



## Holiness of Heart and Life: Part 3 of 6

BY STEVE MANSKAR

### Practicing Holiness of Heart and Life Increases Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of Jesus Christ

Holiness of heart and life is synonymous with “perfection in love” and “entire sanctification.” John Wesley defined it as follows:

*The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love.*<sup>[1]</sup>

and

*It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love 'rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks'.*<sup>[2]</sup>

Holiness is the result of the cross-bearing life described by Jesus when he said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

The cross Jesus’ followers are to take up is obedience to his commands to love (Matthew 22:37-40). Love<sup>[3]</sup> is the beginning and end of Christian faith.

John Wesley described the process of forming holiness of heart and life in Sermon 92: “On Zeal”

*In a Christian believer love sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers; - longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, fidelity, temperance; and if any other were comprised in "the mind which was in Christ Jesus." In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers- by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety - reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord's supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the church, dispersed all over the earth - a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.*<sup>[4]</sup>

Love is formed in congregations centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is the way of life shaped by habits and attitudes Wesley called “holy tempers” and the Apostle Paul named “fruit of the Spirit:” love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a). These characteristics are the fruit of a life of obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ in a community devoted to following Christ in the world.

The love that is formed in the heart by following Jesus in the world is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

John Wesley describes this love in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

*God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul, which is continually crying, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee.' My God and my all! 'Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.'*

*He is therefore happy in God; yea, always happy, as having in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life, and overflowing his soul with peace and joy. Perfect love having now cast out fear, he rejoices evermore. Yea, his joy is full, and all his bones cry out, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten me again unto a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for me.' ...*

*"And loving God, he 'loves his neighbor as himself;' he loves every man as his own soul. He loves his enemies, yea, and the enemies of God. And if it be not in his power to 'do good to them that hate' him, yet he ceases not to 'pray for them,' though they spurn his love, and still 'despitefully use him, and persecute him.'*

*"For he is 'pure in heart.' Love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper. It has cleansed him from pride, whereof 'only cometh contention;' and he hath now 'put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.' And indeed all possible ground for contention, on his part, is cut off. For none can take from him what he desires, seeing he 'loves not the world, nor any of the things of the world;' but 'all his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name.'* [5]

Love, for Wesley, is much more than feeling deep attraction to and affection for God and the things of God. It is a reordering of the affections and tempers away from pleasing the self and the world and towards pleasing only God. For Wesley, and the Apostle Paul, love is active. It compels specific behavior that is pleasing to God. Paul describes the behavior derived from love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. In other words, persons who profess to love God practice patience, kindness, humility, justice, truth-telling, peace-making, hope, and endurance.

The life of active love is exemplified by obedience to Jesus' teachings summarized in Matthew 22:37-40

*" 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*



Obedience to Jesus is shaped by these two great commandments: love God and love those whom God loves. Wesley believed God provided the means to follow Christ in his way of love by learning and practicing “works of piety” and “works of mercy.” The works of piety are the practices of worship and devotion God provides, and modeled by Jesus, that draw us to God and keep us in his company. The works of mercy are those practices of compassion and justice that enable people to enact their love for God in the world by loving the world that God loves (John 3:16).

Wesley regarded the works of mercy and works of piety to be "means of grace." He defined means of grace as being "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."<sup>[6]</sup> Means of grace are basic practices that open the heart, mind, and life to God and the ways of God in individuals and communities. They are intended to help people live out the relationship they seek with God and with those whom God loves.

The means of grace are very much like the habits couples practice to nurture their relationship with one another. Just as couples spend time together in conversation and sharing their lives with one another, Christians must spend time with God in prayer, worship, sacrament, Scripture, and service in the world God loves. We become what we love. Love forms habits that shape our life and character into the life and character of the beloved. This love that, in the words of Charles Wesley, “forms the savior in the soul,”<sup>[7]</sup> equips Christians to engage in fruitful, Christ-like dialog with non-Christian neighbors, friends, co-workers, classmates, and strangers.

Wesley describes how Methodists are to interact with God and their neighbors in the General Rules:

*First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind ...*<sup>[8]</sup>

A goal of love of God is forming and nurturing relationships with the neighbor. In inter-faith dialog we do no harm and make on-going relationship possible when we listen rather than debate with the neighbor who professes a non-Christian faith or no faith at all. Listening excludes proselytizing. Christians seeking to build relationships of mutual respect will not denigrate other religious traditions, reduce any religious tradition to caricature, expect any individual to speak for an entire faith tradition, or objectify any person.

*Secondly, by doing good, by being, in every kind, merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men;—to their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison;—to their souls, by instructing reproving, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with ... By running with patience the race that is set before them, "denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily;" submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as*

*the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should "say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake."*<sup>[9]</sup>

Love seeks the well-being of the neighbor. Therefore, Christians will extend hospitality to persons of other religious traditions. They will be made to feel welcomed in our homes and places of worship. We will do all in our power to accommodate their physical and ritual needs when they are in our homes or churches. As followers of Jesus Christ, we will treat our guests as friends and persons of sacred worth created in the image of God. We will acknowledge all that we hold in common:

- Practice of compassion
- Service to others
- Practicing moral precepts and virtues
- Training in meditation techniques and regularity of practice
- Attention to diet and exercise
- Fasting and abstinence
- The use of music and chanting and sacred symbols
- Practice in awareness (recollection, mindfulness) and living in the present moment
- Pilgrimage
- Study of scriptural texts
- Formation of community
- Humility, gratitude, and a sense of humor
- Prayer is communion with God, whether it is regarded as personal, impersonal, or beyond them both.<sup>[10]</sup>

The goal in dialog is building mutual trust and relationships for common mission. Christians are not to set out to convert non-Christians. Rather, they are to represent Christ to their non-Christian neighbor. Of course, in the course of conversation the gospel of Christ will be proclaimed in word and deed. Any conversion that may occur is the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians, as representatives and reflections of Christ, must not impede the Spirit's work.

Persons who strive toward holiness of heart and life join with others to serve the world that God loves. Loving your neighbor as yourself means Christians join with Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, pagan, atheist, and agnostic neighbors who are willing to serve with and improve life for people who are poor, sick, oppressed, voiceless and marginalized by the world.<sup>[11]</sup>

*Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are:*

*The public worship of God;*

*The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded;*

*The Supper of the Lord;*

*Family and private prayer;*

*Searching the Scriptures; and*

*Fasting, or abstinence.*<sup>[12]</sup>

Disciplined practice of the works of piety (also known as "the instituted means of grace") listed in the third General Rule make practice of the first two Rules possible in personal and congregational witness in the world. They are practices that connect persons to God and his grace that transforms the heart, mind, and soul. The transformed heart is open to God and to those whom God loves. Grace re-orders the affections and helps persons to understand that God's

love is not limited to Christians and the Church. The triune God is Lord of the Universe and all that is in it. Those who confess and practice love of this God are compelled by love to love those whom God loves. The writer of 1 John expresses this quite plainly:

*We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*<sup>[13]</sup>

The works of piety connect persons to the grace that opens the heart, hands, eyes, and ears to all people, of all religious traditions and of no faith. When the heart is opened to grace and our affections and tempers are re-formed and re-aligned with Christ we realize that our non-Christian neighbor is our sister and brother. Disciples of Jesus Christ must love their neighbors as themselves because their Lord and Savior loves them.

Loving others means accepting them as they are, befriending, and providing hospitality to them. Loving as Christ loves means that Christians live as channels of his grace for all people. The works of piety “forms the Savior in the soul” and equip Christians to be fully present to their neighbors in love, compassion, and justice.

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.”<sup>[14]</sup>

The General Rules are a rule of life for Christians in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition. It is “a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. It fosters gifts of the Spirit in personal and human community, helping to form us into the persons God intends us to be.”<sup>[15]</sup> The aim of this rule is to form persons whose lives reflect the life of Jesus in the world. They are guided by the power of the Holy Spirit to “walk just as he walked.” When they encounter persons of other religions, or no religion, their witness is characterized by incarnate love described by John Wesley:

And while he thus always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, "That he who loveth God, love his brother also." And he accordingly loves his neighbour as himself; he loves every man as his own soul. His heart is full of love to all mankind, to every child of "the Father of the spirits of all flesh." That a man is not personally known to him, is no bar to his love; no, nor that he is known to be such as he approves not, that he repays hatred for his good-will. For he "loves his enemies;" yea, and the enemies of God, "the evil and the unthankful." And if it be not in his power to "do good to them that hate him," yet he ceases not to pray for them, though they continue to spurn his love, and still "despitefully use him and persecute him."<sup>[16]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> Steven W. Manskar, *A Perfect Love: Understanding John Wesley's 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection'*, (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 41.

<sup>[2]</sup> Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” §I.9, in *Sermons II*, 2:160.

<sup>[3]</sup> When Wesley uses the word “love” he means that love described by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. He

summarizes the character of this love in Sermon 149: “On Love,”

“Now, what is it to love God but to delight in him, to rejoice in his will, to desire continually to please him, to seek and find our happiness in him, and to thirst day and night for a fuller enjoyment of him?”

As to the measure of this love, our Lord hath clearly told us, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' Not that we are to love or delight in none but him. For he hath commanded us not only to love our neighbour—that is, all men—as ourselves; to desire and pursue their happiness as sincerely and steadily as our own; but also to love many of his creatures in the strictest sense—to delight in them, to enjoy them—only in such a manner and measure as we know and feel not to indispose but to prepare us for the enjoyment of him. Thus, then, we are called to love God with all our heart.”

<sup>[4]</sup> Wesley, Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” §II.5, in *Sermons III*, 3:313.

<sup>[5]</sup> Manskar, 15-16.

<sup>[6]</sup> Wesley, Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace” §II.1, *Works*, 1:381.

<sup>[7]</sup> Wesley, #507.3 in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists*, in *Works*, 7:698.

<sup>[8]</sup> Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” § 4, in *Works*, 9:70

<sup>[9]</sup> *Ibid.*, § 5, 9:72

<sup>[10]</sup> “Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue”,  
[www.cccm.ca/Stage/.../Principles\\_and\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Interfaith.doc](http://www.cccm.ca/Stage/.../Principles_and_Guidelines_for_Interfaith.doc)

(International Movement of Catholic Students, 2008), 5-6.

<sup>[11]</sup> Mark 3:31-35

<sup>[12]</sup> Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” § 6, in *Works*, 9:73.

<sup>[13]</sup> 1 John 4:19-21, NRSV

<sup>[14]</sup> 1 John 2:3-6

<sup>[15]</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 138.

<sup>[16]</sup> Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” ¶ 9, in *Works*, 9:37-38.

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