

## THE WHEN AND HOW OF HOLINESS

Wesleyans do not think uniformly about Christian perfection.<sup>1</sup> While we share common theological language and concepts, diverse perspectives exist. The purpose here is to explore crucial differences in the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection, also called entire sanctification, based on [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#) (“May the God of peace himself *sanctify* you *entirely*,” NRSV; emphasis added). We will begin by outlining the three major Wesleyan positions on Christian perfection and then argue for the strength of one of them.

### THE THREE MAJOR POSITIONS ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

Expressed in the most general terms, sanctification addresses the entire work of transformation in human lives by the Holy Spirit from the moment individuals are born again until they are glorified in death. The ultimate end of the Spirit’s work is to restore the full image of God in humanity, making humanity like Christ, thereby glorifying God in creation.

When the Spirit takes residence in humans, he begins to transform our attitudes, interests, and actions, while confronting the internal principle of selfishness and sin that stubbornly persists in us. This is often called “initial” and “progressive” sanctification. While this principle may be described in different ways, there is a consensus among Wesleyans that the Spirit can conquer this condition and enable believers to love God entirely, to live in complete obedience to his revealed will, and to serve others in love.<sup>2</sup> Within the Wesleyan tradition, this work of the Spirit has been called “Christian perfection,” “perfect love,” “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” “entire sanctification,” and “fullness of the Spirit.” The work of sanctification does not end here. Over time, as Christians continue to submit to the Spirit, their love deepens, and their knowledge and understanding of God’s will increase, thereby bringing them into greater conformity with Christ until they reach “final sanctification” in the moment of glorification.

Wesleyans generally agree on “what” Christian perfection is, albeit with some important nuances. Major disagreements, however, arise in answering the question of “how” a believer experiences it in life. These nuances in understanding and differences on means have led to three major positions on Christian perfection in the Wesleyan tradition.

*The “shorter way”—Christian perfection now by total consecration and faith.* The most optimistic view on holiness teaches that believers can experience Christian perfection now, in

<sup>1</sup> This section is adapted from Christopher T. Bounds, “What Is the Range of Current Teaching on Sanctification and What Ought a Wesleyan to Believe on this Doctrine?,” *The Asbury Journal* 62 (2007): 33–53.

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of ways the deliverance from inward sin has been described in the Wesleyan tradition: an “eradication of the sin nature,” a “cleansing from inward sin,” “freedom from all inward rebellion,” “the full restoration of the moral image of God,” “the removal of the principle of sin,” etc. Regardless of how it has been described, the Wesleyan tradition has taught that Christians can be freed from the inner propensity to sin, the drive to assert personal will, and the desire against God’s will. As such, the Christian can be freed from the constant struggle between “the flesh” and “the Spirit,” where the basic orientation of the Christian’s life is obedience to and love of God.

the present moment, through an act of entire consecration and faith, whereby believers surrender their lives to the lordship of Christ and trust God to purify and empower them. Christian perfection is a simple synergism in which the work of consecration and faith by a Christian is met immediately with deliverance from the inner propensity to sin by the Holy Spirit.

J. A. Wood, in the American holiness classic *Perfect Love*, illustrates this perspective in his instructions on the exercise of faith necessary to appropriate entire sanctification. To be perfected in love, he states that we must (1) believe that God has promised it in the Scriptures; (2) believe that what God has promised, God is able to do; (3) believe that God is willing to do it; (4) and believe that God has done it in us. He then asks, “Are you now committing all, trusting in Christ? If you are, it is done.”<sup>3</sup>

What makes this position unique in the larger Wesleyan tradition is its understanding of Christians’ ability to consecrate themselves and to exercise faith. Every believer has an inherent power, either as a gift of prevenient grace, regenerating grace, or as an uncorrupted part of the moral image, to do the grace-enabled human work required in the experience of Christian perfection.<sup>4</sup> From the moment of conversion any Christian can appropriate perfection. Because the Holy Spirit is always ready to respond to a personal act of consecration and faith, ignorance on the part of a believer, an unwillingness to surrender fully to the Lord, or a lack of will to believe become the root causes for not experiencing entire sanctification.

This teaching makes a distinction between Christian perfection and spiritual maturity. It is possible for a person to be set free from inward and outward sin and perfected in love but not to have the wisdom, experience, and knowledge necessary for Christian maturity. In other words, one can be fully renewed in the moral image of God yet lack significant restoration of the natural and political image. Yet, a Christian cannot become fully mature without the experience of entire sanctification. A believer can know what to do in each situation but not have the power or proper motivation to execute it in a way fitting for spiritual maturity. Holiness is ultimately a dynamic experience that intensifies and grows throughout the life of a Christian, continuing beyond Christian perfection and enabling us to address more fully sins of infirmity in life.

Traditionally, this view has been termed the “shorter way” for its emphasis on the immediacy of the experience of Christian perfection; one does not have to wait any significant length of time to experience it after conversion. Primarily associated with the teaching of Phoebe Palmer and the holiness movement, this position can be seen in Allan Brown’s “How to Be Entirely Sanctified in Four Easy Steps.” It is a possible interpretation of the Church of the Nazarene’s Articles of Faith and seems to be implied by the expectation of Christian perfection for those seeking ordination. Nazarenes require all their ordained ministers to testify to the experience of entire sanctification.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John Allen Wood, *Perfect Love*, 87–88.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Finney is an example of a holiness evangelist in the nineteenth century who denied original sin and taught that this power to exercise faith is naturally inherent in each person apart from grace.

<sup>5</sup> Allan P. Brown, “How to Be Entirely Sanctified in Four Easy Steps,” *God’s Revivalist*, September 2012, 1–4; “Article of Faith VII: Prevenient Grace,” in *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2017–2021* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene), ¶ 7. A close reading of this article indicates that the prevenient grace given to all of humanity empowers a person to exercise saving faith, needing no additional grace, making possible the exercise of faith for salvation an inherent power within an individual. If this is true for conversion, it

*The “middle way”—Christian perfection by seeking until you receive.* The next view on holiness in the Wesleyan tradition affirms with the “shorter way” that entire sanctification is realized in a Christian’s life through personal consecration and faith. Also like the “shorter way,” it makes a distinction between Christian perfection and spiritual maturity. Perfection is what makes growth toward spiritual maturity optimal. However, unlike the “shorter way,” it does not believe that faith necessary to appropriate Christian perfection is a power inherent at any given moment in a believer’s life. Rather, sanctifying faith is seen as a gift of grace, a grace with which a Christian can choose to cooperate or not. The grace capable of creating this faith is more than what one receives at conversion.

John Wesley’s teaching on levels or degrees of grace and faith is at the heart of this holiness teaching. Wesley taught that a person is totally dependent on God’s grace for the work of salvation. At each stage or level of progression in the way of salvation, more grace is needed to move forward. For example, Wesley taught that prevenient grace given to every person enables a person to respond to grace, but that prevenient grace does not have within itself the power to exercise faith to appropriate the new birth. God must give more grace beyond prevenient grace to create the possibility of saving faith. This grace is communicated through the various means of grace, most notably through the preaching of the gospel, but also through other “instituted” and “prudential” means, such as prayer, Bible reading, fasting, and holy Communion. Through participation in these means of grace, saving faith can be communicated, with which a person can choose to cooperate or not. In the same way, to the grace made available at conversion, more grace must be added in order to make possible the creation of faith necessary for salvation and sanctification.<sup>6</sup>

From this perspective, believers actively seek Christian perfection, availing themselves of the various means of grace, waiting for God’s grace capable of creating faith to appropriate it. Thus, a person cannot be entirely sanctified at any given moment, but only in those times and places in which God’s grace is being made available that can create such faith. For example, while Wesley describes faith that sanctifies entirely as a trust that “God hath promised it in the Holy Scripture,” that “God is able to perform” it, that “He is able and willing to do it now,” and “that He doeth it,” he makes clear that it is “a divine evidence and conviction”; it is a faith that God creates and enables through the means of grace.<sup>7</sup>

To be clear, the “middle way” teaches that a person can be sanctified in the moment a believer asks for it. It can happen immediately, or over a shorter or longer period. The premium here is placed on God’s timing. From this perspective, we cannot determine how God wants to move in any given moment; we can only either cooperate with or resist what God is doing. Among the various Wesleyan models, this teaching may be called the “middle way,” rejecting the simplicity of the “shorter way,” while refusing to succumb to the arduous nature of the “longer way,” addressed below. The “middle way” is seen in John Wesley’s “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” in Steve DeNeff’s *Whatever Became of Holiness?*, and can also be argued as a possible position taken in The Wesleyan Church’s Articles of Religion, but more particularly with its

would appear to be true for entire sanctification as well. See also ¶ 502.2 which stipulates all Nazarene ministers “must have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and be sanctified wholly ...”

<sup>6</sup> Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *WJW* 5:185–201.

<sup>7</sup> Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *WJW* 6:43–54.

candidates for ordination.<sup>8</sup>

*The “longer way”*—*Christian perfection by a long process of continual growth*. In contrast to the previous two positions, the third Wesleyan view on holiness emphasizes that Christian perfection is realized most often in a believer’s life after a long journey of dying to self, following many years of spiritual development. There will be some Christians who will realize entire sanctification in the present life, but most will not experience it until just before death or at the point of death. A belief in the persistence and stubbornness of original sin forms the heart of the doctrine. This recalcitrance can only be overcome gradually over a lifetime through significant growth in grace, personal denial, and spiritual development.

The analogy of a slow death is one of the most well-known descriptions of this view, an analogy that emphasizes the complementary nature of process with an instantaneous moment. In a slow death, there is a long process leading to the point of death, often a painful and arduous process. Nevertheless, there is a point at which a person dies. While this view does not deny the possibility of a short process and early death, or the exercise of personal faith in appropriating entire sanctification, its focus is on the long progression. While the moment in which a Christian dies completely to self is always the goal in the present life, the process leading to the goal takes preeminence.

Furthermore, while there are exceptions, many who adhere to this doctrine of holiness equate Christian perfection with spiritual maturity or closely link them. John Wesley’s high view of Christian perfection comes to the fore, a perfection in which a believer has “the mind of Christ” in speech, saying what Christ would say, and in action, doing what Christ would do.<sup>9</sup> The movement toward this state of perfection can only be brought about by growth in grace, knowledge, wisdom, experience, and the practice of spiritual disciplines. As such, entire sanctification is not really seen as a possibility for new converts but only for those who have diligently followed Christ for many years.

In the Wesleyan tradition this view has been called the “longer way,” because of its focus on an extended process in the realization of Christian perfection. The “longer way” is described and embraced in John Wesley’s more pessimistic writings, such as “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” where he states, “As to the time, I believe this instant generally is the instant of

<sup>8</sup> Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *WJW* 6:43–54; Steve DeNeff, *Whatever Became of Holiness?* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 1996), 125–37; “Article of Religion XIV: Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire,” in *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church* 2000, ¶ 238. A close reading of this article affirms a progressive sanctification leading to the experience of entire sanctification. Progressive sanctification is described as a daily growing in grace. While not explicitly stated, this growing in grace may indicate the need for more grace to be added to the grace given in conversion for a believer to fully surrender to Christ and exercise faith to appropriate entire sanctification, pointing to the “middle way.” The Wesleyan Church’s middle way approach is clearly seen in ¶ 5566, where candidates for covenant membership are asked, “Have you the assurance that you have experienced the deeper grace of heart cleansing? If not, do you propose to diligently seek this grace?”

<sup>9</sup> Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” *WJW* 8:341–44. If a Wesleyan holds to this as a definition of entire sanctification, the person must realize that this goes beyond the common understanding of entire sanctification as defined here. It must also be noted that Wesley at times defines Christian perfection in ways that encompass Christian maturity and at other times in ways that do not.

death, the moment before the soul leaves the body.... I believe it is usually many years after justification.”<sup>10</sup> Denominationally, this position represents the United Methodist tradition and expectation for people seeking ordination, where they are asked, “Are you going on to perfection?” and “Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?” The expectation is that no one at the time of ordination can testify to the experience of entire sanctification.

## THE EXERCISE OF FAITH IN THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION: TWO CONTRASTING PARADIGMS

The relationship between divine grace and personal faith in Christian perfection is one defining difference among Wesleyans. All Wesleyan traditions in their doctrinal statements affirm salvation “by grace through faith.” A question arises: “Is faith primarily a gift of grace, or a power residing in humanity through prevenient grace or the human will?” Stated differently: Is the faith that saves and sanctifies principally a human work or a gift of divine grace? Do we have the power within ourselves “to believe” at any given moment, or must God impart it to us?

How Wesleyans answer these questions determines our conception of salvation and influences how we understand the experience of new birth and, more importantly for our discussion, Christian perfection. It guides, in turn, what counsel is given on the experience of Christian perfection. Theologically, Wesleyans adhere to two contrasting paradigms, determined by (1) their respective understandings of original sin and (2) the relationship between divine grace and human action. Historically, these differences are rooted in the Pelagian-Augustinian debates over the centuries of the church and the various nuanced positions that have developed from them.<sup>11</sup>

*Christian perfection when we decide.* The first paradigm focuses on immediate experience. We can exercise sanctifying faith at any moment we decide. The moment of entire sanctification is determined largely by us. Wesleyans ground their understanding here in either the image of God in humanity, in its remaining vestiges, or in a robust view of prevenient grace.

To begin, a small minority of Wesleyans reject the doctrine of original sin and hold to a form of Pelagianism. They argue that people are born into this life like Adam and Eve before the fall in the garden. This aligns them with Pelagianism. What sets them apart is their belief that

<sup>10</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, vol. 3, *Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 226–57; Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 176–90, 201–15; Wesley, “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” *WJW* 11:446. In these thoughts, Wesley states, “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.”

<sup>11</sup> The four major historical positions from the most optimistic view of humanity in the work of salvation to the most pessimistic are (1) Pelagianism, (2) semi-Pelagianism, (3) semi-Augustinianism, and (4) Augustinianism. There also exist important differences and nuances among these major positions. For a more detailed and extensive discussion of these contrasting paradigms, see Christopher T. Bounds, “How Are People Saved? The Major Views of Salvation with a focus on Wesleyan Perspectives and Their Implications,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 3 (2011): 31–54.

humanity inevitably sins, as Adam and Eve did, and requires the application of Christ's atoning work to their lives. They teach that humanity retains the free will enjoyed by our first parents in the garden or one similar to it. Therefore, people have the internal resources within themselves to begin to move toward God, repent, and exercise faith to believe the Gospel. They believe as human beings we have an inherent ability to see the truth of the Gospel and act accordingly. The same holds true for Christian perfection. Once understanding comes of the truth of entire sanctification, we have the power to meet the conditions necessary to experience it.<sup>12</sup>

Another minor group of semi-Pelagian Wesleyans acknowledge original sin and its impact on us. Semi-Pelagians believe every person arrives at birth with a propensity to rebellion, disobedience, and selfishness, contributing to human sinfulness. We nevertheless retain vestiges of the moral image of God and the ability to will the good. We have some measure of free will to contribute to salvation's work. It remains in our power to recognize our alienation from God because of sin and to turn to Christ for salvation. The same is true for the experience of Christian perfection. Believers have the power to exercise sanctifying faith once they have knowledge of it.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, many Wesleyans are semi-Augustinian. They acknowledge "total depravity" and the state of "natural humanity" as spiritually dead to God, thoroughly corrupt, and dependent on God's initiative in the work of salvation. They teach that God has taken that initiative through prevenient grace given to all. However, in sharp contrast to John Wesley's teaching, they hold to an expansive, robust view of prevenient grace. They have softened Wesley's strong semi-Augustinian theology. Prevenient grace given to every person makes repentance and faith operative within every person. As such, we have the ability in any given moment to believe the truth of the gospel and appropriate salvation. These "soft" semi-Augustinian Wesleyans also believe we have the power to determine the moment of Christian perfection once we have adequate knowledge of what it is and how it is experienced.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of differences, each of these Wesleyan understandings believe that we can hear the message of Christian perfection, weigh the strengths and weaknesses of its arguments, decide to believe in the fullness of salvation expressed in teaching on entire sanctification, exercise sanctifying faith in Jesus Christ, and be sanctified. Our act of faith is principally what we do. We can experience entire sanctification at any moment we decide because we have the power to appropriate the fullness of Christ's redemptive work through faith.

This Wesleyan model places emphasis on human initiative in one way or the other. God does not determine when people are entirely sanctified; it rests entirely on us. Once knowledge

<sup>12</sup> Charles G. Finney represents this view. See Finney, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1976), lectures 35 and 55.

<sup>13</sup> Nazarene theologian A. M. Hills is an example of this view. See A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena, CA: C. J. Kinne, 1931), 2:179–80.

<sup>14</sup> Examples of Wesleyan theologians holding to a soft semi-Augustinian theology include Daniel D. Whedon, "Doctrines of Methodism," in *Essays, Reviews and Discourses* (New York: Phillip and Hunt, 1887), 110. See also "Article of Faith VII: Prevenient Grace," in the *Manual of The Church of the Nazarene 2005–2009* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene), which states, "But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight" (33).

comes, the door to Christian perfection is before us, and we can decide to go through it at any time. The Holy Spirit then imparts entire sanctification. This human-divine synergism pervades evangelical Wesleyan churches in general and Wesleyan-holiness denominations in particular. While hopeful because it promises an immediate experience, it leads people to think they can have Christian perfection when they decide.

*Christian perfection by seeking until God decides.* The second paradigm focuses on seeking Christ for grace until the Holy Spirit imparts sanctifying faith. In contrast to the first model, Wesleyans here teach that actions attributed to us in salvation are not inherent powers; rather, they are gifts of grace. When God gives grace to repent, and when God bestows grace to believe, only then is Christian perfection possible. Through prevenient grace granted to all, humanity can receive God's grace and choose to embrace or resist it. We play a role in what happens with grace in our lives once given, but we cannot determine it.

Until God moves to bring awareness, repentance, and sanctifying faith, Christian perfection cannot happen. People, therefore, who have been awakened to the "sin that remains after new birth" and desire entire sanctification must seek God for grace in the appointed means of grace, until God moves to make it happen. The testimonies to entire sanctification found in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine* illustrate this model well. In testimonies of entire sanctification people had to wait an average of six years between the time they began to ask God for entire sanctification and the experience of it.<sup>15</sup> Some had shorter periods, while others had longer.

At the heart of this second Wesleyan model is a particular understanding of grace. Unless the Spirit is working in a way that makes entire sanctification possible, people cannot experience it. Only in moments in which the Holy Spirit enables sanctifying faith are people entirely sanctified. This model, therefore, places the premium on the divine initiative. God ultimately determines when people can be entirely sanctified. Then, and only then, can people decide whether they want to submit to or resist the grace God makes available. God opens and closes the doors of opportunity to experience entire sanctification, and humanity chooses whether to go through the doors or not. Humanity, however, cannot go through the door if it is not opened by God.

This is a divine-human synergism and the full expression of Wesley's full semi-Augustinianism, which has a more limited view of prevenient grace. While contemporary Wesleyan theologians express a clear semi-Augustinian view of salvation, their discussions of the implications of this theology have been shallow or absent, leading to the preeminence of the first paradigm today.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the Wesleyan paradigm for the experience of Christian perfection is missing in Wesleyan churches, and one of the key insights of Wesleyan theology has a diminished voice in contemporary Christianity.

## A NEO-HOLINESS "MIDDLE WAY" UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

<sup>15</sup> Mark Horton, "Research on Revival," *The Arminian Magazine* 21, no. 2 (2003): 11–13.

<sup>16</sup> See H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1988), 431, 439–41; J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1994), 351–55, 362–65, 405–8; Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 14–15, 73–82.

At the heart of John Wesley's theology is the doctrine of Christian perfection or entire sanctification.<sup>17</sup> Wesley believed that there is a work of divine grace available to all that can liberate human life from the guilt, power, and being of sin, empowering a Christian to fulfill the two greatest commandments. Through God's justifying grace, sin is forgiven. Through God's regenerating and sanctifying grace, bondage to sin is broken, enabling believers to walk in obedience to the known will of God, and the "propensity toward sinning" is corrected, making the love of God and neighbor the natural response of human hearts.

John Wesley left little ambiguity about *what* entire sanctification is. His theological heirs have embraced almost universally Wesley's definition. This can be seen in the Articles of Religion and Confessions of Faith of Wesleyan denominations and in the theological treatises and texts written by Wesleyan theologians.<sup>18</sup> However, because Wesley and the eighteenth-century Methodist revival wavered in their understanding of *when* Christian perfection takes place in life, their heirs followed in one of two basic trajectories: the more optimistic "shorter way" or the more pessimistic "longer way."<sup>19</sup>

No place better expresses John Wesley's equivocation here than his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" and his "Brief Thoughts on Perfection," a brief addendum to *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. In his sermon, Wesley concludes a discussion of Christian perfection with a confident exhortation to experience it in the present moment:

But you shall not be disappointed of your hope: it will come, and will not tarry. Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith ... expect it by faith; expect it as you are; and expect it now!... Do you believe we are sanctified by faith? Be true then to your principle; and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse; as a poor sinner that has still nothing to pay, nothing to plead, but "Christ died." And if you look for it as you are, then expect it now.<sup>20</sup>

However, "Brief Thoughts on Perfection" gives a striking contrast. Wesley portrays the typical experience of entire sanctification as the culminating experience in a long process of gradual growth, taking place in most Christians just before the moment of death. He states, "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. [However], I believe it is usually many years after justification."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> John Wesley famously called Christian perfection "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up" (*WJW* 13:9).

<sup>18</sup> For an example in a Wesleyan denomination, see "Article of Religion XIV: Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire," in *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2000* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2000), ¶ 238. For examples of Wesleyan theologians, see Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 367–468; Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 226–57. For examples of popular Wesleyan writers, see DeNeff, *Whatever Became of Holiness?*, 125–37; Keith Drury, *Holiness for Ordinary People* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 1983), 71–88.

<sup>19</sup> These two different views about the timing of entire sanctification in Wesley establish one of the distinguishing marks between Wesleyan denominations.

<sup>20</sup> Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *WJW* 6:53.

<sup>21</sup> Wesley, "Brief Thoughts on Perfection," *WJW* 11:446.



Denominations generally following Wesley's "longer way" include the United Methodist Church, the British Methodist Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Churches traditionally championing the "shorter way" include the Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Churches of Christ in Christian Union, and the Salvation Army.<sup>22</sup>

Historically, the latter bodies are called "holiness" denominations because their appropriation of Wesley's "shorter way" theology was forged in the nineteenth-century American holiness movement. Through revivals, camp meetings, accountability groups, hymnody, and print media, they made the doctrine and experience of Christian perfection accessible to the common masses across the United States and the world.<sup>23</sup> The holiness movement's message of the "shorter way," however, has fallen on hard times and is almost totally eclipsed in Wesleyan circles today by the "longer way."<sup>24</sup> Theologically, there is much to embrace in the holiness movement's "shorter way," but there are also some glaring problems in need of correction.

*Advantages of the holiness movement's "shorter way" over the "longer way"* There are important differences and modifications in thought that set apart the American holiness movement's teaching from its sibling. First, Holiness theology believes that an entirely sanctified life is the normative Christian experience. While the "longer way" believes every Christian should experience perfection in this life, most will not until death or just before death. Yes, there will be a few

<sup>22</sup> One of the clear ways to distinguish between denominations holding the "longer" and "shorter" ways is to examine the questions asked of ministerial candidates. Churches holding to the "longer way" ask the historic question John Wesley posed to his preachers, "Do you expect to be made perfect in this life?" The assumption is that candidates have not realized it yet but would expect to do so before death. In contrast, denominations holding to the "shorter way" require their prospective ministers either to testify to the experience of entire sanctification for ordination or ask their candidates, "Have you been entirely sanctified?" The expectation is that ministers have already experienced Christian perfection or are near it.

For examples of the "longer way," see the doctrinal statements on sanctification from The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2004* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004); The British Methodist Church, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church 2012: Volume 2* (Peterborough, UK: Methodist, 2012); The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2008* (Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union, 2009).

For examples of the "shorter way," see the doctrinal statements on sanctification from *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine 2010* (London: Salvation, 2010); *Manual of The Church of the Nazarene 2009–2013* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene, 2013); *The Free Methodist Church of North America 2007 Book of Discipline* (Indianapolis: Free Methodist, 2007); *What We Teach: A Summary of the Doctrine of the Churches of Christ in Christian Union* (Circleville, OH: Advocate, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> For historical treatments and descriptions of the American holiness movement's substantial influence in society and the church in the nineteenth century, see Melvin Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1996); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957).

<sup>24</sup> See Keith Drury's famous address to the Christian Holiness Partnership, "The Holiness Movement Is Dead," in *Counterpoint: Dialogue with Drury on the Holiness Movement*, ed. Larry D. Smith (Salem, OH: Schmull, 2005), 17–27.

believers who walk in perfection long before death, but this is the exception rather than the rule. The general expectation is to see it as the culmination of a long process of gradual sanctification. Focus is placed on a life that is slowly dying to sin.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, the “shorter way” believes freedom from the power and condition of sin should typify the basic life of every Christian. Entire sanctification is an experience that should happen soon after becoming a Christian, not after a decades-long process of growth.<sup>26</sup>

Second and closely connected, holiness theology makes a clear distinction between entire sanctification and Christian maturity. It is possible for a person to be set free from inward and outward sin and perfected in love but not to have the knowledge, wisdom, and experience necessary for Christian maturity. Yet a Christian cannot become fully mature without the experience of entire sanctification. A believer may know what to do in each situation but not have the power or purity of heart to execute it in a way fitting with spiritual maturity. Holiness theology understands that Christian perfection sets the foundation and enables the movement toward Christian maturity.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the “longer way” often conflates entire sanctification and maturity, seeing perfection as the ultimate expression of Christian maturity. John Wesley’s high view of Christian perfection comes to the fore, a perfection in which a believer has “the mind of Christ” in thought, speech, and action—thinking, speaking, and doing only as Christ would.<sup>28</sup>

Third, while the “shorter way” and the “longer way” share the same definitions of entire sanctification, they nuance their respective understandings of (1) salvation from sin’s condition and (2) perfection in love. The “longer way” has the tendency to raise its understanding of perfection, while the “shorter way” lowers it. The “longer way” sees perfected Christians as always joyful, always giving thanks, and always loving to the full extent to which they can love.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, the holiness tradition’s bias is to recognize limitations in the experience of perfect love at times. People who have been entirely sanctified may have love as the natural reigning disposition of their hearts, and yet love may not always be actualized fully in their lives. They may not always love God to the full extent of their “heart, soul, mind, and strength” and may not always love their neighbors with their complete capacity. While the fruit of the Holy Spirit is abundantly manifested in their lives, there may be fluctuation in expression. These limitations have several possible causes: ignorance (lack of self-awareness regarding cultural bias), physical limitations (lack of sleep, food), emotional trauma (due to poor modeling of love), and so on.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For examples, see United Methodist theologian Stephen Long’s discussion of this “longer way” issue in *Keeping Faith: An Ecumenical Commentary on the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 73–84; Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 176–90, 201–15.

<sup>26</sup> See Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness* (New York: Piercy and Reed, 1843), pref., 10–14; and Daniel Steele, *Love Enthroned: Essays on Evangelical Perfection* (New York: Richard Dickerson, 1883), 55–70, 352–63.

<sup>27</sup> For examples, see Donald S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1971), 238–39; J. A. Wood’s *Purity and Maturity* (Chicago: Christian Witness, 1913), 180; and Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, 32–48.

<sup>28</sup> See United Methodist theologian Stephen Rankin, *Aiming at Maturity: The Goal of the Christian Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 48–60; Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” *WJW* 8:341–44.

<sup>29</sup> The classic expression of this view is Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” *WJW* 8:341–44.

<sup>30</sup> See Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 464–68; Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 221–43; John N.

Fourth, what the “longer way” makes implicit in its teaching on Christian perfection, the holiness tradition makes explicit: empowerment for ministry. One of the few distinctive differences between Articles of Religion and Confessions of Faith in the American holiness and “longer way” traditions is that the “shorter way” denominations have added a specific statement on ministry empowerment.<sup>31</sup> When a Christian’s heart has been perfected in love, then obedience to God and loving neighbor become the normal response. Christians no longer must “force themselves” to evangelize the lost or reach out in service to people in need. Spirit-infused love for neighbor naturally compels and enables witness and service, even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances. While “longer way” theology would agree, it has not focused on this benefit as much as the holiness tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the “longer way” often leads to a practical problem: If Christians must wait a lifetime before they can hope to be entirely sanctified, they have little expectation for the power and condition of sin to be broken in their foreseeable future. There is an increased temptation to acquiesce to a life in which they try to manage their sins and become satisfied. The “shorter way,” however, when it has been expressed well, leads to expectation and earnest seeking, confident that the holiest longings of the human heart can be realized in life, sooner rather than later.

In the end, these are strengths only if they comport with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Obviously, many inside and outside of the Wesleyan tradition would question whether they do. Skeptical Wesleyans, however, should note that the “shorter way’s” nuanced understanding of entire sanctification as the normative Christian life captures well historic Wesleyan exegesis of [Matthew 5–7](#); [Romans 6–8](#); [Galatians 5](#), and 1 John.<sup>33</sup> Those outside the Wesleyan tradition, who may see the “shorter way” as novel and outside the bounds of historic Christianity, would do well to recall that the “shorter way” resonates with the earliest post-New Testament view of Christian perfection found in the ante-Nicene church (the apostolic fathers, Irenaeus, and Origen) and in later Greek and Latin fathers from the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the

Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy: A Biblical Perspective* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury, 1999), 185–200. In this regard, the American holiness movement’s understanding is closer to Thomas Aquinas’ definition of Christian perfection. See [Aquinas, \*Summa Theologiae\*, 2a-2ae, Q. 184.](#)

<sup>31</sup> See Article of Religion XIV: “Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire,” in *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2000*, ¶ 238; Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 388.

<sup>32</sup> See The United Methodist Church’s Confession of Faith on “Sanctification and Christian Perfection” in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, ¶ 104.

<sup>33</sup> For an example of early Wesleyan exegesis of these passages, see Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*; and Adam Clarke’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977). For a more recent treatment from a Wesleyan perspective, see the *Asbury Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> For the ante-Nicene fathers’ treatment of Christian perfection as a normative experience, see Christopher T. Bounds, “The Doctrine of Christian Perfection in the Apostolic Fathers,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2007): 7–27; “Irenaeus and the Doctrine of Christian Perfection,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (2010): 45–60. Even Augustine believed the normative Christian life was one in which the love of God reigns in the human heart, enabling a Christian to walk in full obedience to God. See Christopher T. Bounds, “Augustine’s Consistent Belief in a Christian’s Victory over Sin,” *Asbury Theological Journal*

holiness movement's basic understanding of entire sanctification echoes Thomas Aquinas' teaching on the type of Christian perfection every believer should expect to experience in the present life. He states that it is a removal of "whatever hinders the mind's affections from tending wholly to God."<sup>35</sup>

*The "Achilles' heel" of the "shorter way"* The American holiness movement's "shorter way" captures well the biblical and early Christian vision of the normative Christian life. However, it has been hampered and stifled by an inadequate understanding of the divine-human synergism in Christian perfection.<sup>36</sup> As the holiness tradition has proclaimed, taught, and counseled people about how to experience entire sanctification, it has fallen victim at times to forms of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism. More often, it has softened Wesley's semi-Augustinianism and given too much credit to prevenient grace given to all. This has often been done unwittingly, but at other times in full knowledge of the facts.

Holiness theology teaches that Christians can experience Christian perfection now through an act of entire consecration and faith, whereby believers surrender their lives to the lordship of Christ and trust God to purify and empower them. Entire sanctification is a simple synergism in which the work of consecration and faith by a Christian is met immediately by the grace of the Holy Spirit, bringing deliverance from the inner propensity to sin and empowerment to walk in love of God and neighbor.<sup>37</sup>

The human part of this synergism is represented in the three "easy steps" to sanctification first formulated by Phoebe Palmer and enshrined in the holiness tradition: First, Christians are to "present [themselves] to God in full surrender," that includes the "spirit," "soul," and "body." Second, they are "by faith [to] ask the God of peace to sanctify [them] and believe that He does it." Third, they are to "testify to others that [they] by faith believe God has received [their] full surrender and has entirely sanctified [them]."<sup>38</sup>

At this point, what makes holiness teaching unique in the larger Wesleyan-Arminian tradition is its understanding of Christians' ability to consecrate their lives and exercise sanctifying faith. Every believer has the inherent power, either as a gift of prevenient grace, regenerating grace, or as an uncorrupted part of free will to do the human work required in Christian perfection.<sup>39</sup> From the moment of conversion, any Christian can appropriate entire sanctification.

44, no. 2 (2009): 20–35.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 2a-2ae, Q. 184, art. 2.

<sup>36</sup> While there are other theological problems with the holiness movement's theology of the "shorter way" that could be addressed, such as the tendency at times to "sell short" the work of regeneration and to overly simplify sin, I believe their understanding of operant grace is most problematic.

<sup>37</sup> For a few examples, see Brown, "How to be Entirely Sanctified," 25–27; Virgil A. Mitchell, "How to be Entirely Sanctified," *Vista* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2009), 2–4; Leslie D. Wilcox, *Be Ye Holy* (Cincinnati, OH: Revivalist, 1965), 110–40.

<sup>38</sup> See Brown, "How to be Entirely Sanctified," 25–27; Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, 1–38. Brown teaches at God's Bible School and College in Cincinnati, Ohio, a school that epitomizes nineteenth-century American holiness theology.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1976), lectures 35 and 55, is an example of a nineteenth-century holiness evangelist who almost holds to pure Pelagianism through his denial of original sin (he is a soft semi-Pelagian) and teaches that the power to exercise faith is naturally inherent

Because the Holy Spirit is always ready to respond to a personal act of consecration and faith, ignorance on the part of a believer, unwillingness to surrender fully to Christ, or a lack of will to believe become the root causes for an inability to achieve Christian perfection.<sup>40</sup>

The holiness movement places the focus squarely on human initiative and power to consecrate and believe. God does not determine when people are entirely sanctified (or converted); this rests entirely on humanity. Once people begin to see the truth of holiness, the door to Christian perfection is before them, and they can choose to open it, go through, and enter the sanctified life. When they choose to go through the door, God bestows this work of holiness.

However, there are several problems with this Pelagian, semi-Pelagian, and soft semi-Augustinian holiness perspective from a biblical, historical, and theological perspective.<sup>41</sup> Because of the fall in the garden, humanity does not have the ability to recognize the truth of the full gospel unless enlightened by the Holy Spirit, does not have the ability to have true sorrow over remaining sin, turn completely from sin, consecrate themselves fully to God, and have the faith to believe that God can sanctify them wholly unless the Holy Spirit gives this grace. Ultimately, total consecration and sanctifying faith are a gift of divine grace and not an innate ability.<sup>42</sup>

The holiness movement's confidence in human ability to fulfill the requirements to experience entire sanctification has led to many practical problems. For example, when the holiness tradition taught that people must be converted and sanctified to have a "ticket to heaven," many sincere seekers despaired of being "saved" at all after experiencing repeated failure to enter the sanctified life by its easy-to-follow formula. Many gave up on Christianity altogether as a result.

in each person. An example of a true semi-Pelagian view is Nazarene theologian A.M. Hills, who in his influential systematic theology (the first in the holiness tradition), *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena, CA: C. J. Kinne, 1931), 2:179–80, recognizes the debilitating influence of Adam's sin on humanity but argues for humanity's free will and natural capacity "by virtue of creation" to recognize the truth of the gospel, repent of sin, and exercise saving faith and sanctifying faith. While semi-Augustinian in his theology, Wesleyan theologian R. Larry Shelton unintentionally communicates a semi-Pelagian theology with his chapter "Initial Salvation: The Redemptive Grace of God in Christ," in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic and Practical*, ed. Charles Carter (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 496–99, by treating repentance and faith that appropriates salvation in a way that makes it seem like an inherent power all humanity possesses. An example of a Wesleyan theologian who explicitly teaches that the power to consecrate and exercise sanctifying faith is given to all through prevenient grace (a form of soft semi-Augustinianism) is nineteenth-century Methodist theologian John Miley, who in his influential *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1894), 2:301–15 grounds humanity's freedom to repent and exercise faith in Christ's gift of prevenient grace given to all. See also "Article of Religion VIII: Personal Choice," in *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2000* ¶ 224.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, "How to be Entirely Sanctified," 25–27.

<sup>41</sup> See Thomas C. Oden's discussion of historic Christianity's rejection of any form of Pelagian or semi-Pelagian theology and the church's embrace of semi-Augustinianism in *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 93–124, 206. See also Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 567–77, 603–7.

<sup>42</sup> See Steve DeNeff, *The Way of Holiness* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2010), 61–75, for a description of true grace-empowered repentance. See Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *WJW* 6:53, for a description of the grace-created faith necessary to appropriate entire sanctification.

Some Wesleyans simply conceded to the “longer way” after unsuccessful attempts to get “the victory.” Many fellow seekers eventually rejected any Wesleyan teaching on holiness, embracing more Reformed or Lutheran understandings of sanctification. Others, after testifying to the experience of Christian perfection publicly to show their exercise of sanctifying faith, settled into bifurcated lives: giving public face and witness to a life of holiness while being plagued by a deeply divided heart and a persistent struggle to keep their sinful actions hidden from the church. Still others reduced heart holiness to entire consecration, whether sin still reigned in their lives or not, or they condensed holiness to a certain list of behavioral rules that became the primary criteria by which a sanctified life was judged. If people could keep the rules, they would be judged to be perfect.

Ultimately, the holiness movement’s “shorter way” works well when Christians immediately experience entire sanctification at the moment they seek and ask for it. However, it has limited theological and practical resources to offer seekers who do not genuinely experience it straight-away.<sup>43</sup> While the Holy Spirit used this theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to bring many into the experience of entire sanctification, it has led too many seekers to settle for something less than true sanctification or to despair of the experience.

*A “middle way” perspective: A neo-holiness theology of Christian perfection.* The American holiness movement has captured well Scripture’s vision of the normative Christian life and the expectation that entire sanctification should happen sooner, rather than later, in the Christian life. Its greatest weakness, however, arises from its belief that Christians have the ultimate power in determining when and where perfection occurs. It fails to understand the finer nuances of God’s grace and it erroneously gives too much power to humanity in the synergistic work of salvation and sanctification.

To correct this problem, the holiness tradition must recover John Wesley’s semi-Augustinian understanding of grace. He believed that because of the fall and transmission of original sin, humanity is destitute of all natural ability to move toward God at any point in salvation; people are impotent to perform even the normal actions assigned to humanity in the work of salvation: repentance and faith.<sup>44</sup>

Wesley believed all human beings are “naturally” dead to God spiritually, thoroughly sinful, under divine condemnation, helpless to change themselves, ignorant of their present condition, and are incapable of grasping their true predicament in life. Therefore, if salvation is going to happen, God must take the initiative. If people are to awaken from their spiritual sleep of death, experience conviction of sin, repent, and exercise faith in Christ for salvation, then God must do the work.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> This does not mean that the holiness tradition is without any sound advice for seekers of holiness. However, the advice given is often inconsistent with their semi-Pelagian theology. Ultimately, when Christians experience entire sanctification at the moment they ask and exercise faith, as it happens at times in the holiness tradition, it is only because God has given them the gift of sanctifying faith and given them this moment to be sanctified.

<sup>44</sup> See Wesley, “On the Doctrine of Original Sin—Part II,” *WJW* 9:261–88. In his treatise Wesley defends propositions on original sin given in response to questions 22–27 in The Westminster Larger Catechism; “On Original Sin,” *WJW* 6:60; “On the Fall of Man,” *WJW* 6:223–24.

<sup>45</sup> Wesley, “Journal,” *WJW* 1:214; “The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption,” *WJW* 5:99, 101, 108–9; “Wandering

Wesley taught that God takes initiative by giving humanity prevenient grace. This grace makes possible the reception of additional grace and a response to it.<sup>46</sup> As God's grace comes at different times and in various ways in life, prevenient grace enables people to receive it and then empowers them to decide whether to cooperate with what God is doing in the moment or not.<sup>47</sup> In any positive human action in the way of salvation, there is first God's grace, followed by human reception and cooperation.

For example, when God brings illuminating and convicting grace into a person's life, prevenient grace enables the individual to receive it and to choose whether to embrace or resist it. When God gives grace to believe the gospel, prevenient grace makes it possible to receive and respond. Heart conviction and saving faith are impossible without God giving grace in the moment for each. As such, Wesley's understanding of grace is a divine-human synergism, with priority given to God's work.

At this point, the differences between Wesley's conception of grace and the holiness tradition are evident. Wesley believed that prevenient grace only restores humanity's capacity to receive and cooperate with further works of grace, while holiness teaching believes it reinstates everyone's ability to see the truth of the gospel, to repent of their sins, and to believe in Christ without further grace. The former view of prevenient grace is more modest, the latter more expansive. For Wesley, the possibility of illumination, amendment of life, and the exercise of saving faith requires more grace than what is given preveniently.

Wesley's semi-Augustinian conception of grace has ramifications for the experience of Christian perfection. He believed that Christians cannot recognize the truth of holiness unless *the Spirit brings* this recognition. They cannot begin to really despise their sin unless *the Spirit empowers* them to do so. They cannot turn toward God in total consecration unless *the Spirit enables* them. And they cannot exercise sanctifying faith, even if they see the truth of the "full gospel," unless *the Spirit creates* such faith in them. Prevenient grace only enables them to cooperate with sanctifying grace as the Spirit works in divinely appointed times and ways.

Therefore, people cannot choose when they are entirely sanctified. The experience of entire sanctification can only happen in the moments in which God gives grace to make total consecration possible and to create sanctifying faith.<sup>48</sup> Once awakened to the truth of Christian perfection and empowered to make a thorough surrender of their lives, Christians can only seek more grace until they are given personal faith to believe in the Spirit's cleansing work and to exercise that faith for sanctification.<sup>49</sup>

If people are completely dependent on God's grace for even the human work in Christian perfection, a question arises: "How does God give this grace to people?" The answer: God works

Thoughts," *WJW* 6:24; "Original Sin," *WJW* 6:58–59, 63; "The New Birth," *WJW* 6:70.

<sup>46</sup> At this point, it might be helpful to give a basic definition of grace. Grace is the unmerited work of God for us, in us, and through us. It is any work of God on our behalf.

<sup>47</sup> See Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 14–15, 73–82.

<sup>48</sup> Steve DeNeff states this explicitly in *Whatever Became of Holiness*, 53–63. To clarify, "moments" does not mean any specific duration of time. These moments can last for minutes, days, weeks, or months. It only means a period of time in which God is at work bringing a person to entire sanctification.

<sup>49</sup> Wesley, "Letter to Isaac Andrews, January 4, 1784," in *Letters of John Wesley*, ed. John Telford, 8 vols. (London: Epworth, 1931), 7:202.

through appointed channels, or means.<sup>50</sup> As people are exposed to the means of grace, or as they place themselves in the means of grace (as they hear the gospel, partake in baptism and holy Communion, participate in the body of Christ, study the Bible, pray, fast, hear testimonies, listen to sermons, etc.), the Holy Spirit works to awaken people to the possibility of salvation from sin's power and being, to empower repentance and consecration, to create sanctifying faith, to perfect in love, and to move them to Christian maturity.

At this point, it is important to clarify that Wesley did not believe that participating in the means of grace necessarily means that someone will receive the specific grace they are seeking in the moment.<sup>51</sup> Christians cannot control how God works; they can only receive and respond to the grace God makes available to them at any given time. For example, when the truth of entire sanctification is preached, God may only be planting in one Christian the seed that with more grace will overcome the hardness of their heart to the possibility of holiness. In another believer, God may only be giving grace to bring conviction and repentance of remaining sin, but not sanctifying faith. Other people may respond to the truth of Christian perfection and seek it but not yet have sanctifying grace given to them; they may only be experiencing a deeper level of consecration, but not full consecration. From a human perspective, the Spirit may be doing very little, while at other times, God ordains the message to draw, convict, convince, and give sanctifying faith.

## CONCLUSION

Historically, the holiness tradition's "shorter way" paradigm for the experience of entire sanctification has been shaped by different forms of semi-Pelagianism and soft semi-Augustinism, leading to the erroneous belief that Christians have the power to determine when they experience perfection. The problems arising from this model unfortunately have caused many Wesleyans to forsake the "shorter way."

The "longer way," while embracing Wesley's semi-Augustinian theology, offers no real expectation of Christian perfection early in believers' lives. While it exhorts Christians to seek perfection in love in the means of grace, few will experience it until just before or at the point of death. This view has discouraged many from earnestly seeking Christ for entire sanctification.

In this last chapter, we have tried to make the case for a "middle way" between the "shorter" and "longer way." The "shorter way's" vision of the normative Christian life and the expectation of entire sanctification happening toward the beginning of the Christian life and not the end need not be abandoned. Rather, holiness theology must embrace John Wesley's semi-Augustinian doctrine of grace, leading to a more theologically sound and helpful "middle way" model: actively seeking Christian perfection until the Spirit gives it, with the confidence it will happen sooner rather than later.

<sup>50</sup> Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *WJW* 5:185–201.

<sup>51</sup> Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *WJW* 5:185–201. Wesley states, "We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord's Supper; but that it is God alone who is the Giver of very good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of Him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our souls" (188).