

The Blessing

by E. W. Lawrence (London, England)

Continually throughout his ministry John Wesley urged upon his listeners the need for their experiencing the blessing of sanctification. The doctrine itself he called the "grand depositum" of the Methodist societies. He opened his book, *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, by giving an account of "the steps by which I was led . . . to embrace the doctrine of Christian perfection." He declared also that the experience "could only be passed on by those who already had it." Such a statement would tend to make nonsense of the idea that Wesley himself never professed to have the "blessing."

In his printed sermon, "The Scriptural Way of Salvation," which was published in 1765, he said, "I have continually testified, in private and in public, that we are sanctified, as well as justified, by faith." And writing to his friend, the Countess of Huntingdon, in 1771, he told how he had seen the need for holiness of heart and life laid out in the Scripture. Then this testimony: "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. **This I have continued to declare for above thirty years. . .**"

Writing to three of his preachers in 1762, he said, "You have over and over denied instantaneous sanctification, but I have known and taught it, and so has my brother, as our writings show, for these twenty years. . ."

When, just when, did John Wesley himself actually enter in the blessing of "entire, instantaneous sanctification"?

A specified day in the year 1744 has been put forward as one suggestion. J. C. McPheeters, I see, favors this date as well, and as recently as May 1962, in an editorial, he quotes from the late James Buckley—an authority on Wesleyana, and editor for thirty-two years of the *New York Christian Advocate*. "It is my understanding from Wesley's writings," he says, "that he was born again May 24, 1738, in that Aldersgate meeting, . . . and that December 23, 1744, he received what he called the second blessing, or sanctification."

Olin A. Curtis also favored 1744. In his book *Christian Faith*, he said, "To anyone familiar with John Wesley's realistic manner of speech, it is evident that we have here (against December 23, he meant) the same thought and testimony to the experience of holiness as we have in his *Journal*, May 24, to the experience of his conversion. If the one is not quite so near a full definition as the other, it surely is just as expressive of the fact."

On that particular evening, December 23, 1744, he had been to a meeting at Snowfields, and God had dealt with him in a very special way, for he put on record afterwards, "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 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.'"

Whether or not that was the actual occasion when he experienced the blessing of instantaneous sanctification for himself is another matter, and still a debatable point. And since reading Bishop Leslie R. Marston's volume, *From Age to Age a Living Witness*, I have begun to doubt the view previously stated.

For many years I have been greatly impressed by a view I first heard voiced by D. W. Lambert, then tutor at Cliff College, England. But a few weeks after his own conversion, Wesley decided to visit the Moravian Brethren, in Berthelsdorf. He had been greatly helped by these folk since he first met them on his voyage to Georgia. Peter

Delayed Answers

I think one gets glimpses in the Bible of what delayed answers to prayer may mean.

Moses, for instance—the answer to his prayer to enter the Promised Land was kept back for centuries until he stood there with Jesus himself.

And Elijah—his prayer to die was refused, for the glory of the fiery chariot and the whirlwind was waiting for him.

It seems to be, as it is in arithmetic, that the figure carried forward becomes part of a higher power! Even if the answer is carried on out of the bounds of this life altogether, it is not thereby lost. "The powers of the world to come" are more than we know yet.—Amy Carmichael

Boehler was able to lead him along the pathway of faith, to encourage and yet challenge him. And it was in a Moravian prayer meeting that he felt God's Spirit speak to him, and his heart was strangely warmed. Wesley felt greatly drawn to these Moravians, and he loved them dearly.

Christian David, a godly lay brother, told Wesley that while sin did not reign in one who had been justified, it did still continue to exist. Christian David testified to this from his own experience.

Wesley also said of this good brother: "Four times I enjoyed the blessing of hearing him preach during the four days I spent here: and every time he chose the very subject which I would have desired. . . . He described the state of those who are weak in the faith, who are justified, but have not yet a new, clean heart, who have received forgiveness through the blood of Christ, but have not received the constant indwelling of the Holy Ghost given unto them."

He also met Arvid Gradin, who spoke of "a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation from all, even inward sins." This man also defined "full salvation" as "constant repose in the blood of Jesus."

Wesley had been with the brethren at Ekershaussen a few days earlier, and put on record: "Here I continually met with what I sought for, namely, living proofs of the power of faith: persons saved from inward as well as outward sin, by 'the love of God shed abroad in the hearts,' and from all doubt and fear, by the abiding witness of the Holy Ghost given unto them. . . ."

Wesley had known the implications of sanctification theoretically many years before that, even in his "high church" days. In 1733, five years before Aldersgate, in a sermon he had preached in St. Mary's (Oxford), he spoke of "that habitual disposition of soul which in the sacred writings is termed 'holiness,' and which directly implies the being alienated from sin, and from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus. . . ."

And so I felt it more than likely that John Wesley had, for himself, entered into "the blessing" during those weeks in Saxony.

"Many who ascribe to Aldersgate the revolutionary change in John Wesley from a floundering priestly legalist to a well-organized, confident, intense prophet and evangelist overlook his period of struggle and vacillation that soon followed his heart warming," says Bishop Marston. I'm afraid I overlooked it. For example, who would have credited John Wesley writing, on January 4, 1739, "I am not a Christian now." It does not appear in the abridged edition of the *Journal* that I have here. Yet Wesley put that on record, in black and white, almost nine months

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