinner is justified the guilt is canceled. When he is regenerated he receives a nucleus of power, not enough to exterminate his wrong disposition, but enough "to fight it to a standstill." In Christian perfection, there is no such fight with the disposition, "no civil war at all," for the wrong impulse never enters the consciousness as motive. Now, when you ask, "What becomes of the wrong disposition?" Wesley can give no fundamental answer, for the simple reason that he was all mixed up in his psychology. I am not one of those courageous men who dare to say that John Wesley had at the bottom of his thinking a consistent psychology. My opinion rather is that he was a very crude realist, but usually restless under that unspeakable curse, and trying to break away, without ever being fully able to accomplish his purpose. This "slavery of the man to the lump" is not surprising, if we only remember that many of the recent Christian books, and many more of the modern scientific books, have been written with an underlying realism so gross that any serious thinker should have been unwilling to grant it toleration at any time since the death of Immanuel Kant; and I almost said at any time since the death of Plato. But Wesley does this much for us: he holds that the civil war in the perfect Christian is rendered impossible by love, supreme love toward God and man. Whether the natural disposition is extirpated or only overwhelmed, it does not appear in a consciousness full to the brim of pure love.

It will help us all, probably, if I can give a concrete illustration of Wesley's view. Here is a man, a Christian preacher now, who has from infancy been naturally jealous. He is not only converted, but is a noble Christian man, ready to sacrifice for his Lord, and equally ready to serve his brethren. But he is still jealous in disposition. Yesterday he heard another preacher's sermon receive large commendation, and, like an uprush of mercury in the heat, that old feeling of jealousy rose into consciousness. His volition, his personality, had no more to do with it than his will had to do with the coming on of night. But the moment our preacher realizes that he is jealous he makes Christian battle, and forces the disposition back, back into its cave. Now, we have here an exceedingly strange psychological situation, for the man's struggle is plainly Christian in its revelation of the moral ideal, and yet the struggle reveals a motive-life which no Christian ought to have at all. Or, we can say this: The victory is truly that of a Christian man -- but as a

Christian man he should have been without the possibility of that kind of a battle. Now comes a pivotal inquiry. As our preacher grows what does his growth in grace accomplish? According to Wesley, the growth does not affect the inherent disposition of jealousy at all; but it does bring the regenerate man himself to a more potent attitude, both of intolerance toward the disposition and of trust toward Jesus Christ. With this more potent personal attitude the man dares to believe that his Lord can and will take that jealousy, and every wrong disposition, out of his life. In full, simple faith he asks Christ to do it; and, precisely as when he was converted, it is all done at one stroke. Now what is the man's condition? On the one hand, he never is conscious of jealousy. Rather does he spontaneously rejoice in another man's success. On the other hand, he never comes to self-consciousness without being filled, like the prodigality of a freshet, with the love of God. This, as I understand him, is what John Wesley means by the conquest of inbred sin through supreme love.

And if there is one man here to whom Wesley's view of inbred sin suggests no reality, no point in kindred experience, he most surely is to be regarded as extremely fortunate.

Christian Perfection and Biblical Theology

Is there, though, for this Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection any support in biblical theology? In Wesley's day there was such an arbitrary and fragmentary and superficial use of Scripture, even by the finest scholars, that many students have gained the impression, if not the belief, that the scriptural argument for Christian perfection cannot endure the test of our modern method of studying the Bible. I am certain that the test can be endured; but, before taking up that matter, I wish to enter a protest against the prevailing notion that before we can accept a Christian doctrine every feature of it must have exact Scripture proof. The Bible is not to be used in that hard and fast manner. The Bible is the normative authority on Christian doctrine; but we must also provide for the larger and larger interpretations by the developing Christian consciousness. For example, it would be enough to show that Christian perfection is not in contradiction of any Scripture, but harmonizes with the trend of emphasis in the New Testament upon moral love; and is the loftiest ideal belonging to the most normal and most thoroughly developed Christian consciousness. If we can make it indubitable that the Bible itself never allows the great saints to rest until they hold and experience this doctrine of supreme love, we will have secured quite as good a basis for the doctrine as could be secured by any amount of precise scriptural proof.

Saint John's Doctrine of Love. The essence of the message of Saint John to the Christian man is in this glowing passage (1 John 4.16 to 5.5): "God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him. Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love, because he first loved us. v If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God: and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is begotten of God overcome the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. And who is he that overcome the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

When we separate the real message of this passage from its rhetorical mannerism, we find the connected points to be these: First, in Saint John's conception of God the finality is love. Second, we make entrance into this love of God by being "begotten of God," and this takes place when we believe "that Jesus is the Christ." Third, we are prepared for the day of judgment by having this love of God made perfect in us; and this perfection of love can be achieved in this life -- "because as he is, even so are we in this world." Fourth, the marks of this perfect love are that it "casteth out fear," that it makes a man "love his brother also," and that it enables him to "do his commandments," and to have that perfect faith which "overcometh the world."

Saint Paul's Teaching. In coming to Saint Paul's teaching, I wish to be sure of avoiding not only all personal bias, but also all Methodist bias, so I will make use of Professor Bartlet, Mansfield College, Oxford. In his article on Sanctification in the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, Professor Bartlet writes of Saint Paul's teaching as follows: "There is a state possible to Christians, corresponding to the ideal of their calling, in which they can be described as 'unblamable in holiness' (*amemptous en hagiosynei*), and into which they may be brought by the grace of God in this life. Therein they stand hallowed through and through (*holoteleis*), every part of their being (*holokleron hymon to pneuma kai he psyche kai to soma*) abiding by grace in a condition fit to bear the scrutiny of their Lord's presence without rebuke (*amemptos en tei parousiai tou kyriou hemon Iesou Christou teretheie*). Such is the teaching of 1 Thess. 3.13 and 5.23. The fidelity of God to his purpose in calling men to be Christians is pledged to this achievement (1 Thess. 5.24), though there is no definite time, as measured from the initial hallowing of the Spirit in conversion, at which it must needs be accomplished. God, who begins the good work in the soul, also continues to work at its perfecting (*epitelein*) right up to the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1.6); and yet, ere that day dawns, Christians may become already 'pure in purpose' (*eilikrineis* = Christ's *katharoi tei kardiai*, Matt. 5.8) and 'void of offense,' and so remain until the day of Christ' (Phil. 1.10). It is this state of realized sanctification of conduct, or 'walk,' so as to 'please God,' that Saint Paul has constantly in view in exhorting his converts to holy living (for example, 1 Thess. 4.1). This is what he means, at times, by his use of *hagiasmos*. But the conception needs to be carefully guarded and explained by other aspects of his thought. Thus (1) it represents a growth in holiness rather than into holiness out of something else; (2) it is conceived as realizable by a definite act of faith -- claiming and appropriating its rightful experience by an act of will informed by the living energy of the Holy Spirit -- rather than as the cumulative result of a slow, instinctive process after conversion; (3) it is not the same as absolute moral perfection or consummation (*teleiousthai*), but is rather the prerequisite to its more rapid and steady realization."

Our Lord's Injunction. "And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets" (Saint Matt. 22.37-40). This one passage should forever settle the entire controversy as to both the ideal and the possible achievement in the Christian life. From the Old Testament (Deut. 6.5 and Lev. 19.18) our Lord takes the two items of supreme moment, and lifts them into a Christian primacy of injunction. It has been said that our Saviour did not intend to give an actual injunction, but only to suggest a Christian ideal. But I do not understand how anyone can hold such a view; for a study of the Saviour's life will show that love toward God and love toward man were the two tests which he used in determining all religious values. And the fact is that today the Christian consciousness anywhere grasps the Master's words as injunction, and responds to them as such, making them the final test of life. Every Christian deed is Christian, every Christian thought is Christian, every Christian feeling is Christian, precisely to the extent that it expresses this supreme love. Ignatius clearly apprehended the whole thing when he said: "The

beginning of life is faith, and the end is love. And these two being inseparably connected together, do perfect the man of God; while all other things which are requisite to a holy life follow after them. No man making a profession of faith ought to sin, nor one possessed of love to hate his brother. For He that said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, said also, And thy neighbor as thyself."

A Psychology of Personal Holiness

With my conception of a perfect Christian very much more is required than perfection in motive, and so I prefer the expression personal holiness. The holiness is personal because it is holiness exactly from the standpoint of self-consciousness and self-determination. What you have is holiness in personality.

The Transformed Motive. As we have seen, the motive-life of a regenerate man is organized about the motive of loyalty to Christ. This motive of loyalty is not a simple motive, but is made up of two elements, one of love and the other of duty. At rare moments these two elements are in self-consciousness with equal force, but usually the sense of duty is paramount. The regenerate man, in any typical situation, is seeking to do his duty. His common remark is: "I will be true; I will not deny my Lord." This loyalty is very different from the loyalty of the moralist; and for two reasons, namely, it is loyalty to a person, and it is rooted in the enthusiasm of a positive personal affection. And yet the Christian loyalty has some of the same psychological weakness which renders morality so ineffective. Duty always implies a conflict, a civil war. The sense of the ought is, like a bugle, intended to call the person into battle. And while this moral battle is great, it is less than the highest mood. You will see what I mean if you think of a home where husband, wife, parents, children are ever trying to do their duty by each other. What a dreadful home that would be! Not one day with the simple, rejoicing impulse of dominant love.

Now we can quickly uncover the fundamental flaw in the condition of the regenerate man. In his life of struggle to do his duty he cannot organize his inner personal life. He has the beginning, the ground plan, so to speak, of an organism, but he cannot carry out the plan. And the reason of his failure is that when duty is paramount in consciousness, even though it be the most noble sense of duty, the personal task is done under fear; and fear is never an organizing motive.

In personal holiness this motive of loyalty is transformed into the simple motive of pure love. There remains all the ethical quality of duty, for the new supreme love is a moral love; but "the whip of the ought" is gone. The holy person does not do things because it is his duty to do them, but because he loves to do them. But note this closely, the important thing here, psychologically, is not the vastness of the love (that is a matter of endless growth), but simply that the love entirely occupies the self-conscious mood. Whenever the person comes to self-consciousness it is crammed with love to the very edges. Thus, there is a perfect personal organism, because all the man's motivity is nothing but love in a variety of shapes. In the man's personal life there is no antagonism, no civil war whatever. He may be tempted, as we shall see, but he cannot be tempted by his own inorganic condition, by his own depravity.

The Exhaustion of Wrong Motive. The old question, "Suppression or eradication?" I cannot fairly consider; for my psychological point of view is different from that of the combatants about that question. But if you will recall my early discussion of motivity you can see what I think takes place when the motive of loyalty is transformed. The new motive of pure love is not used in a negative conflict, but is used positively; and by this positive use the wrong motives are exhausted.

There is no longer any heart-interest in them. They are mere ideas empty of all urgency toward the will. It is not that they are for the time being shut out from consciousness; no, the work is profounder than all that,

they cease to have any existence as motives. The full use of pure love has exhausted them.

The Question of Growth. Is this experience of personal holiness obtained by growth? First of all, the practical concern in the matter leads me to say that the very word growth is a word which should be used, in this discussion, only with extreme care. For to many people growth means a natural, an unurged development from an implanted germ. Now, there is no such unurged development in the Christian life. The whole thing is personally strenuous from conversion until death. But is personal holiness obtained gradually by earnest endeavor? Looking at it in the most comprehensive way, our answer should be in the affirmative; for the crisis itself is profoundly involved in all that has led up to it. Some of the evangelists to the contrary notwithstanding, no man can arbitrarily leap into that faith which is the condition of the divine gift of supreme love. It may, now and then, look like such a leap, but psychologically it is not so. You can leap into self-assertive presumption, but never into real faith.

And yet John Wesley's emphasis upon the ultimate stroke is exceedingly important. For there is a great difference between the last phase of the regenerate life and the first phase of the life of supreme love. As it is only in the latter case that the motive of loyalty entirely loses the note of duty; only in the latter case that love absolutely fills self-consciousness to its rim; so only in the latter case that all the wrong motives of disposition are exhausted.

But the question has been asked, "Why, on the principle of your discussion of motivity, may a regenerate man, with his motive of loyalty, not simply fight his way into personal holiness?" My answer is this: To exhaust all wrong motive by a sheer negative fight would require more time than belongs to our earthly life; and even if there were time enough the victory would exalt the element of duty and not the element of love in the motive of loyalty. What we are after is so to escape sin as to escape the bondage of conscience itself, and, like God himself, live the life of moral love.

But I have yet one suggestion to offer. I can conceive of another way of obtaining Christian perfection in love. It is, anyway, a theoretical possibility that a man might at the beginning of his Christian life lay hold of the under element of love in his loyalty, and emphasize that. He might by self-sacrifice express his love for Christ in the most complete manner. He might in prayer cultivate the mood of love for Christ. And so on and on until his love for the Saviour absolutely filled his consciousness, and his entire service was one of rejoicing love, and not one of moral obligation. There are a few of the saints whose experience is at least a hint of this kind of earnest growth into the fullness of love.

Falling Away from Personal Holiness. If it be true that the wrong motives of our depraved, inorganic individuality are thoroughly exhausted of their urgency, then the question arises, How is it possible to fall away from personal holiness? I answer: No Christian who is perfect in love can fall in the same way that a regenerate man may fall, by yielding to a motive which springs out of individuality into consciousness in antagonism to the moral ideal. But this higher life itself, as strange as it may seem at first, is a life of the most extreme self-assertion. It is spiritual self-assertion, but it is fundamental self-assertion, all the same. And out of this spiritual self-assertion there may come three motives, any one of which may bring on struggle, and with the struggle the possibility of personal defeat. These three motives are: First, spiritual discouragement. A saint in this world, in situations where Christ is not triumphant, can have a sort of discouragement which actually grows out of his supreme love for his Lord; and there is very great peril in such a mood. Second, spiritual pride. There is no experience so lofty in this life to a moral person as entirely to protect him from spiritual pride. In studying the temptations of our Saviour you see the whole method of its approach. A regenerate man is not half so likely to have this temptation as is the saint who is

filled with love. Third, spiritual ambition. A holy man may have an ambition to be a great leader in the church, or a great preacher, or a great evangelist; and his ambition may have been created by his love for Jesus Christ; and yet there may come such a turn in his affairs that he must choose between his ambition and his Master. That is, his ambition is so interesting to the man now that it stands over against the very love which created it.

I am inclined also to think that sometimes this supreme love has created a subordinate love in some human person, which has grown and grown, until at last, in an abnormal crisis, the saint was obliged to make a choice between his human friend and his Saviour. But beyond all our psychological theorizing we positively know that there are peculiar temptations which are characteristic of the life of personal holiness; and, such temptations once in force, there is ever the possibility of falling away from the experience. The Christian battle is not over until through death we pass into the intermediate state.

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