

## HISTORIC POSITION OF METHODISM ON THE SUBJECT OF HOLINESS.

This article is an extract from a small pamphlet entitled "The Historic Position of Wesleyan Methodism on the Subject of Holiness," by Rev. Charles Munger, published by McDonald & Gill, Boston, Mass., about fifty years ago. We publish it not only because it gives the Methodist position on Holiness, but because we believe it gives the Bible position on this great subject of Christian experience and life.

The historic position of Wesleyan Methodism on the subject of holiness appears in three things: its theology, its experience, and its expedients.

I. What was the theology of Wesleyan Methodism on the subject of holiness?

We purposely limit the discussion to the time of Wesley for two reasons: (1) Wesleyanism during that period took and held its positions in one of the sharpest controversies of modern times. (2) The positions then taken were accepted by universal Methodism, and have never been materially changed. Judging from the authorities accepted as standard during the first century of Methodist history, we repeat that Methodism has neither added nor subtracted a single fraction that was recognized as essential to the Wesleyan theology of Wesley's time. Therefore the Wesleyanism of that period shows the historic position of Methodism. I am aware that it has been said recently that Methodism has not clearly defined what she meant by holiness. The assumption that our Church has been laboring through an entire century to spread spiritual holiness without finding out what she has meant by it, is an absurdity that falls by its own weight. On the contrary, we affirm that Methodism has never defined anything more clearly and uniformly. The records of a century prove the truth of this assertion. To these records we appeal.

Scriptural holiness, entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, in the Wesleyan theology, is a Divine repairment of a moral or ethical impairment called in our Articles of Religion, "Original or Birth Sin." The seventh and eighth Articles declare four startling facts:—

(1) That man by nature is very far gone from original righteousness.

(2) That by nature he is morally corrupt or depraved.

(3) That by nature he is inclined to evil continually,—that this corrupt nature has an elastic spring sinward.

(4) That by nature he has no power to do works acceptable to God.

These four terrible facts are affirmed as existent in every man by nature, aside from an overt act of transgression of his own. Universal evangelical Protestantism agrees in asserting these facts, and also in asserting that holiness, in the sense of entire sanctification, is a complete restoration to the lost righteousness—or perfect love; a complete removal of the acquired moral depravity; a complete reversal of the sinward inclination; and a bestowment of power always to cleave to God in works of acceptable obedience. This was no peculiarity of Methodism. The Calvinists asserted it in the following words of the Westminster confession: "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God." Compare the explanation of this in Fisher's Catechism, published by the American Presbyterian Board, as follows: "Perfect holiness (or sanctification) is perfect freedom from all sin as to the very being of it, and perfect likeness and conformity to God."

Here the Calvinists declare that perfect holiness, or entire sanctification, is perfect deliverance from all sin as to the very being of it, and

perfect conformity to God, whose nature is love. This is precisely the Wesleyan doctrine. Take a few examples of Wesley's definitions which occur in every year of his life. John Wesley never discussed anything without defining it, and he never defined anything so frequently, so definitely, and so uniformly, as Christian perfection, or holiness.

"Our first conception of it was to have the mind of Christ and to walk as He walked . . . And we have the same conception of it now without addition or diminution." A careful examination of Mr. Wesley's definitions of holiness from 1725 to 1791, the year of his death, shows beyond doubt that he adhered to the above definition without the least wavering, and all his definitions, which multiplied every year of his public life, agree in this as the root. "To be holy is to have the mind that was in Christ, and to walk as He walked." In strict analysis this "mind" implies the three great facts—purity, love and power. Mr. Wesley's definitions constantly declare or necessarily imply these things.

1733—In this year Mr. Wesley preached before the Oxford University his first published sermon. The subject was "Christian Perfection," which he defined in these words: "It is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness, and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus."

1741—In this year we have noticed Mr. Wesley's use of the prayer in our sacramental service, "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily magnify Thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

In the two preceding sections of that service the Church prays thus: "Forgive us all that is past." "Pardon and deliver us from all our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness." But in this section she prays distinctly for entire purity, even to the thoughts of the heart,—and perfect love and power to walk worthily and magnify His name. All by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. To each and all the Church solemnly declares her assent, consent, belief and prayer by the word "Amen."

How did Mr. Wesley understand this prayer for cleansing and perfect love?

A few of the many expressions used by him about that time will answer this question. In the same year we notice, among others, the following definitions of Christian Perfection: "A deliverance from inward as well as outward sin." "The body of sin destroyed." "A rest from doubt and fear, and from every evil motion freed, cast out by perfect love." "A pure heart." "A spirit made whole." "From every soul-disease to perfect health restored." "To sin entirely dead."

1749—A few lines from the Wesleyan Hymns giving simply those which contain the defining terms:

"All the devil's work destroy."

"From this inbred sin deliver."

"Let me gain that second rest."

"Perfected in holiness."

"Fill us with the glorious power."

"Rooting out the seeds of sin."

"Make every wounded spirit whole."

"And every leper clean."

"Thy quickening Spirit breathe."

"The second gift impart."

1762—"Sanctification in the proper sense—an instantaneous deliverance from all sin . . . meaning from all sinful tempers, from all pride,

anger, evil desire, idolatry and unbelief."

1765—"Entire sanctification—a full salvation from all our sins . . . Love excluding sin; love filling the heart."

1768—"We are encompassed with a cloud of witnesses who have testified and do testify that perfection which I have taught these forty years. I mean loving God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves. I pin down all opposers to this definition. No evasion. No shifting the question."

1770—"An entire deliverance from sin—a recovery of the whole image of God. . . . A second change whereby they shall be saved from all sin and perfected in love."

1774—"The second blessing, properly so-called . . . delivered from inbred as well as actual sin."

1784—"Full deliverance from all sin, and a renewal in the whole image of God."

1790—"Full sanctification," "perfect love."

"This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists, and for the sake of propagating this chiefly, He appears to have raised them up."

Thus definitely and unequivocally did Mr. Wesley declare, with the Calvinists, that entire sanctification implied a deliverance from all sin as to the very being of it. On the other or positive side, he constantly declared that its sum and essence was perfect love. Thus the repairment affirmed in these quotations from Calvinists and Wesleyans, undeniably covers the impairment declared in the seventh and eighth articles of our religion. The Wesleyans also declared that such repairment is instantaneously wrought, even an instantaneous deliverance from all sin, an instantaneous destruction of all sin as to its very root and being, an instantaneous reversal of sinward tendencies or the inclinations of evil, and an instantaneous gift of power always to cleave to God. And this, said Wesley, is sanctification in its proper sense.

## SOME THINGS WHICH WILL HURT YOUR SOUL

The ascendancy of the physical over the spiritual.

Too much frivolity.

Discouragement.

Low contentment in matters of what there is in certain errors.

Living in the neighborhood of questionable things.

Worry.

Trickery in business relations.

Exaggeration.

Reading that does not feed the soul.

Infrequent and short prayers.

Living at high pitch emotionally.

Taking yourself too seriously.

Thoughtless conversation.

Thinking of your injuries too much.

Unkind criticism of others.

Secret moral irregularities.

Careless relations to the opposite sex.

Failure to build habits of piety.

Neglect of Bible reading.

Indolence, irritation and irreverence.

Exciting revelry in play or work.

Failure to witness for Christ.

Love of money.

Telling smutty stories.

Intemperance in your affections.

Familiarity with worldlings.

Loose imaginations.

Overcaution about what others think of you.

—Selected.