

Was John Wesley a True Believer?

We must be careful in identifying anyone as a believer or a non-believer since we cannot know the heart of people. However, we are called to know when a person is a genuine Christian so that we can welcome them into the body of Christ and call them brother. Similarly, we are also commanded by the Lord to identify wolves; that is a false teacher in the church. We do this, according to the Lord, by identifying their fruit. The fruit determines the root. If the fruit is bad then the root is bad and the person cannot be attached to the vine; cannot be a true believer.

So, the question boils down to: what is the fruit of John Wesley's convictions?

It is my conviction that the fruit of John Wesley's teaching is not only heretical, is not only serious, but it cannot emanate from someone who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ. This is further proved by the testimony of John Wesley's own character.

So, let us examine the evidence.¹

Wesley's wrong theology

Wesley hated the doctrine of sovereign predestination

The doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God.²

This doctrine not only tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness, and good works, but hath also a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation.³

It is a doctrine full of blasphemy; of such blasphemy as I should dread to mention.⁴

The blasphemy clearly contained in the *horrible decree* of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. ... This is the blasphemy for which (however I love the persons who assert it) I abhor the doctrine of predestination.⁵

Calvinism: All the devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done far less toward stopping this work of God, than that single doctrine. It strikes at the root of salvation from sin, previous to glory, putting the matter on quite another issue. ... Be diligent to prevent them, and to guard these tender minds against the predestinarian poison.⁶

The doctrine of absolute predestination naturally leads to the chambers of death.⁷

¹ Most quotes are taken from the edition of Wesley's Works found in the CD Rom *AGES Digital Christian Library* Software (*Master Christian Library 5*); other quotes are taken from *The Works of John Wesley*, Baker Book House, (1996); which has a different pagination; I give double sources on multiple occasions.

² AGES Vol 7, p418.

³ Baker Works, Vol 7, p422. AGES Vol 7, p422.

⁴ AGES Works, Vol 7, p424.

⁵ Baker Works, Vol. 7, p376-384. AGES Works, Vol 7, p425-426.

⁶ Baker Works, Vol. 8, p336. AGES Vol 8, p395-6.

⁷ Baker Works, Vol. 10, p257-258. AGES Vol. 10, p303.

For I do not believe ... the doctrine of absolute predestination. I never did believe it, nor the doctrines connected with it, no, not for an hour.⁸

Wesley hated the doctrine of election to salvation

God, looking on all ages, from the creation to the consummation, ... and seeing at once whatever is in the hearts of all the children of men, knows every one that does or does not believe, in every age or nation. Yet what he knows, whether faith or unbelief, is in nowise caused by his knowledge. Men are as free in believing or not believing as if he did not know it at all.⁹

All who suffer Christ to make them alive are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God."¹⁰ [That is, election is determined by the work of man in the future.]

I do not believe (what is only preterition or reprobation in other words) any such absolute election, as implies that all but the absolutely elect shall inevitably be damned. I do not believe the doctrine of irresistible grace, or of infallible perseverance; because both the one and the other implies that election which cannot stand without preterition or reprobation.¹¹

I believe this election to be conditional, as well as the reprobation. ... But unconditional election I cannot believe ... because it necessarily implies unconditional reprobation. Find out any election which does not imply reprobation, and I will gladly agree to it. But reprobation I can never agree to.¹²

Wesley hated the doctrine of irresistible grace

I believe, that the grace of God ... may be, and hath been, resisted. ... I cannot believe, that all those must be damned, in whom it does not thus irresistibly work.¹³

I do not believe the doctrine of irresistible grace.¹⁴

Salvation by irresistible grace ... makes man a mere machine, and, consequently, no more rewardable and punishable.¹⁵

Wesley completely misunderstood justification

What, then, is that holiness which is the true "wedding garment," the only qualification for glory? ... It first, through the energy of God, worketh love to God and all mankind; and, by this love, every holy and heavenly temper - in particular, lowliness, meekness, gentleness, temperance, and longsuffering. ... In a word, holiness is the having "the mind that was in Christ," and the "walking as Christ walked".¹⁶ [That is, by human works.]

⁸ AGES Works, Vol. 10, p449.

⁹ Baker Works, Vol. 6, p227. AGES Vol. 6, p256.

¹⁰ Baker Works, Vol. 7, p385. AGES Vol. 7, p427.

¹¹ Baker Works, Vol. 10, p379. AGES Vol. 10, 449.

¹² AGES Works, Vol. 10, p249, 250.

¹³ AGES Works, Vol. 13, p604.

¹⁴ AGES Works, Vol. 10, p449.

¹⁵ AGES Works, Vol. 10, p273.

¹⁶ Baker Works, Vol. 7, p312-317. AGES Vol. 7, p355.

Repentance, and "fruits meet for repentance," go before faith. ... Repentance absolutely must go before faith; fruits meet for it, if there be opportunity.¹⁷

Q. 3. But must not repentance, and works meet for repentance, go before this faith? A. Without doubt; if by repentance you mean conviction of sin; and by works meet for repentance, obeying God as far as we can, forgiving our brother, leaving off from evil, doing good, and using his ordinances, according to the power we have received.¹⁸

If he persevere therein, [in sincerity] God will infallibly give him faith.¹⁹

Does not talking of a justified or a sanctified state tend to mislead men? Almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas we are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, 'according to our works'; -- according to the whole of our inward tempers, and our outward behaviour." Any other view of justification will not lead the believer to pursue holiness with vigour and will tend to promote "careless living".²⁰

Wesley affirmed perfectionism

'But whom then do you mean by 'one that is perfect?' We mean one in whom is 'the mind which was in Christ,' and who so 'walketh as Christ also walked;' a man 'that hath clean hands and a pure heart,' or that is 'cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;' one in whom is 'no occasion of stumbling,' and who, accordingly, 'does not commit sin.' To declare this a little more particularly: We understand by that scriptural expression, 'a perfect man,' one in whom God hath fulfilled his faithful word, 'From all your filthiness and from all your idols I will cleanse you: I will also save you from all your uncleannesses.' We understand hereby, one whom God hath 'sanctified throughout in body, soul, and spirit;' one who 'walketh in the light as He is in the light, in whom is no darkness at all; the blood of Jesus Christ his Son having cleansed him from all sin.'²¹

What is then the perfection of which man is capable while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command, "My son, give me thy heart." It is the "loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind." This is the sum of Christian perfection: It is all comprised in that one word, Love. The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, ... Several persons have enjoyed this blessing, without any interruption, for many years. Several enjoy it to this day. And not a few have enjoyed it unto their death.²²

By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions. ... As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant. ... 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

¹⁷ Baker *Works*, Vol. 8, p46-47. AGES Vol. 8, p55-56.

¹⁸ Baker *Works*, Vol. 8, p275-277. AGES Vol. 8, p310.

¹⁹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 8, p288-289. AGES Vol. 8, p329.

²⁰ Minutes of the 1770 Methodist Conference of Ministers. Quoted in Iain Murray, *Wesley and the Men who Followed*, Banner of Truth, (2003), p221

²¹ 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as believed and taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, from the year 1725, to the year 1777,' 15:4. *The Works of John Wesley* (1872 ed. by Thomas Jackson), vol. 11, pp. 366-446.

²² Baker *Works*, Vol. 6, p413-420. Ages Vol. 6, p465.

years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five months after it, I know no conclusive argument to the contrary.²³

All real Christians, or believers in Christ, are made free from outward sin.²⁴ By sin I mean a voluntary transgression of a known law.²⁵

A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin.²⁶

Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not to commit sins and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers.²⁷

But is there no sin in those who are perfect in love?" I believe not: But be that as it may, they feel none; no temper contrary to pure love, while they rejoice, pray, and give thanks continually. And whether sin is suspended, or extinguished, I will not dispute: It is enough that they feel nothing but love.²⁸

The error of Perfectionism, which largely emanated from Wesley and Wesleyan theology, is an aspect of heresy that has infiltrated a number of other church streams, notably Pentecostalism and Charismaticism, and also theological movements, such as Higher Life. It is safe to say that Wesley is the foundation of modern Perfectionism.²⁹

This is the idea that a special second blessing experience (called a 'baptism in the Spirit' by Fletcher)³⁰ enables a person to experience 'perfect love' (so named by Wesley) and thus be instantaneously sanctified and perfected once-for-all (although there appear to be degrees of this and 'acceptable' failures).

It is a seriously false doctrine that does immense damage to disciples by ignoring the war that exists in our members. Perfected people fail to put off the old nature and especially sin through pride. The moment you claim to be perfected you have sinned. The net result of perfectionist schemes (of which there are many) is the downplaying of sin so that sin is ignored and not dealt with.

Wesley did not understand the doctrine of sin

St. John says, 'All sin is a transgression of the law.' True, but he does not say, All transgression of the law is sin. This I deny.³¹

"But surely we cannot be saved from sin, while we dwell in a sinful body." A sinful body? I pray observe, how deeply ambiguous, how equivocal, this expression is! But there is no authority for it in Scripture: The word sinful body is never found there. And

²³ Baker *Works*, Vol. 11, p446. AGES Vol. 11, p523.

²⁴ AGES *Works*, Vol. 6, p19.

²⁵ AGES *Works*, Vol. 6, p468.

²⁶ AGES *Works*, Vol. 6, p28.

²⁷ AGES *Works*, Vol. 6, p31.

²⁸ AGES *Works*, Vol. 12, p296; 'CCXVII. Letter to Mrs. Maitland'.

²⁹ 'There is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God ... This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices ... being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin. The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers that person for effective service.' The [US] Wesleyan Church, *Our Core Values and Beliefs*.

³⁰ John Fletcher of Madeley [1729-1785] was Wesley's chosen successor, but he did not consent.

³¹ AGES *Works*, Vol 6, p462.

as it is totally unscriptural, so it is palpably absurd. For no body, or matter of any kind, can be sinful.³² [Had he never read Rm 6:6, 8:10?]

Mariolatry

The blessed Virgin Mary, who, as well after as before she brought him forth, continued a pure and unspotted virgin.³³

This was written in a conciliatory letter to a Roman Catholic and affirms the Roman belief in Mary's continued virginity. In fact, Scripture tells us that Mary had further children, naturally by Joseph, who were Jesus' brothers. One was James the elder.

Wesley preached a false Gospel

Wesley believed that Christ died for everyone, elect or reprobate

Christ died, not only for those that are saved, but also for them that perish.³⁴

One who was sanctified by the blood of Christ may nevertheless go to hell.³⁵

[The atonement] is bought for every child of man.³⁶

The God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made.³⁷

If you ask, "Why then are not all men saved?" ... Whatever be the cause of their perishing, it cannot be his will.³⁸

What! Can the blood of Christ burn in hell? Or can the purchase by the blood of Christ go thither?" I answer, ... If the oracles of God are true, one who was purchased by the blood of Christ may go thither. For he that was sanctified by the blood of Christ was purchased by the blood of Christ. But one who was sanctified by the blood of Christ may nevertheless go to hell; may fall under that fiery indignation which shall for ever devour the adversaries.³⁹

[Salvation] is bought for every child of man, and actually given to every one that believeth. If you call this conditional salvation, God made it so from the beginning of the world.⁴⁰

Wesley affirmed the spiritual ability of sinful man

Men are as free in believing or not believing as if he [God] did not know it at all.⁴¹

Through the grace of God assisting me,⁴² I have a power to choose and do good as well as evil. I am free to choose whom I will serve; and if I choose the better part, to continue therein even unto death.⁴³

³² AGES *Works*, Vol. 6, p462.

³³ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p80-86. AGES Vol. 10, p100.

³⁴ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p4. AGES Vol. 7, p423.

³⁵ AGES *Works*, Vol. 10, p355.

³⁶ AGES *Works*, Vol. 10, p299.

³⁷ AGES Vol 7, p355.

³⁸ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p381. AGES Vol. 7, p423.

³⁹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p297. AGES Vol. 10, p354-355.

⁴⁰ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p254. AGES Vol. 10, p299.

⁴¹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 6, p318. AGES Vol. 6, p25.

The God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made. ... But he will not force them to accept it; he leaves them in the hands of their own counsel.⁴⁴

Wesley believed in salvation gained by works

Yet I believe, (and that without the least self-contradiction,) that final salvation is 'by works as a condition.' ⁴⁵

We must, ... assert salvation by works.⁴⁶

We have received it as a maxim, that 'a man is to do nothing in order to justification.' Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God, should 'cease from evil, and learn to do well.'⁴⁷

Repentance absolutely must go before faith; fruits meet for it, if there be opportunity.⁴⁸

Q. But must not repentance, and works meet for repentance, go before this faith [i.e. justifying faith]? A. Without doubt; if by repentance you mean conviction of sin; and by works meet for repentance, obeying God as far as we can, forgiving our brother, leaving off from evil, doing good, and using his ordinances, according to the power we have received.⁴⁹

It is plain, then, if we affirm, No man is saved by an absolute, unconditional decree, but; only by a conditional one; we must expect, all who hold unconditional decrees will say, we teach salvation by works. Let none, therefore, who hold universal redemption be surprised at being charged with this. Let us deny it no more; let us frankly and fairly meet those who advance it upon their own ground. If they charge you with holding salvation by works, answer plainly, 'In your sense, I do; for I deny that our final salvation depends upon any absolute, unconditional decree. If, therefore, there be no medium, I do hold salvation by works.'⁵⁰

The God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made. ... But he will not force them to accept it; he leaves them in the hands of their own counsel.⁵¹

Is not this salvation by works? Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition. ... As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid: We are rewarded according to our works, yea, because of our works. How does this differ from, "for the sake of our works?" ... Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot.⁵²

Whosoever denies salvation by absolute decrees, in so doing (according to their apprehension) asserts salvation by works. And herein I verily believe they are right. As

⁴² This is not the Biblical saving grace to the elect alone to give faith, but a general, universal, assisting grace that does not compel salvation but helps all who would chose to save themselves. [See: Baker *Works*, Vol 7:317.]

⁴³ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p228-229. AGES Vol. 7, p258.

⁴⁴ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p317. AGES Vol. 7, p355.

⁴⁵ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p432. AGES Vol.10, p432.

⁴⁶ Baker *Works*, Vol. 11, p494-495. AGES Vol. 11, p578.

⁴⁷ Baker *Works*, Vol. 8, p396-7. AGES Vol. 8, p396.

⁴⁸ AGES *Works*, Vol. 8, p456.

⁴⁹ AGES *Works*, Vol. 8, p310.

⁵⁰ Baker *Works*, Vol. 11, p579. AGES Vol. 11, p579.

⁵¹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p355. AGES Vol. 7, p355.

⁵² AGES *Works*, Vol. 8, p397.

averse as I once was to the thought, upon further consideration, I allow there is, there can be, no medium. Either salvation is by absolute decree, or it is (in a scriptural sense) by works. Yea, this I will proclaim on the housetop, — there is no medium between these. You must either assert unconditional decrees, or (in a sound sense) salvation by works.⁵³

Wesley believed in salvation lost by lack of works

Q. Are works necessary to the continuance of faith? A. Without doubt; for a man may forfeit the free gift of God, either by sins of omission or commission. Q. Can faith be lost but for want of works? A. It cannot but through disobedience.⁵⁴

Those who live by faith may yet fall from God, and perish everlastingly ... Those who are sanctified by the blood of the covenant may so fall as to perish everlastingly.⁵⁵

I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly.⁵⁶

True believers, ... may nevertheless finally fall. ... Those who so effectually know Christ, as by that knowledge have escaped the pollutions of the world, may yet fall back into those pollutions, and perish everlastingly.⁵⁷

Unless you fulfil the condition, you cannot attain the promise.⁵⁸

Those who live by faith may yet fall from God, and perish everlastingly. ... Those who are sanctified by the blood of the covenant may so fall from God as to perish everlastingly.⁵⁹

A child of God, that is, a true believer, (for he that believeth is born of God,) while he continues a true believer, cannot go to hell. But, (2.) If a believer make shipwreck of the faith, he is no longer a child of God. And then he may go to hell, yea, and certainly will, if he continues in unbelief.⁶⁰

He who is a child of God today, may be a child of the devil to-morrow. For, (4.) God is the Father of them that believe, so long as they believe.⁶¹

I do not believe the doctrine ... of infallible perseverance.⁶²

Wesley believed in Baptismal Regeneration

[What] are the benefits we receive by baptism, ... the first of these is, the washing away the guilt of original sin, by the application of the merits of Christ's death. ... By baptism, we who were "by nature children of wrath" are made the children of God. And this regeneration which our Church in so many places ascribes to baptism is more than barely being admitted into the Church, though commonly connected therewith; being

⁵³ AGES *Works*, Vol. 11, p578.

⁵⁴ *Works*, Vol. 8, p311-312. AGES Vol. 8, p311-312.

⁵⁵ AGES *Works* Vol. 10, p296.

⁵⁶ AGES *Works*, Vol. 10, p340.

⁵⁷ *Works*, Vol. 10, p242-247. AGES Vol. 10, p288,ff.

⁵⁸ *Works*, Vol. 10, p285-298. AGES Vol. 10, p346.

⁵⁹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p285-298. AGES Vol. 10, p296.

⁶⁰ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p285-298. AGES Vol. 10, p355.

⁶¹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p285-298. AGES Vol. 10, p355.

⁶² AGES *Works*, Vol 10, p449.

"grafted into the body of Christ's Church, we are made the children of God by adoption and grace." This is grounded on the plain words of our Lord: "Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John iii. 5.) By water, then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again; whence it is also called by the Apostle, "the washing of regeneration." ... Herein a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit by long-continued wickedness.⁶³

Wesley believed that pagans could be saved without knowing Christ or the Gospel

As to the ancient Heathens, no more therefore will be expected of them than the living up to the light they had. ... We have great reason to hope, though being of another spirit, they are taught by God, in all the essentials of true religion, by his inward voice.⁶⁴

I have no authority from the word of God "to judge those that are without;" nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation.⁶⁵

They will be saved during their unbelief... on the footing of honest Heathens, upon the plea of invincible ignorance.⁶⁶

Who of us is now accepted of God? He that now believes in Christ with a loving, obedient heart. But who among those that never heard of Christ? He that, according to the light he has, "feareth God and worketh righteousness." Is this the same with "he that is sincere?" Nearly, if not quite. Is not this salvation by works? Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition.⁶⁷

A typical example of contradiction in Wesley's writings

I do not believe salvation by works.⁶⁸

We must, ... assert salvation by works.⁶⁹

Wesley often contradicted himself and even his own supporters accept that his writings are sometimes confused or full of spin.

Wesley's wrong church practices

Wesley appointed women teachers in the church

Wesley gave, *'the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallet, and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connexion'*.⁷⁰ Other women leaders included Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet (later John Fletcher's wife)⁷¹ and Wesley laid down rules for them.⁷²

⁶³ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p192. AGES Vol. 10, p227-229.

⁶⁴ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p226. AGES Vol. 7, p226.

⁶⁵ Baker *Works*, Vol. 7, p394. AGES Vol. 7, p394.

⁶⁶ Baker *Works*, Vol. 6, p233. AGES *Works*, Vol. 6, p233.

⁶⁷ AGES *Works*, Vol. 8, p397.

⁶⁸ Baker *Works*, Vol. 10, p379. AGES Vol. 10, p450.

⁶⁹ Baker *Works*, Vol. 11, p494-495. AGES Vol. 11, p578.

⁷⁰ Zachariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of Holy Women*, Vol 1, p84.

Wesley allowed unrestrained behavioural phenomena

Methodist revival meetings exhibited many forms of charismatic exuberance and this kind of thing happened daily and during Wesley's own preaching.⁷³ Examples include:

- Crying out.⁷⁴
- Laughing and wailing (which often was exhibited by children).⁷⁵
- Falling down.⁷⁶
- Visions.⁷⁷
- Tongues.⁷⁸
- One Methodist even was said to have the gift of preaching in his sleep.⁷⁹

Wesley allowed prayers for the dead

In this kind of general prayer, therefore, "for the faithful departed," I conceive myself to be clearly justified.⁸⁰

Wesley was ecumenical

Wesley was ecumenical with regard to Rome. (See *AGES Works*, Vol 10, p80-86.)

Wesley's poor personal testimony

Wesley's bad marriage

Wesley married Molly Vazeille in 1751, but his marriage was deeply troubled, '*distant and unhappy*'.⁸¹ He saw very little of his wife and wrote to her listing her faults. Wesley also had what is termed '*romantic debacles*' before and after his marriage which '*cast a shadow over his pastoring*'.⁸²

He wrote scores of letters to women, both married and single. Though most are in the framework of pastoral counsel or fellowship, some of these letters contain very intimate language that is inappropriate.

He denied his vows to the Anglican Church

His actions in establishing house churches and separatist assemblies was clearly sectarian and contrary to his vow to obey the synod of the Church of England and articles 23 and 36 of the Thirty-Nine Articles.

Wesley published an abridgement of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (to which he was sworn in the Anglican Church) for the Methodists in 1794. He left out fifteen of them and edited the remainder. Gone were articles on election and predestination, articles against perfectionism, and works before justification, amongst others.

⁷¹ Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley, A Biography*, USA: Eerdmans, p175, 190. [UK Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003.]

⁷² Tomkins, p167.

⁷³ Tomkins: p65, 103, 71, 72, 39.

⁷⁴ Tomkins: p65, 71, 105, 108.

⁷⁵ Tomkins: p157, 155.

⁷⁶ Tomkins: p72, 79, 105, 156-7.

⁷⁷ Tomkins: p156.

⁷⁸ Tomkins: p144.

⁷⁹ Tomkins: p144.

⁸⁰ *AGES Works*, Vol. 9 p68.

⁸¹ Tomkins, p167.

⁸² Tomkins, p196.

Augustus Toplady accused Wesley (which was not denied) that he procured a mendicant Greek minister (known to be an impostor) to ordain him as a bishop, and ordain some followers as priests, upon which they officiated in the Church of England. This was in direct rebellion to the Oath of Supremacy, which Wesley had sworn.⁸³

Wesley used fraud to malign other Christians

He was malignant to Calvinism and Calvinists, savagely attacking its doctrines in pamphlets. Wesley attributed Calvinism to Satan and called it a '*deadly poison*' and the most deadly and successful enemy.⁸⁴ Calvinism, according to Wesley, was '*not the Gospel* but rather '*the greatest hindrance to the work of God*', the worst device '*Satan threw in the way*' which '*strikes at the root of salvation from sin*'.⁸⁵

What is the direct antidote to Methodism, the doctrine of heart-holiness? A. Calvinism: All the devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done far less toward stopping this work of God, than that single doctrine. It strikes at the root of salvation from sin, previous to glory, putting the matter on quite another issue. ... Be diligent to prevent them, and to guard these tender minds against the predestinarian poison.⁸⁶

Wesley used forgery to slander Augustus Toplady, his Calvinistic opponent (one amongst very many). In those days this was a capital offence. Toplady responded immediately, demonstrating the evil tactic as an illegal act. He wrote to Wesley:

You draw up a flimsy, partial compendium of Zanchius: a compendium which exhibits a few detached propositions, placed in the most disadvantageous point of view, and without including any part of the evidence on which they stand. But this alone was not sufficient to compass the desired end. Unsatisfied with carefully and totally suppressing every proof alleged by Zanchius in support of his argument; a false colouring must likewise be superinduced, by inserting a sentence or two now and then of your own foisting in. After which you close the motley piece, with an entire paragraph, forged every word of it by yourself: and conclude all, as you began, with subjoining the initials of my name: to make the ignorant believe that the whole, with your omissions, additions and alterations, actually came from me. -- An instance of audacity and falsehood hardly to be paralleled!⁸⁷

Wesley published another tract including the same offensive and false words purporting to be Toplady's, *The Consequence Proved*.⁸⁸ In this he sought to defend his twisting of Toplady's words with sophistry.

When Toplady died, Wesley initiated a rumour that Toplady had died blaspheming God and doubting his salvation. Wesley was challenged by Richard Hill who gave ample evidence that Wesley originated the lie and gave testimony that Toplady died in a godly, trusting manner.

⁸³ *A Letter To The Rev. John Wesley Relative to His Pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination*, Augustus Toplady (1740-1778); from *The Complete Works of Augustus Toplady* (1794), Sprinkle Publications Ed. (1987) pp. 719-728.

⁸⁴ AGES Works, Vol. 13, p193, 243, 285; Vol. 8, p395-6.

⁸⁵ AGES Works, Vol. 13, p59, 193; Vol. 10, p531; Vol. 8, p346, 395.

⁸⁶ AGES Works, Vol. 8, p395-6.

⁸⁷ *A Letter To The Rev. John Wesley Relative to His Pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination*, Augustus Toplady (1740-1778); from *The Complete Works of Augustus Toplady* (1794), Sprinkle Publications Ed. (1987) pp. 719-728.

⁸⁸ AGES Works, Vol. 10, p439ff.

Plagiarism

Wesley lifted 31 paragraphs from Dr Samuel Johnson's, *Taxation no Tyranny* and published it as his own as *A Calm Address to our American Colonies*. He also plagiarised an anti-slavery work written by a Quaker.⁸⁹

Gambling

He said at one stage '*I never myself bought a lottery ticket; but I blame not those that do*'. Later he had a share in one.⁹⁰

Treason

Wesley treacherously supported the American Revolution.

Wesley believed in Ghosts

That there are ghosts, or realms below, not even a man of them now believes.⁹¹

Here Wesley favourably quotes a poet. His family home had a poltergeist called 'Old Jeffrey'. He even published articles on his family's experiences and other ghost stories while in later years he welcomed paranormal manifestations.⁹²

Wesley had dubious practices

- He drew lots for divination. In fact, it was on the throw of a dice that he chose to be an Arminian rather than a Calvinist.⁹³
- He believed in opening the Bible at random for guidance at critical times.⁹⁴
- He trusted in dreams for guidance.⁹⁵
- He trusted in subjective impressions and emotionalism.⁹⁶
- He trusted in circumstantial signs against proper judgment.⁹⁷

Wesley denied ever loving Christ

My friends affirm I am mad, because I said I was not a Christian a year ago. I affirm I am not a Christian now ... For a Christian is one who has the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which (to mention no more) are love, peace, joy ... And I feel this moment I do not love God ... joy in the Holy Ghost I have not ... though I have constantly used all the means of grace for twenty years, I am not a Christian.⁹⁸

This was written in his journal within a year of his supposed conversion.

In one of my last [letters] I was saying that I do not feel the wrath of God abiding on me; nor can I believe it does. And yet (this is the mystery), I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore I am only an honest heathen ... And yet, to be so employed of God! And so hedged in that I can neither get forward nor backward! Surely there was never such an instance before,

⁸⁹ Tomkins, p177-178.

⁹⁰ 'John Wesley & Ephraem Syrus', Gordon Wakefield, Hugoye: *Journal of Syriac Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1998).

⁹¹ AGES *Works*, Vol. 7, p372.

⁹² Tomkins, p18-20.

⁹³ See A. Toplady, *A Letter To The Rev. John Wesley Relative to His Pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination*. Tomkins, p54, 75, 78.

⁹⁴ Tomkins, p54, 78.

⁹⁵ Tomkins, p133.

⁹⁶ Tomkins, p46, 62, 66.

⁹⁷ Tomkins, p71-73, 98.

⁹⁸ Iain Murray; *Wesley and the Men Who Followed*, Banner, (2003), p8-9.

from the beginning of the world! If I ever have had that faith, it would not be so strange. But I never had any other evidence of the eternal or invisible world than I have now; and that is none at all, unless such as faintly shines from reason's glimmering ray. I have no direct witness (I do not say, that I am a child of God, but) of anything invisible or eternal. And yet I dare not preach otherwise than I do, either concerning faith, or love, or justification, or perfection. And yet I find rather an increase than a decrease of zeal for the whole work of God and every part of it. I am borne along, I know not how, that I can't stand still. I want all the world to come to what I do not know.⁹⁹

This was written later in life (in his sixties) in a letter written to his brother Charles in June 1776.

Wesley's poor wider influence

What was the influence of John Wesley?

Methodism

First he was the founder of Methodism. Although he personally remained in the Anglican Church all his life, local separatist assemblies ('societies') were set up by him all over England and America. Indeed, he commissioned lay preachers for these groups, and regional ('circuit') superintendents, and all this led to the formal establishment of the Methodist 'Connexion' in 1784 by a Deed of Declaration on the Court of Chancery. In 1787 Wesleyan chapels were registered as dissenting meeting places under the Toleration Act of 1759. A secession group, the Methodist New Connexion (the first of many), was established in 1797, six years after Wesley's death.

Methodism itself, being Arminian, is a heretical church group that quickly became more and more liberal. In the mid-20th century it succumbed to deeper and deeper modernism in the UK and being in the forefront of ecumenical moves. Furthermore its officers are unbiblical¹⁰⁰ and it also taught 'Final Perfection', or instant sanctification.

The Salvation Army

Wesleyanism was the main foundation of Booth's Salvation Army, which declined even further from the faith in denying the practice of the sacraments in order to foster unity.

American Camp Meetings

Wesleyanism in frontier America was expanded by Camp Meetings in the wilderness; a sort of Bible conference in the open air. At these some of the worst excesses in behaviour were exhibited; not only in extravagant shouting, dancing, jumping, shaking, jerking, screaming etc, but also in fornication. A local saying claimed that '*as many were begot as born again*'. There was also a close connection with the heretical Shakers in these camp meetings.

Wesleyan based movements

Wesleyan Methodism had a profound impact upon The Holiness Movement in America and the subsequent rise of Pentecostalism. Both these movements are riddled with a

⁹⁹ Quoted in Stephen Tomkins, 2003, *John Wesley: A Biography*, Eerdmans, p168.

¹⁰⁰ A confusing system that includes: regional 'Superintendents' that are actually bishops; separating bishops from elders; employing lay preachers not elders; an itinerant minister who only stays with a congregation for a year; plus a separate church pastor.

multiplicity of errors that we cannot enter into here. The point is that it is accepted that Wesley is a key pioneer in the development of both rogue church movements.

Open theism

This was developed by Clark Pinnock and is a radical Wesleyan-Arminianism. This denies God's sovereignty and even his ability to know the future.

Conclusion

If we had time we could list even more examples of false teaching because John Wesley was not afraid to openly shout his ideas, whatever the consequences. He was ready to fight dirty for them, even though they were clearly not found in the Bible. Indeed, his chief theological influences were mystics, both ancient (like Clement of Alexandria, 155-220) and more contemporary (like William Law or Thomas à Kempis.)

This strain of his character paralleled his theology, which was an emphasis upon man. Just as his doctrine centred upon the ability and sovereignty of man, so his character was resolutely set on self-affirmation; what he said was absolute and axiomatic, whether right or wrong. Wesley had deep convictions, but these were not Biblical. Thus he makes unequivocal statements that the Bible never says this or that, when any careful reader can find places where it does say this or that.

The modern popularity of Wesley tells us at least three things. The first is that Christians who support Wesley cannot read the Bible carefully since it is fairly simple to find that Scripture contradicts much of what he says. Secondly, it shows that most supporters of Wesley have not read his own words (in 14 volumes) but only the thoughts of biased hagiographers. Thirdly, it shows the modern fascination with pragmatics – 'if it works in practice then it is truth'. Wesley was a terrific organiser and a disciplined hard worker. Unlike some of his better contemporaries (such as Whitefield¹⁰¹) he carefully and methodically organised his followers in local groups with regional preachers and administrators. He also established many rules and regulations to deal with various issues. There was no shortage or direction from Wesley. Thus his people stood (until the 20th century)¹⁰² while large numbers of the followers of revivalist Calvinists fell away.

What is shocking, when you review Wesley's teaching, is that he taught such a large number of serious errors. Others have risen up, proclaiming certain erroneous doctrines, and have been cast out and vilified in short shrift.¹⁰³ Even Arminians have to accept that Wesley taught errors.¹⁰⁴ For some reason, largely because of his great church following and beloved Methodist hymn writing, Wesley's errors were downplayed and covered up. Many Wesley biographies say little or nothing about his false teaching or his serious character

¹⁰¹ Late in life Whitefield said that many of his hundreds of thousands of converts were '*a rope of sand*' and he regretted that he had not been as good an organiser as his dubious friend John Wesley.

¹⁰² This needs qualification. The people 'stood' in that a large body of Methodists continued until the mid-20th century in the UK, when it became much more liberal and numbers fell away (there are more in the US). However, this is not saying much as this standing was steeped in doctrinal error and ecclesiastical false practices.

¹⁰³ It is odd that fine Calvinists, like Toplady, who withstood Wesley in his day, have been largely forgotten by modern Calvinists while Wesley is lauded by the same.

¹⁰⁴ They will gloss over his Arminian affirmations but will balk at his ecumenism, baptismal regeneration, pagan salvation, Mariolatry, perfectionism, forgery, plagiarism, belief in ghosts, prayers for the saints, acceptance of gambling and so on.

flaws. Thus modern believers can grow up hearing about Wesley and just accept that he was a great church leader and teacher, when the truth is the very reverse.

There is no doubt that we have to affirm the following:

- John Wesley was a wolf in the church. Jesus demands that we identify these in order to protect the saints.
- He taught a great deal of false doctrine.
- His foundational theology was deeply erroneous, being a mix of Arminianism, perfectionism, legalism and mysticism.
- Many of his expositions and propositions are in error and are deeply unbiblical.
- His church practice was unscriptural.
- His personal character was more than flawed. He committed, not only serious sins without repentance, but broke the law of the time more than once.
- He was guilty of hating the brethren and committing serious attacks on the brethren. According to Scripture this alone means that he was not of God.¹⁰⁵
- At the beginning of his 'Christian' life he said he was not converted; he did not refute his non-Christian previous life of legalism, and at the end of his life he stated that he did not love God and never had.
- All in all, one has to come to the conclusion that John Wesley could not have been a genuine believer.
- This means that reading his works will damage your growth in grace.
- It also means that all systems founded on his teaching must be in error also.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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¹⁰⁵ 1 Jn 2:9.