

# ON SIN IN BELIEVERS

## THE REPENTANCE OF BELIEVERS

### AN INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

In the first edition of *SOSO*, I (1746), 'The Witness of the Spirit' (Discourse I), was followed by a sermon on 'The Means of Grace' to round out the volume. Two years later, Wesley placed his third university sermon, 'The Circumcision of the Heart' (from 1733), as the first sermon in his second volume, following it with a new sermon on 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God'. The shared theme in this sequence (stressed in three of the sermons and implied in 'The Means of Grace') concerned the power bestowed on justified and regenerate believers not to commit sin—a crucial idea in the holy-living tradition, which then was given its climactic statement, up to that date, in *Christian Perfection* (1750); see No. 40.

This idea of the Christian's grace-bestowed power not to commit sin was, however, bound to generate controversy and confusion among both critics and some disciples. With their doctrines of the ineradicable 'remains of sin' (*fomes peccati*), the Lutherans had taught that the justified believer was *simul justus et peccator* but also that his repented sins were covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ and thus inculpable; cf. *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), Article II, 'Original Sin', especially §§35-45. With similar premises with respect to the *fomes peccati* (the Christian is 'a sinner saved by grace'), the Calvinists stressed rigorous examination of consciences, repentance, the final perseverance of the elect, and the perfect and immutable freedom 'in the state of glory only'; cf. *The Westminster Confession* VI.v, IX.v; see also XIII-XVIII. On the other side, the Moravians and some of Wesley's own disciples (e.g., Thomas Maxfield, William Cudworth, James Rely) had taken the claim that 'those born of God do not commit sin' to its antinomian extreme of sinless—even guiltless—perfection, as if the power not to sin meant the extirpation of all 'remains of sin'. For an exposition of this view, see the *Supplement to The Christian Magazine* for the Year 1762: 'for all who are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit's dwelling in them are delivered from the guilt, the power, or, in one word the being of

sin' (p. 579; see also below, pp. 328-32). Moreover, they had appealed to Wesley's basic soteriology as the logical ground for their interpretation.

Wesley, caught in the controversy generated by these two polarities, reacted typically and came up with what he regarded as a valid third alternative. Its root notion was a distinction between 'sin properly so called' (i.e., 'the [deliberate] violation of a known law of God'—mortal if unrepented) and all 'involuntary transgressions' (culpable only if unrepented and not discarded when discerned or entertained). This distinction already had a history in Catholic moral theory ('mortal' versus 'venial'); cf. Claude Fleury, *Les Moeurs des Israélites* (1683; cf. *The Manners of the Ancient Israelites*. . . , ed. Adam Clarke [1852], p. 306). But it had also had a special development among Anglican moralists as well. Richard Lucas had analyzed it in his *Enquiry After Happiness* (1717), III. 299-301 (e.g., 'Mortal sin is a deliberate transgression of a known law of God tending to the dishonour of God and injury of our neighbour or the deprivation of our own nature'). John Kettlewell, in *The Measures of Christian Obedience* (1681), had spoken of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' sins (see Bk. IV, chs. 3-4, pp. 330 ff., 335 ff.). Much more to the same effect had been found in Samuel Bradford's *Boyle Lectures* for 1699, *The Credibility of the Christian Revelation*, from its intrinsic evidence; in eight sermons (1700), *Sermon II*, p. 445; Hugh Binning, *Fellowship With God* (1671), pp. 216-18, and John Weemse [Weemes], *The Portraiture of God in Man* . . . (1627), p. 326 (cf. Weemes's formulation of the distinction as between 'sins forgiven' and 'sins passed by. . .').

Thus, there was an unstable tension between the claims that a Christian may be delivered from sin's bondage, and that 'sin remains but no longer reigns' (see below, I.6 and n.); this continued to plague Wesley in many ways, as one can see from his frequent references to it; see below, II.3, III.1-9 and n.; and cf. Nos. 1, *Salvation by Faith*, II.6; 8, 'The First-fruits of the Spirit', II.6, 9, III.4-5; 14, *The Repentance of Believers*, I.2-3; 18, 'The Marks of the New Birth', I.5-6; 19, 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God', II.8; 40, *Christian Perfection*, II.4-5; 41, *Wandering Thoughts*, III.6; 43, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, III.6-8; 46, 'The Wilderness State', II.6, III.14; 58, *On Predestination*, §7; 62, 'The End of Christ's Coming', III.3; 65, 'The Duty of Reproving our Neighbour', III.14; 74, 'Of the Church', § 21; 76, 'On Perfection', II. 9; 82, 'On Temptation', I. 5; 104, 'On Attending the Church Service', § 18; 128,



'The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart', II. 5. Cf. also Wesley's letters to John Hosmer, June 7, 1761, to Mary Bishop, May 27, 1771, and to Mrs. Bennis, June 16, 1772.

What matters most is that Wesley insisted on holding to both traditions—*sola fide* and holy living—without forfeiting the good essence of either. Moreover, he saw no inconsistency in his shifting from one emphasis to the other as circumstances seemed to require. He was more concerned to face the dreadful realities of sin while never yielding to any defeatist notion that God's grace is intrinsically impotent to save souls 'to the utmost', in this life. That enough of his comments on this twin concern could have been misconstrued as a doctrine of 'sinless perfection' is apparent both in its exaggerations in Cudworth and others, and also in nineteenth-century developments—especially in American Methodism—in which 'entire sanctification' was interpreted as 'a second and separate work of grace' and normative for the Christian life; cf. Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism.

In 1763, in a needed effort to counter the distortions and bring the controversy more nearly back to balance, Wesley wrote and published a sermon entitled *A Discourse on Sin in Believers*, 'in order to remove a mistake which some were labouring to propagate: that there is no sin in any that are justified' (see *JWJ*, Mar. 28, and Bibliog, No. 257). In 1767 he wrote out its sequel, *The Repentance of Believers*, and published it the following year (cf. *JWJ*, Apr. 17–24, and Bibliog, No. 305).

Here, we find an interesting version of Wesley's doctrine of 'entire sanctification'; cf. Pt. II. Shortly after this, when he began to re-arrange the sequence of Vol. I of *SOSO* for the edition of his Works, he quite deliberately inserted these two sermons as Nos. 13 and 14, between 'The Witness of Our Own Spirit' and 'The Means of Grace'. They are designed, as he says, for the encouragement of 'the weaker brethren' whose Christian assurance had been all too easily shaken by their awareness of sin's residues in their hearts, even in their uncertain pilgrimage of grace toward 'perfect love'.

The present text of *On Sin in Believers* is based on the first edition of 1763, and the text of *The Repentance of Believers* is from its first edition of 1767. For stemmata illustrating text transmissions through the editions published in Wesley's lifetime and the list of substantive variant readings found in these successive editions, see Appendix, 'Wesley's Text', in Vol. IV.

## SERMON 13

## On Sin in Believers

2 Corinthians 5:17

*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.*

1.1. Is there then sin in him that is in Christ? Does sin remain in one that 'believes in him'?<sup>1</sup> Is there any sin in them that are 'born of God',<sup>2</sup> or are they wholly delivered from it? Let no one imagine this to be a question of mere curiosity, or that it is of little importance whether it be determined one way or the other. Rather it is a point of the utmost moment to every serious Christian, the resolving of which very nearly concerns both his present and eternal happiness.

2. And yet I do not know that ever it was controverted in the primitive Church. Indeed there was no room for disputing concerning it, as all Christians were agreed. And so far as I have observed, the whole body of ancient Christians who have left us anything in writing declare with one voice that even believers in Christ, till they are 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might', have need to 'wrestle with flesh and blood', with an evil nature, as well as 'with principalities and powers'.<sup>3</sup>

3. And herein our own Church (as indeed in most points) exactly copies after the primitive;<sup>4</sup> declaring (in her Ninth

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John 9:36, 41.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 3:9; 4:7, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eph. 6:10, 12.

<sup>4</sup> A typical example of Wesley's unself-conscious Anglican triumphalism. Cf. also No. 33, 'Sermon on the Mount, XIII', III.1; 'Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church', §1, dated Dec. 11, 1789 (*AM*, 1790); and his letter to Sir Harry Trelawney, Aug. 1780. He was 'anti-Establishment', to be sure, but never 'anti-Anglican' or even 'pro-Nonconformist'.

The Thirty-nine Articles were a set of doctrinal formulae first adopted by the Church of England in 1563. They gained full official approval in 1571, having evolved from a series of confessional statements in 1536 ('Ten Articles'), 1537, 1539 ('Six Articles'), 1543, and 1553 ('Forty-two Articles'). By design, they were more Reformed and anti-Roman than the Edwardian Homilies (1547) had been, and they had been added to the Elizabethan Prayer Book as an appendix, since they were never intended to be a 'confession' in the same sense as *The Augsburg Confession* (1530), etc. Even so, it was required that Anglican clergy, in Wesley's day, and even down till 1865, should subscribe to them. In the prayer



Article), 'Original sin [. . .] is the corruption of the nature of every man, [. . .] whereby man is [. . .] in his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> [. . .] And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek *φρόνημα σαρκός*,<sup>6</sup> [. . .] is not subject to the law of God.<sup>7</sup> And although there is no condemnation for them that believe [. . .], yet this lust hath of itself the nature of sin.'<sup>8</sup>

4. The same testimony is given by all other churches; not only  
10 by the Greek and Romish Church, but by every Reformed Church in Europe, of whatever denomination. Indeed some of these seem to carry the thing too far; so describing the corruption of heart in a believer as scarce to allow that he has dominion over it, but rather is in bondage thereto.<sup>9</sup> And by this means they leave  
15 hardly any distinction between a believer and an unbeliever.

5. To avoid this extreme many well-meaning men, particularly those under the direction of the late Count Zinzendorf,<sup>10</sup> ran into

book prepared by Wesley for the American Methodists in 1784 (*The Sunday Service*) he included a highly personal abridgement of them, reducing their number from thirty-nine to twenty-four; a twenty-fifth was added by the Americans. As in the BCP, Wesley's Articles were placed as an appendix; 'Of Original or Birth Sin' appears as Art. VII rather than IX.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gal. 5:17.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. No. 8, 'The First-fruits of the Spirit', I.2, and, below, IV.7; see also No. 43, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, III.6.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 8:7.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. The Thirty-nine Articles, Art. IX, 'Of Original or Birth Sin', and consider Wesley's omissions. For an even more drastic abridgement, cf. 'The Twenty-five Articles' of the Methodists, Art. VII, in Wesley's *Sunday Service*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. No. 9, 'The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption'. This is an obvious reference to the more one-sided versions of the *simul justus et peccator* as formulated by Matthias Flacius Illyricus and also as denounced by Trent, Session V.v. Cf. *The Formula of Concord* (Epitome), Art. I ('On Original Sin'), 'Affirmative', III: 'And we do indeed affirm that no one is able to dis sever this [sinful] corruption of [human] nature from the nature itself except God alone—which will fully come to pass by means of death in the resurrection into blessedness,' in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1881–82), III. 100–101.

Incidentally, this notion of sin's being destroyed by death is affirmed by the early Wesley in two sermons written before 1738 (cf. Nos. 109, *The Trouble and Rest of Good Men*, I, II.6; and 136, 'On Mourning for the Dead', ¶5, but the notion never reappears afterward. William Tilly had made the point in his sermon 'On Grieving the Holy Spirit' which Wesley extracted. This idea had appeared in Luther's *Treatise on the Holy Sacrament of Baptism* (1519), VII–VIII, XVII–XVIII, and had then been developed in classical Lutheran eschatology; cf. Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, pp. 625 ff. For references to Luther in the Wesley corpus, cf. No. 14, *The Repentance of Believers*, I.9 and n.

<sup>10</sup> Wesley's relations with Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the most prominent of the Moravians, were complex and unfortunate; cf. 'The Rift With the Moravians' in LPT,

another, affirming that 'all true believers are not only saved from the *dominion* of sin but from the *being* of inward as well as outward sin, so that it no longer *remains* in them.' And from them, about twenty years ago, many of our countrymen imbibed the same opinion, that even the corruption of nature *is no more* in those who  
5 believe in Christ.

6. It is true that when the Germans<sup>11</sup> were pressed upon this head they soon allowed (many of them at least) that sin did still remain *in the flesh*, but not *in the heart* of a believer. And after a time, when the absurdity of this was shown, they fairly gave up the  
10 point; allowing that sin did still *remain*, though not *reign*, in him that is born of God.<sup>12</sup>

7. But the English who had received it from them (some directly, some at second or third hand) were not so easily prevailed upon to part with a favourite opinion. And even when  
15 the generality of them were convinced it was utterly indefensible, a few could not be persuaded to give it up, but maintain it to this day.<sup>13</sup>

II.1. For the sake of these who really fear God and desire to know 'the truth as it is in Jesus',<sup>14</sup> it may not be amiss to consider  
20 the point with calmness and impartiality. In doing this I use indifferently the words 'regenerate', 'justified', or 'believers'; since, though they have not precisely the same meaning (the first

Wesley, pp. 347–76. The crucial difference between them, in Wesley's view, was that antinomianism was a natural consequence of the Moravian doctrines of 'perfect love', whereas his own doctrine of 'perfection' and 'holiness' was strongly moralized (*viz.*, 'love of God and neighbour'). Cf. below, III. 9–10 and V.1, as well as Nos. 48, 'Self-denial', III.2; 76, 'On Perfection', III.12; 107, 'On God's Vineyard', I.3. See also JWJ, July 12, 1739, and Sept. 3, 1741; Charles's letter to the Count, Nov. 26, 1737, and John's letter of Sept. 6, 1745. See also, *Dialogue between an Antinomian and his Friend*, Bibliog. No. 102, Vol. 13 of this edn.

<sup>11</sup> I.e., the Moravians.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nos. 1, *Salvation by Faith*, II.6; 14, *The Repentance of Believers*, I.2; 19, 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God', II.2; 43, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, III.6–8; 74, 'Of the Church', §21; and 128, 'The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart', II.5. See also Wesley's account of Christian David's beliefs, in JWJ, Aug. 10, 1738, where the same phrase occurs: 'though it [sin] did not reign, it did remain in me.'

<sup>13</sup> E.g., John Gambold had been a lively member of the Holy Club and the author of a fine sermon, 'On the Holy Spirit' (1736), which Jackson published as Wesley's own (in his edn. of *Works*, VII. 508–20). Subsequently, Gambold became a pastor of the Moravians in England and, finally, their bishop. There is a poignant record of Wesley's last visit with him in JWJ, Nov. 5, 1763—very close to the date of the reference above.

<sup>14</sup> Eph. 4:21.



implying an inward, *actual* change; the second a *relative* one; and the third the means whereby both the one and the other are wrought) yet they come to one and the same thing, as everyone that 'believes' is both 'justified' and 'born of God'.<sup>15</sup>

5 2. By 'sin' I here understand inward sin:<sup>16</sup> any sinful temper, passion, or affection; such as pride, self-will, love of the world, in any kind or degree; such as lust, anger, peevishness; any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ.

3. The question is not concerning *outward sin*, whether a child  
10 of God *commits sin* or no. We all agree and earnestly maintain, 'He that committeth sin is of the devil.'<sup>17</sup> We agree, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.'<sup>18</sup> Neither do we now inquire whether inward sin will *always* remain in the children of God; whether sin will continue in the soul *as long as* it continues in the  
15 body. Nor yet do we inquire whether a justified person may *relapse* either into inward or outward sin. But simply this: is a justified or regenerate man freed from *all sin* as soon as he is justified? Is there then no sin in his heart? Nor ever after, unless he fall from grace?

20 4. We allow that the state of a justified person is inexpressibly great and glorious. He is 'born again, not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God'.<sup>19</sup> He is a child of God, a member of Christ, an heir of the kingdom of heaven. 'The peace of God which passeth all understanding keepeth his heart and  
25 mind in Christ Jesus.'<sup>20</sup> His very 'body is a temple of the Holy Ghost',<sup>21</sup> and 'an habitation of God through the Spirit'.<sup>22</sup> He is 'created anew in Christ Jesus';<sup>23</sup> he is *washed*; he is *sanctified*. His 'heart is purified by faith';<sup>24</sup> he is cleansed from 'the corruption that is in the world'.<sup>25</sup> 'The love of God is shed abroad in his heart  
30 by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him.'<sup>26</sup> And so long as he 'walketh in love'<sup>27</sup> (which he may always do) he 'worships God in

<sup>15</sup> But see below, No. 18, 'The Marks of the New Birth', where significant nuances of differentiation between these terms may be found.

<sup>16</sup> Wesley's inventory of 'inward' sins corresponds to what he speaks of elsewhere as 'involuntary' (as the Lutherans had in their *Formula of Concord*) and to what the Romans had grouped under the heading of 'venial' at Trent, Session V; see above, intro. and I.4 and n.

<sup>17</sup> 1 John 3:8.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. John 1:13.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19.

<sup>23</sup> Eph. 2:10.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Pet. 1:4.

<sup>27</sup> Eph. 5:2.

<sup>18</sup> 1 John 3:9.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Phil. 4:7.

<sup>22</sup> Eph. 2:22.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Acts 15:9.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Rom. 5:5.

spirit and in truth'.<sup>28</sup> He 'keepeth the commandments of God, and doth those things that are pleasing in his sight':<sup>29</sup> so 'exercising himself as to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man'.<sup>30</sup> And he has power both over outward and inward sin, even from the moment he is justified.

III.1. 'But was he not then "freed from all sin",<sup>31</sup> so that there is no sin in his heart?' I cannot say this: I cannot believe it, because St. Paul says the contrary. He is speaking to believers, and describing the state of believers in general, when he says, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: 10 these are contrary the one to the other.'<sup>a</sup> Nothing can be more express. The Apostle here directly affirms that 'the flesh', evil nature, opposes 'the spirit', even in believers; that even in the regenerate there are two principles 'contrary the one to the other'.

2. Again: when he writes to the believers at Corinth, to those 15 who were 'sanctified in Christ Jesus',<sup>b</sup> he says: 'I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ'. . . . Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying and strife, [. . .] are ye not carnal?'<sup>c</sup> Now here the Apostle speaks unto those who were unquestionably 20 believers, whom in the same breath he styles his 'brethren in Christ',<sup>33</sup> as being still in a measure *carnal*. He affirms there was 'envying' (an evil temper) occasioning 'strife' among them, and yet does not give the least intimation that they had lost their faith. Nay, he manifestly declares they had not; for then they would not 25

<sup>a</sup> Gal. 5:17.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. 1:2.

<sup>c</sup> [1 Cor.] 3:1, 3.

<sup>28</sup> John 4: 23, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Acts 24:16.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. 1 John 3:22.

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 6:7.

<sup>32</sup> 'Babes' or 'children', 'young men', and 'fathers' in Christ is a frequent theme throughout Wesley's writings. E.g., cf. Nos. 24, 'Sermon on the Mount, IV', I.4; 40, *Christian Perfection*, II.1; 55, *On the Trinity*, §17; 83, 'On Patience', §10. See also JWJ, July 17, 1741, where Wesley records he preached a sermon from 1 Cor. 3: 'The school at Kingswood was thoroughly filled between eight and nine in the evening. I showed them from the example of the Corinthians what need we have to bear one with another, seeing we are not to expect "many fathers in Christ," no, nor young men among us, as yet. We then poured out our souls in prayer and praise, and our Lord did not hide his face from us.' Cf. also his letter to the Revd. Mr. Plenderlieth, May 23, 1768; to Joseph Benson, Mar. 16, 1771; to Elizabeth Briggs, May 31, 1771; and to John Fletcher, Mar. 22, 1775, and June 1, 1776. In his *Notes* on Heb. 5: 13-14, Wesley distinguishes the 'babes', 'who desire and can digest nothing but the doctrine of justification and imputed righteousness' from those 'of full age', who embrace the 'sublimar truths relating to "perfection"'.  
<sup>33</sup> Col. 1:2.



have been 'babes in Christ'. And (what is most remarkable of all) he speaks of being 'carnal' and 'babes in Christ' as one and the same thing; plainly showing that every believer is (in a degree) 'carnal' while he is only a 'babe in Christ'.

5 3. Indeed this grand point, that there are two contrary principles in believers—nature and grace, the flesh and the spirit—runs through all the epistles of St. Paul, yea, through all the Holy Scriptures.<sup>34</sup> Almost all the directions and exhortations therein are founded on this supposition, pointing at wrong  
10 tempers or practices in those who are, notwithstanding, acknowledged by the inspired writers to be believers. And they are continually exhorted to fight with and conquer these, by the power of the faith which was in them.

4. And who can doubt but there was faith in the angel of the  
15 church of Ephesus<sup>35</sup> when our Lord said to him: 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience. . . . Thou hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted.' But was there meantime no sin in his heart? Yea, or Christ would not have added, 'Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because  
20 thou hast left thy first love.'<sup>d</sup> This was real sin<sup>36</sup> which God saw in his heart, of which accordingly he is exhorted to *repent*. And yet we have no authority to say that even then he had no faith.

5. Nay, the angel of the church at Pergamos also is exhorted to 'repent', which implies sin, though our Lord expressly says,  
25 'Thou hast not denied my faith.'<sup>e</sup> And to the angel of the church in Sardis he says, 'Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die.'<sup>f</sup> The good which remained was 'ready to die', but was not actually dead. So there was still a spark of faith even in him; which he is accordingly commanded to 'hold fast'.<sup>g</sup>

30 6. Once more: when the Apostle exhorts believers to 'cleanse' themselves 'from all filthiness of flesh and spirit',<sup>h</sup> he plainly

<sup>d</sup> Rev. 2:2-4.

<sup>e</sup> Ver. 13, 16.

<sup>f</sup> [Rev.] 3:2.

<sup>g</sup> Ver. 3.

<sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. 7:1.

<sup>34</sup> For a rather different view of the tension between nature and prevenient grace, see below, No. 85, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', III.3-4.

<sup>35</sup> I.e., the pastor and congregation considered as a single *persona*; cf. Wesley's *Notes* for Rev. 2:2-4.

<sup>36</sup> All the contemporary editions have 'a real sin', but the errata sheet in *Works* (1771) calls for the 'a' to be deleted, as does the MS correction in Wesley's personal copy.

teaches that those believers were not yet cleansed therefrom. Will you answer, 'He that "abstains from all appearance of evil"<sup>37</sup> does *ipso facto* cleanse himself from all filthiness'? Not in any wise. For instance, a man reviles me; I feel resentment, which is 'filthiness of spirit'; yet I say not a word. Here I 'abstain from all appearance of evil', but this does not cleanse me from that filthiness of spirit,  
5 as I experience to my sorrow.

7. And as this position, 'there is no sin in a believer, no carnal mind, no bent to backsliding',<sup>38</sup> is thus contrary to the Word of God, so it is to the *experience* of his children. These continually  
10 feel an heart bent to backsliding, a natural tendency to evil, a proneness to depart from God, and cleave to the things of earth. They are daily sensible of sin remaining in their heart, pride, self-will, unbelief, and of sin cleaving to all they speak and do, even their best actions and holiest duties. Yet at the same time  
15 they 'know that they are of God';<sup>39</sup> they cannot doubt of it for a moment. They feel 'his Spirit clearly witnessing with their spirit that they are the children of God'.<sup>40</sup> They 'rejoice in God through Christ Jesus, by whom they have now received the atonement'.<sup>41</sup> So that they are equally assured that sin is in them and that 'Christ  
20 is in them, the hope of glory.'<sup>42</sup>

8. 'But can Christ be in the same heart where sin is?' Undoubtedly he can; otherwise it never could be saved therefrom. Where the sickness is, there is the physician,

Carrying on his work within,  
Striving till he cast out sin.<sup>43</sup>

25

Christ indeed cannot *reign* where sin *reigns*; neither will he *dwell* where any sin is *allowed*. But he *is* and *dwells* in the heart of every believer who is fighting against all sin; although it be 'not' yet 'purified according to the purification of the sanctuary'.<sup>44</sup>  
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<sup>37</sup> Cf. 1 Thess. 5:22.

<sup>38</sup> The last phrase here is from Hos. 11:7; the entire quotation appears to be Wesley's own paraphrase of an antinomian view (as, e.g., from Cudworth and Relly).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 1 John 5:19.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:16.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Rom. 5:11.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Col. 1:27. The same point as Luther's *simul justus et peccator*.

<sup>43</sup> 'Hymn for Whitsunday', st. 4, ll. 3-4, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), p. 214 (*Poet. Wks.*, I. 188). The metaphors here of Christ the physician and of salvation as healing are significant; they distinguish Wesley's essentially interpersonal, therapeutic views of justification, regeneration, and sanctification from all their forensic alternatives; cf. No. 17, 'The Circumcision of the Heart', I.5.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 2 Chr. 30:19.



9. It has been observed before, that the opposite doctrine, 'that there is no sin in believers', is quite *new* in the church of Christ; that it was never heard of for seventeen hundred years, never till it was discovered by Count Zinzendorf. I do not remember to have  
 5 seen the least intimation of it either in any ancient or modern writer, unless perhaps in some of the wild, ranting antinomians.<sup>45</sup> And these likewise say and unsay, acknowledging there is sin 'in their flesh', although no sin 'in their heart'.<sup>46</sup> But whatever doctrine is *new* must be *wrong*; for the *old* religion is the only *true*  
 10 one; and no doctrine can be right unless it is the very same 'which was from the beginning'.<sup>47</sup>

10. One argument more against this new, unscriptural doctrine may be drawn from the dreadful consequences of it. One says, 'I felt anger today.' Must I reply, 'Then you have no faith'? Another  
 15 says, 'I know what you advise is good; but my will is quite averse to it.' Must I tell him, 'Then you are an unbeliever, under the wrath and the curse of God'? What will be the natural consequence of this? Why, if he believe what I say, his soul will not only be grieved and wounded but perhaps utterly destroyed; inasmuch as he will  
 20 'cast away that confidence which hath great recompense of reward'.<sup>48</sup> And having cast away his shield, how shall he 'quench the fiery darts of the wicked one'?<sup>49</sup> How shall he overcome the world?<sup>50</sup> Seeing 'this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith'.<sup>51</sup> He stands disarmed in the midst of his enemies,

<sup>45</sup> Such as Johannes Agricola (1494-1566), Tobias Crisp (1600-43; cf. *DNB*, 'extremely unguarded in his expressions'), and John Saltmarsh (d. 1647; cf. *DNB*, 'champion of complete religious liberty').

<sup>46</sup> See I.5 above.

<sup>47</sup> 1 John 1:1. That Wesley took 'Christian antiquity' as a decisive guideline in theology and ethics may be seen, early and late, throughout the corpus. On Jan. 24, 1738 (see JWJ) he had invoked his own version of the 'canon' of Vincent of Lerins (first half of the fifth century) as 'a sure rule of interpreting Scripture, viz.: *Consensus veterum: quod ab omnibus, quod ubique, quod semper creditum* . . .' ('the ancient consensus: what has been believed by all, everywhere and always . . .'); cf. *The Commonitory* of Vincent of Lerins (435), ch. II, §6. See also John Goodman, *The Old Religion* . . . (1684), 'To the Reader'. In No. 14, *The Repentance of Believers*, I.2, Wesley will list Scripture, reason, and Christian experience as his doctrinal norms. But in the Preface to his collected *Works*, I (1771), the list will read: 'Scripture, reason, and Christian antiquity'. See also his letter to Walter Churchey (June 20, 1789): 'In religion I am for as few innovations as possible;' for other references to doctrinal 'novelty', cf. No. 25, 'Sermon on the Mount, V' §1 and n.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Heb. 10:35.

<sup>49</sup> Eph. 6:16 (cf. *Notes*).

<sup>50</sup> See John 16:33.

<sup>51</sup> 1 John 5:4.

open to all their assaults. What wonder then if he be utterly overthrown, if they take him captive at their will; yea, if he fall from one wickedness to another, and never see good any more? I cannot therefore by any means receive this assertion 'that there is no sin in a believer from the moment he is justified'. First, 5 because it is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture; secondly, because it is contrary to the experience of the children of God; thirdly, because it is absolutely new, never heard of in the world till yesterday; and lastly, because it is naturally attended with the most fatal consequences, not only grieving those whom God  
 10 hath<sup>52</sup> not grieved, but perhaps dragging them into everlasting perdition.

IV.1. However, let us give a fair hearing to the chief arguments of those who endeavour to support it. And it is, first, from Scripture they attempt to prove that there is no sin in a believer. 15 They argue thus: 'The Scripture says every believer is "born of God",<sup>53</sup> is "clean",<sup>54</sup> is "holy",<sup>55</sup> is "sanctified",<sup>56</sup> is "pure in heart",<sup>57</sup> has a new heart, is a temple of the Holy Ghost.<sup>58</sup> Now, as "that which is born of the flesh is flesh", is altogether evil, so "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit",<sup>59</sup> is altogether good. Again: a  
 20 man cannot be clean, sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy. He cannot be pure and impure, or have a new and an old heart together. Neither can his soul be unholy while it is a temple of the Holy Ghost.'<sup>60</sup>

I have put this objection as strong as possible, that its full 25 weight may appear. Let us now examine it, part by part. And (1).

<sup>52</sup> Orig., 'had', altered to 'hath' in 1771 only.

<sup>53</sup> 1 John 3:9; 4:7.

<sup>54</sup> John 15:3, etc.

<sup>55</sup> Eph. 1:4, etc.

<sup>56</sup> Rom. 15:16, etc.

<sup>57</sup> Matt. 5:8.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19.

<sup>59</sup> John 3:6.

<sup>60</sup> This pejorative summary of Moravian teachings should be compared with Zinzendorf's public teaching, as in *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion, Preached in Fetter Lane Chapel in London, 1746*, ed., G. W. Forell (Iowa City, Iowa, University of Iowa Press, 1973); see espec. Lecture IV, 'Concerning Saving Faith', and Lecture VII, 'On the Essential Character and Circumstances of the Life of a Christian'. Zinzendorf's words and Wesley's interpretation of them leave ground for pondering: was Wesley reading Zinzendorf in the light of the antinomian views of the *English* Moravians?



‘“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” is altogether good.’ I allow the text, but not the comment; for the text affirms this, and no more, that every man who is ‘born of the Spirit’ is a *spiritual man*. He is so. But so he may be, and yet not be *altogether* spiritual.<sup>61</sup> The Christians at *Corinth* were *spiritual* men; else they had been no Christians at all. And yet they were not *altogether* spiritual: they were still (in part) *carnal*. ‘But they were fallen from grace.’<sup>62</sup> St. Paul says, ‘No: they were even then “babes in Christ”’.<sup>63</sup> (2). ‘But a man cannot be clean, sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy.’ Indeed he may. So the Corinthians were. ‘Ye are washed,’ says the Apostle, ‘ye are sanctified;’ namely cleansed from ‘fornication, idolatry, drunkenness’, and all other outward sin.<sup>i</sup> And yet at the same time, in another sense of the word, they were *unsanctified*: they were not washed, not inwardly *cleansed* from envy, evil surmising, partiality. ‘But sure they had not a new heart and an old heart together.’ It is most sure they had; for at that very time their hearts were *truly*, yet not *entirely*, renewed. Their carnal mind was nailed to the cross; yet it was not wholly destroyed. ‘But could they be *unholy* while they were “temples of the Holy Ghost”?’<sup>j</sup> Yes, that they were ‘temples of the Holy Ghost’ is certain. And it is equally certain they were, in some degree, *carnal*, that is, *unholy*.

2. ‘However, there is one Scripture more which will put the matter out of question: “If any man be (a believer) in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”’<sup>k</sup> Now certainly a man cannot be a *new creature* and an *old creature* at once.’ Yes, he may: he may be *partly renewed*, which was the very case with those at Corinth. They were doubtless ‘renewed in the spirit of their mind’,<sup>64</sup> or they could not have been so much as ‘babes in Christ’.<sup>65</sup> Yet they had not the whole mind which was in Christ,<sup>66</sup> for they *envied* one another. ‘But it is said expressly, “Old things are passed away: all things

<sup>i</sup> 1 Cor 6:9, 10, 11.

<sup>j</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19.

<sup>k</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>61</sup> An interesting inversion of Wesley’s earlier doctrine of the *radical* difference between ‘almost’ and ‘altogether’ Christians; cf. No. 2, *The Almost Christian*, poem.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Gal. 5:4.

<sup>64</sup> Eph. 4:23.

<sup>65</sup> 1 Cor. 3:1.

<sup>66</sup> See Phil. 2:5.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Cor. 3:1.

are become new.”’ But we must not so interpret the Apostle’s words as to make him contradict himself. And if we will make him consistent with himself the plain meaning of the words is this: his *old judgment* (concerning justification, holiness, happiness, indeed concerning the things of God in general) is now ‘passed away’; so are his *old desires, designs, affections, tempers, and conversation*. All these are undeniably ‘become new’, greatly changed from what they were. And yet, though they are *new*, they are not *wholly* new. Still he feels, to his sorrow and shame, remains of the ‘old man’,<sup>67</sup> too manifest taints of his former tempers and affections, a law in his members which frequently *fight*s against that law of his mind,<sup>68</sup> though it cannot ‘gain any advantage’<sup>69</sup> over him as long as he ‘watches unto prayer’.<sup>70</sup>

3. This whole argument, ‘If he is clean, he is clean,’ ‘if he is holy, he is holy’ (and twenty more expressions of the same kind may easily be heaped together) is really no better than playing upon words: it is the fallacy of arguing from a *particular* to a *general*,<sup>71</sup> of inferring a general conclusion from particular premises. Propose the sentence entire, and it runs thus: ‘If he is holy *at all*, he is holy *altogether*.’ That does not follow: every babe in Christ is holy, and yet not altogether so. He is saved from sin; yet not entirely: it *remains*, though it does not *reign*. If you think it does not *remain* (in *babes* at least, whatever be the case with *young men*, or *fathers*) you certainly have not considered the height and depth and length and breadth of the law of God (even the law of love laid down by St. Paul in the thirteenth of Corinthians); and that ‘every *ἀνομία*’, disconformity to, or deviation from this law, ‘is sin.’<sup>72</sup> Now, is there no disconformity to this in the heart or life of a believer? What may be in an adult Christian is another question. But what a stranger must he be to human nature who can possibly imagine that this is the case with every babe in Christ!

<sup>67</sup> Col. 3:9.

<sup>68</sup> See Rom. 7:23.

<sup>69</sup> 2 Cor. 2:11.

<sup>70</sup> 1 Pet. 4:7.

<sup>71</sup> Yet another reminder of Wesley’s days as ‘Moderator of the Classes’ (i.e., logical disputations) at Lincoln College. He had mastered Dean Henry Aldrich’s *Artis Logicae Compendiae* (1691) and, indeed, had translated it into English in 1750 for use in the Kingswood School; cf. *Bibliog.* No. 186 (Vol. 15 of this edn.).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. 1 John 3:4.



4. 'But believers "walk after the Spirit",<sup>m</sup> and the Spirit of God dwells in them. Consequently they are delivered from the guilt, the power, or, in one word, the being of sin.'<sup>73</sup>

5 These are coupled together as if they were the same thing. But they are not the same thing. The *guilt* is one thing, the *power* another, and the *being* yet another. That believers are delivered from the *guilt* and *power* of sin we allow; that they are delivered from the *being* of it we deny. Nor does it in any wise follow from these texts. A man may have the Spirit of God dwelling in him, and 10 may 'walk after the Spirit',<sup>74</sup> though he still feels 'the flesh lusting against the Spirit'.<sup>75</sup>

5. 'But the "church is the body of Christ".<sup>n</sup> This implies that its members are washed from all filthiness; otherwise it will follow that Christ and Belial are incorporated with each other.'<sup>76</sup>

15 Nay, it will not follow from hence—'Those who are the mystical body of Christ still feel the flesh lusting against the

<sup>1</sup> What follows for some pages is an answer to a paper published in the *Christian's [sic] Magazine*, pp. 577-82. I am surprised Mr. Dodd should give such a paper a place in his magazine which is directly contrary to our Ninth Article.

[William Dodd is more famous for the spectacularly tragic ending of his career (his trial and execution as a forger) than for his earlier successes as a popular Anglican preacher whose 'eloquent and touching' sermons 'in the French style' were praised by Horace Walpole (*Letters*, III.282; cf. Leslie Stephens's biography of Dodd, *DNB*. Wesley had known him since 1756, and there had been a running controversy between them about Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and also about Wesley's separatist tendencies. Wesley's account of his pastoral visits with Dr. Dodd during his last days and at his execution was published in *AM*, 1783, pp. 358-60 (see Vol. 14 of this edn.).

[Dodd was editor of the *Christian Magazine*, 1760-67, and in its *Supplement . . . for the Year 1762* (pp. 577-82) published an article, 'Thoughts on Christianity', by one 'C.' (does this signify 'Christian' or, perhaps, William Cudworth?). Unsurprisingly, 'C.'s arguments are more carefully nuanced than one could guess from Wesley's excerpts, even though their essential consequence is not misrepresented by much. And his stated aims (p. 582), to undercut hypocrisy, to abolish 'antinomianism', and to end 'the great contest about inherent and imputed righteousness', were not very different from Wesley's own, especially in his later years. What is most significant here is that when Wesley was confronted with a clear and forceful doctrine of sinless perfection, his repudiation of it was immediate and vigorous.]

<sup>m</sup> Rom. 8:1.

<sup>n</sup> Col. 1:24.

<sup>73</sup> 'C.'s text (p. 579): '... all who are united to Christ by the holy spirits [sic] dwelling in them are delivered from the guilt, the power or, in one word, the being of sin.'

<sup>74</sup> Rom. 8:1.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Gal. 5:17.

<sup>76</sup> 'C.'s text: 'From the church being called "the body of Christ" (Col. 1:24), which undoubtedly implies that all the members of it are washed from all filthiness, or else that blasphemous consequence would follow, viz., Christ and Belial are not only connected but in some sense incorporated with each other.'

Spirit'—that Christ has any fellowship with the devil, or with that sin which he enables them to resist and overcome.

6. 'But are not Christians "come to the heavenly Jerusalem", where "nothing defiled can enter"?<sup>77</sup> Yes; 'and to an innumerable company of angels', 'and to the spirits of just men 5 made perfect':<sup>o</sup> that is,

Earth and heaven all agree,  
All his one great family.<sup>78</sup>

And they are likewise holy and *undefiled* while they 'walk after the Spirit';<sup>79</sup> although sensible there is another principle in them, and 10 that 'these are contrary to each other'.<sup>80</sup>

7. 'But Christians are "reconciled to God".<sup>81</sup> Now this could not be if any of the "carnal mind"<sup>82</sup> remained; for this "is enmity against God". Consequently no reconciliation can be effected but by its total destruction.'

15 We 'are reconciled to God through the blood of the cross'.<sup>83</sup> And in that moment, the *φρόνημα σαρκός*,<sup>84</sup> the corruption of nature which is 'enmity with God',<sup>85</sup> is put under our feet. The flesh has 'no more dominion over us'.<sup>86</sup> But it still *exists*; and it is still in its nature enmity with God, lusting against his Spirit. 20

8. 'But "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts." <sup>p</sup> They have so; yet it remains in them still, and often struggles to break from the cross. 'Nay, but they have

<sup>o</sup> Heb. 12:22-23.

<sup>p</sup> Gal. 5:24.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Rev. 21:27. 'C.'s text: 'It seems by the heavenly Jerusalem here we are to understand the Gospel church [i.e., on earth] . . . since it is said (Hebrews 12:22) that the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into this city, which cannot with propriety be said of the church triumphant, they having there no more glory than the meanest subject.'

<sup>78</sup> Cf. 'The Communion of Saints, Pt. VI', st. 1, last quatrain, in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), p. 198 (*Poet. Wks.*, I. 364). Orig.:

Him let earth and heaven proclaim,  
Earth and heaven accord his name,  
Let us both in this agree,  
Both his one great family.

For quotations of other lines from this hymn, cf. Nos. 107, 'On God's Vineyard', II.6; and 132, 'On Faith, Heb. 11:1', §6.

<sup>79</sup> Rom. 8:1.

<sup>80</sup> Gal. 5:17.

<sup>81</sup> Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:20.

<sup>82</sup> Rom. 8:7.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Col. 1:20.

<sup>84</sup> Rom. 8:7; cf. I.3 above and n.

<sup>85</sup> Jas. 4:4.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Rom. 6:9.



“put off the old man with his deeds.”<sup>87</sup> They have; and in the sense above-described, ‘old things are passed away; all things are become new.’<sup>87</sup> An hundred texts may be cited to the same effect. And they will all admit of the same answer. ‘But, to say all in one word, “Christ gave himself for the church, that . . . it might be holy and without blemish.”’<sup>88</sup> And so it will be in the end: but it never was yet, from the beginning to this day.

9. ‘But let *experience* speak: all who are justified do at that time find an absolute freedom from all sin.’<sup>88</sup> That I doubt; but if they do, do they find it ever after? Else you gain nothing. ‘If they do not, it is their own fault.’ That remains to be proved.

10. ‘But, in the very nature of things, can a man have pride in him, and not be proud? Anger, and yet not be angry?’<sup>89</sup>

A man may have *pride* in him, may think of himself in *some* particulars above what he ought to think (and so be *proud* in that particular) and yet not be a proud man in his *general* character. He may have *anger* in him, yea, and a strong propensity to furious anger, without *giving way* to it. ‘But can anger and pride be in that heart where *only* meekness and humility are felt?’ No; but *some* pride and anger may be in that heart where there is *much* humility and meekness.

‘It avails not to say these tempers *are* there, but they do not *reign*; for sin cannot in any kind or degree *exist* where it does not *reign*; for *guilt* and *power* are essential properties of sin. Therefore where one of them is, all must be.’<sup>90</sup>

Strange indeed! ‘Sin cannot in any kind or degree *exist* where it

<sup>87</sup> Col. 3:9.

<sup>88</sup> Eph. 5:25, 27.

<sup>89</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>90</sup> ‘C.’s text (p. 581): ‘nine out of ten, at least’.

<sup>89</sup> ‘C.’s text: ‘Suppose anyone should assert that a man may have anger in him, yet not be angry; pride in him, yet not be proud; the love of the world in him, yet not love the world; what should we think of such an one’s understanding?’

<sup>90</sup> ‘C.’s text (pp. 581-82): ‘It will not mend the matter at all to say, “these tempers *are* there but they do not *reign*. . .”. [This] implies a contradiction, for it is an infallible axiom that sin cannot, in any kind or degree, *exist* where it does not *reign*, no more than fire can live where it does not burn. Guilt and power being essential properties of sin, it follows that where one of them is they all necessarily must be, and where anyone is wanting, none of them can be there; for to separate these is to separate a thing from itself.’ ‘C.’s contention here is that conscious and unconscious sinful tempers cannot be dichotomized; on the other hand, such a dichotomy is one of Wesley’s crucial presuppositions.

does not *reign*’? Absolutely contrary this to all experience, all Scripture, all common sense. Resentment of an affront is sin. It is *ἀνομία*, disconformity to the law of love.<sup>91</sup> This has existed in me a thousand times. Yet it did not, and does not, *reign*. But ‘*guilt* and *power* are essential properties of sin; therefore where one is, all must be.’ No; in the instance before us, if the resentment I feel is not yielded to, even for a moment, there is no *guilt* at all, no condemnation from God upon that account. And in this case it has no *power*: though it ‘lusteth against the Spirit’<sup>92</sup> it cannot prevail. Here, therefore, as in ten thousand instances, there is *sin* without either *guilt* or *power*.

11. ‘But the supposing sin in a believer is pregnant with everything frightful and discouraging. It implies the contending with a power that has the possession of our strength, maintains his usurpation of our hearts, and there prosecutes the war in defiance of our Redeemer.’ Not so. The supposing sin is *in* us does not imply that it has the possession of our strength; no more than a man crucified has the possession of those that crucify him. As little does it imply that sin ‘maintains its usurpation of our hearts’. The usurper is dethroned. He *remains* indeed where he once reigned; but remains *in chains*. So that he does in some sense ‘prosecute the war’, yet he grows weaker and weaker, while the believer goes on from strength to strength, conquering and to conquer.

12. ‘I am not satisfied yet. He that has sin in him is a slave to sin. Therefore you suppose a man to be justified while he is a slave to sin. Now if you allow men may be justified while they have pride, anger, or unbelief in them—nay if you aver these are (at least for a time) in all that are justified—what wonder that we have so many proud, angry, unbelieving believers!’<sup>93</sup>

I do not suppose any man who is justified is a slave to sin. Yet I do suppose sin remains (at least for a time) in all that are justified. ‘But if sin remains in a believer he is a sinful man: if pride, for instance, then he is proud; if self-will, then he is self-willed; if unbelief, then he is an unbeliever—consequently, no believer at

<sup>91</sup> See IV.3 above.

<sup>92</sup> Gal. 5:17.  
<sup>93</sup> ‘C.’s text: ‘Is it to be wondered at if those who are prepossessed with such apprehensions should either decline the Christian warfare or faint in the day of battles; either not prepare to stand in the evil day or, having done so, not be able to stand?’ Is Wesley’s quotation here a very free paraphrase of his own, or is he quoting yet another source? The same question may be asked of the remaining quotations, since none of them appears verbatim in ‘C.’s text.



all. How then does he differ from unbelievers, from unregenerate men?

This is still mere playing upon words. It means no more than, 'If there is sin, pride, self-will in him, then—there is sin, pride, self-will.' And this nobody can deny. In *that sense*, then, he is proud or self-willed. But he is not proud or self-willed in the same sense that unbelievers are, that is, *governed* by pride or self-will. Herein he differs from unregenerate men. They *obey* sin; he does not. Flesh is in them both. But they 'walk after the flesh'; he 'walks after the Spirit'.

'But how can *unbelief* be in a *believer*?' That word has two meanings. It means either *no faith*, or *little faith*; either the *absence* of faith, or the *weakness* of it. In the former sense, unbelief is not in a believer; in the latter, it is in all babes. Their faith is commonly mixed with doubt or fear, that is (in the latter sense) with unbelief. 'Why are ye fearful,' says our Lord, 'O ye of little faith?'<sup>94</sup> Again, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'<sup>95</sup> You see, here was *unbelief* in *believers*: little faith and much unbelief.<sup>96</sup>

13. 'But this doctrine—that sin remains in a believer, that a man may be in the favour of God while he has sin in his heart—certainly tends to encourage men in sin.' Understand the proposition right, and no such consequence follows. A man may be in God's favour though he *feel* sin; but not if he *yields* to it. *Having sin* does not forfeit the favour of God; *giving way to sin* does. Though the flesh in *you* 'lust against the Spirit', you may still be a child of God. But if you 'walk after the flesh', you are a child of the devil. Now, this doctrine does not encourage to *obey* sin, but to *resist* it with all our might.

V.1. The sum of all is this: there are in every person, even after he is justified, two contrary principles, nature and grace, termed by St. Paul the 'flesh' and the 'spirit'. Hence although even babes in Christ are *sanctified*, yet it is only *in part*. In a degree, according to the measure of their faith, they are *spiritual*; yet in a degree they are *carnal*. Accordingly, believers are continually exhorted to

<sup>94</sup> Matt. 8:26.

<sup>95</sup> Matt. 14:31.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. this defence of gradations [degrees] of faith (and the validity of even a low degree of it) with No. 2, *The Almost Christian* and with Wesley's earlier either/or doctrine of assurance. Cf. also JWJ, May 29, June 6, 1738; the *Minutes*, Aug. 2, 1745 (answer to Q. 5) and June 16, 1747 (answer to Q. 2, 5); and his letters to Richard Tompson, July 25, 1755, and Feb. 5, 1756.

watch against the flesh, as well as the world and the devil.<sup>97</sup> And to this agrees the constant experience of the children of God. While they feel this witness in themselves they feel a will not wholly resigned to the will of God. They know they are in him, and yet find an heart ready to depart from him, a proneness to evil in many instances, and a backwardness to that which is good. The contrary doctrine is wholly *new*; never heard of in the church of Christ from the time of his coming into the world till the time of Count Zinzendorf.<sup>98</sup> And it is attended with the most fatal consequences. It cuts off all watching against our evil nature, against the Delilah which we are told is gone, though she is still lying in our bosom.<sup>99</sup> It tears away the shield of weak believers, deprives them of their faith,<sup>100</sup> and so leaves them exposed to all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

2. Let us therefore hold fast the sound doctrine 'once delivered to the saints',<sup>101</sup> and delivered down by them with the written word to all succeeding generations: that although we are renewed, cleansed, purified, sanctified, the moment we truly believe in Christ, yet we are not then renewed, cleansed, purified altogether; but the flesh, the evil nature, still remains (though subdued) and wars against the Spirit.<sup>102</sup> So much the more let us use all diligence in 'fighting the good fight of faith'.<sup>103</sup> So much the

<sup>97</sup> BCP, Litany.

<sup>98</sup> See above, I.5 and n., and III.9 and n.

<sup>99</sup> Judg. 16. Cf. also Matthew Mead, *The Almost Christian Discovered*, p. 107: 'There is a natural man, let him go never so far, let him go never so much in matters of religion, but still he hath his Delilah, his bosom lust.' For Wesley's use of 'bosom sin', cf. No. 48, 'Self-denial', II.2 and n.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Eph. 6:16.

<sup>101</sup> Jude 3.

<sup>102</sup> As explicit a version of the 'saved and yet also a sinner at one and the same time' as one might ask for. This should be compared to other passages where Wesley himself comes closer to claiming for Christians 'the power not to sin' or, indeed, close enough to a doctrine of sinless perfection as to allow for its development in some of his nineteenth-century followers, in *his name*. Cf. Nos. 14, *The Repentance of Believers*, I.20, III.2; 40, *Christian Perfection*, II. 1-30; 42, 'Satan's Devices', I.1; and see 109, *The Trouble and Rest of Good Men*, II.4 (which stands almost in contrast on this point to the sermon on *Christian Perfection*). Cf. also *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*; *The Principles of a Methodist*, §§ 11-12; and *Some Remarks on a Defence of . . . Aspasio Vindicated*, §4. Wesley's prefaces to the earliest editions of the *Hymns and Sacred Poems* contain some of the strongest, least nuanced statements of perfection in the Wesley corpus; without the phrase itself, they come close to advocating 'sinless perfection' (see *Bibliog.*, Nos. 13, 40, 54, and the text in Vol.12 of this edn.). Cf. also his letter to Revd. Mr. Plenderlieth, May 23, 1768, and to Thomas Olivers, Mar. 24, 1757.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 6:12.



more earnestly let us 'watch and pray'<sup>104</sup> against the enemy within. The more carefully let us 'take to' ourselves and 'put on the whole armour of God'; that although 'we wrestle' both with 'flesh and blood, and with principalities and powers, and wicked spirits in high places, we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and  
5 having done all, to stand'.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Matt. 26:41; Mark 13:33.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Eph. 6:11-13.

## The Repentance of Believers

Mark 1:15

*Repent and believe the gospel.*

1. It is generally supposed that repentance and faith are only the gate of religion;<sup>1</sup> that they are necessary only at the beginning 5 of our Christian course, when we are setting out in the way of the kingdom. And this may seem to be confirmed by the great Apostle, where exhorting the Hebrew Christians to 'go on to perfection' he teaches them to 'leave' these first 'principles of the doctrine of Christ: not laying again the foundation of repentance 10 from dead works and faith toward God';<sup>2</sup> which must at least mean that they should comparatively leave these, that at first took up all their thoughts, in order to 'press forward toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'.<sup>3</sup>

2. And this is undoubtedly true, that there is a repentance and a 15 faith which are more especially necessary at the beginning: a repentance which is a conviction of our utter sinfulness and guiltiness<sup>4</sup> and helplessness, and which precedes our receiving that kingdom of God which our Lord observes 'is within us';<sup>5</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wesley's letter to Thomas Church, June 17, 1746; also William Tilly, Sermon XII, *Sermons*, p. 360: '... as one that was yet under the low dispensation, and detained in the porch of repentance'; and Edward Young (the elder), *A Sermon Preached Before His Majesty at White-Hall*, December 29, 1678, p. 24: 'Repentance was heretofore the porch of the Christian life but modern ages have made it the postern; it is the last thing men set themselves about.'

Wesley uses the metaphor of a porch in relating paradise to heaven ('paradise is the porch of heaven') in two sermons: 73, 'Of Hell', I.4; and 115, 'Dives and Lazarus', I.3. In No. 84, *The Important Question*, II.4, he calls paradise the 'ante-chamber' of heaven. Elsewhere, Fleury reports that the Mohammedan divines had called *fasting* 'the gate of religion'; cf. *The Manners of the Ancient Israelites*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Heb. 6:1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Phil. 3:14.

<sup>4</sup> This notion of repentance as realistic self-understanding is crucial in Wesley's evangelical soteriology. Cf. No. 7, 'The Way to the Kingdom', II.1 and n. What is most distinctive about it is Wesley's insistence that such repentance *precedes* justification as, in some sense, a precondition of it. Here again, we have a subtle qualification of the 'faith alone' theme; see below, II.6 and n.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Luke 17:21.