

**PATHS TO HOLINESS:  
TRADITIONS AND COMPAÑERISMO**



A SEMINAR ON THE SUBJECT OF HOLINESS BASED  
ON THE TEACHINGS OF JOHN WESLEY

by

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## Session One: Traditions



13<sup>th</sup> century icon of Moses from St. Catherine's Monastery at Mt. Sinai.

The long journey of personal holiness from Moses to Wesley:

- A. Moses
- B. Jesus
- C. St. Benedict
- D. Spanish Mystics
- E. Jeremy Taylor
- F. Thomas á Kempis
- G. John Wesley

## **BRIEF THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION** **by John Wesley**

SOME thoughts occurred to my mind this morning concerning Christian perfection, and the manner and time of receiving it, which I believe may be useful to set down.

1. By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, 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.

And I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.

2. As to the manner. 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.

3. As to the time. I believe this instant generally is 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.

If it must be many years after justification, I would be glad to know how many. *Pretium quotus arroget annus?* [This quotation from Horace is thus translated by Boscawen: -- "How many years give sanction to our lines?" -- Edit.]

And how many days or months, or even years, can any one allow to be between perfection and death? How far from justification must it be; and how near to death?

LONDON, Jan. 27, 1767.

## **Excerpt from John Wesley's *Christian Perfection***

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 unto perfection.' (Heb. 6:1.)

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

"(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.' (1 John 4:18.) This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks. (1 Thess. 5:16, &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 amissible, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this, till 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, --

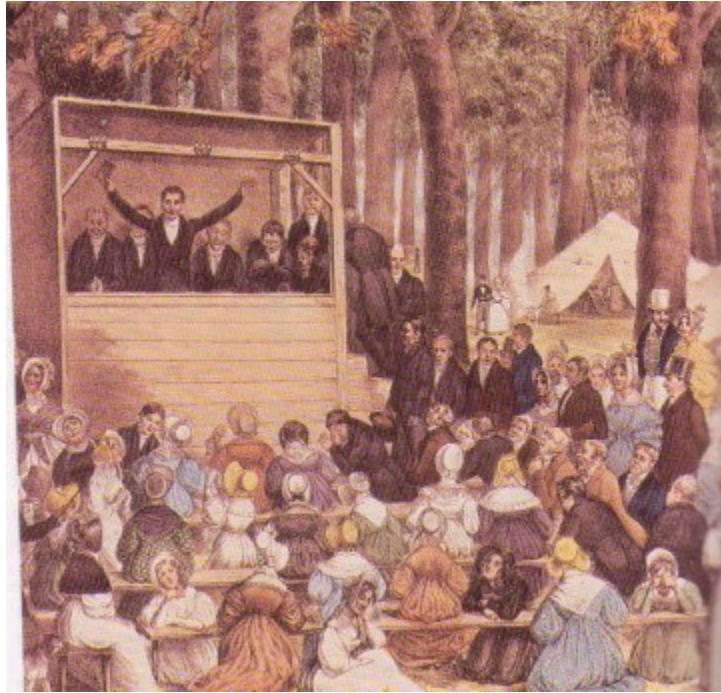
`Every moment, Lord, I want  
The merit of thy death!'

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 continually agonize for it."

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## Session Two: Compañerismo



Engraving by E. W. Clay, published in New York by H. R. Robinson, 1836.

Living out our faith in Christian fellowship:

- A. Oxford Holy Club
- B. Class meetings
- C. Quarterly meetings
- D. Camp meetings
- E. Sunday Service
- F. Means of Grace
- G. Compañerismo

### **Self-Examining Questions from the Oxford Holy Club**

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Do I confidentially pass on to others what has been said to me in confidence?
3. Can I be trusted?
4. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?
5. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
6. Did the Bible live in me today?
7. Do I give the Bible time to speak to me every day?
8. Am I enjoying prayer?
9. When did I last speak to someone else of my faith?
10. Do I pray about the money I spend?
11. Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?
12. Do I disobey God in anything?
13. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
14. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
15. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
16. How do I spend my spare time?
17. Am I proud?
18. Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisees who despised the publican?
19. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I doing about it?
20. Do I grumble or complain constantly?

21. Is Christ real to me?

**The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the  
United Societies (1743), by John Wesley**

1. In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come; which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices, from time to time, which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places. Such a society is no other than “a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”

3. That it may the more easily be discerned, whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called **classes**, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class: one of whom is styled **the leader**. It is his business, (1.) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor. (2.) To meet the minister and the stewards of the society once a week; in order to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reprov'd; to pay to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding; and to show their account of what each person has contributed.

4. There is only one condition previously required to those who desire admission into these societies, — a desire “to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins:” but, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation. First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced: such as, the taking of the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein, or by buying or selling; drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity; fighting, quarreling, brawling; brother going to the law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using of man words in buying or selling; the buying or selling uncustomed goods; the giving



or taking things on usury, that is, unlawful interest; uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers; doing to others, as we would not they should do unto us; doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as the "putting on of gold or costly apparel;" the taking of such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus; the singing of those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God; softness, and needless self-indulgence; laying up treasures upon earth; borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without probability of paying for them.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation - Secondly, by doing good, by being in every kind, merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men – to their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison; – to their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with; trampling underfoot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that "we are not to do good unless our heart be free to do it:" by doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one or another; helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only by all possible diligence and frugality, that the Gospel be not blamed: by running with patience the race that is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world; and looking that men should *"say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake."*

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence.

7. These are the general rules of our societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in His written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practise. And all these, we know, His Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them that watch over that soul as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season; but then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

## **GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Session One**

- 1. List and summarize the main points of Wesley's argument about the doctrine of "Christian perfection." Is there a biblical basis for it?**
- 2. What is "Christian Perfection"? How is it distinguished from justification?**
- 3. Do you preach this doctrine in your church? Why or why not?**
- 4. What techniques or methods would you use to teach this doctrine to adults? Youth? Children?**
- 5. Share your experiences of moving on to "perfection" or "sanctification."**

### **Session Two**

- 1. What are the General Rules? Can you give a biblical basis for them?**
- 2. What are the Means of Grace? How often do you offer or participate in them?**
- 3. Why did Wesley consider meeting together with other believers so important? Was he exclusive or inclusive? How do you deal with his position?**
- 4. What do you do in your congregation to encourage Christian fellowship? Outside your congregation?**
- 5. Do you have a dependable colleague with whom you can share your struggles? What prevents or promotes professional trust and intimacy?**

### **Evaluation**

- 1. Please list what you have learned in this seminar? Did it meet your expectations?**
- 2. What other topics would you like to discuss?**
- 3. Other comments or suggestions.**