

“NOW, THEN, DO IT!”: THE KESWICK CONVENTION’S MODIFICATION OF  
JOHN WESLEY’S DOCTRINE OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Laura Welker

Student Box # 2066

Peter G. Engle, PhD

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## OUTLINE

THESIS: While retaining the substance of John Wesley's theology of entire sanctification by faith, the Keswick Convention's presentation of instant sanctification followed the American revivalist modifications by using an atmosphere of crisis to influence every believer to choose to receive this empowerment of the Holy Spirit by faith through the surrender of the self.

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Since its inception in 1875, the Keswick convention's proclamation of a "higher life" of power and holiness available to every Christian proved to be one of the most influential pietistic movements in later nineteenth and early twentieth century Evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup> The strong biblical exhortation, transdenominational nature, and idyllic location attracted thousands from across Britain and beyond to experience "entire sanctification" and return to their homes under the lordship and power of the Holy Spirit. Thousands of convention attendees dedicated their lives to missionary service and made Keswick the source of one of the largest missionary movements of its time.<sup>2</sup> The majority of devotional literature from that period that are now considered classics, such as *My Utmost For His Highest* and *Hinds Feet on High Places*, as well as beloved hymns such as "Take My Life and Let It Be," were birthed out of the experience and message of Keswick.<sup>3</sup> Primary among its teaching was the believer's reception of instant sanctification, a theology that dates back to the father of Evangelicalism, John Wesley. While retaining the substance of John Wesley's theology of entire sanctification by faith, the Keswick Convention's presentation of instant sanctification followed the American revivalist modifications, using an atmosphere of crisis to influence every believer to choose to receive this empowerment of the

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<sup>1</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 151.

<sup>2</sup> Stevenson, KAV, 19; David Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth Century England: The 1998 Didsbury Lectures* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth Century England*, 79; Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996), 158, mentions the message of Keswick as a strong influence on Hudson Taylor, F. B. Meyer, and Andrew Murray—in fact, they were even speakers at Keswick. Other well-known Keswick participants were Amy Carmichael, G. Campbell Morgan, A. B. Simpson (founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination), H. A. Ironside, and W. Graham Scroggie, according to Stanley M. Burgess, ed, "Keswick Higher Life Movement," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002). The Christian artist Keith Green even had a "Keswick" experience in the 1970s after reading *Rees Howells, Intercessor* by Norman Grubb, and was profoundly changed by it even after having already lived several years of an unusually vibrant Christian life, according to Melody Green's biography *No Compromise*.

Holy Spirit by faith through the surrender of the self. This modification of Wesley's theology will be the focus of this paper.

The teaching of entire sanctification, which John Wesley preferred to call "Christian perfection," was his most original contribution to theology.<sup>4</sup> He firmly believed that the biblical promises of salvation from sin and exhortations for perfection were to be taken at face value; otherwise, were they impossible to reach, it was all a mockery.<sup>5</sup> While he acknowledged the orthodox consensus that sanctification is a gradual process that is completed upon glorification, Wesley believed that full sanctification could also be attained in this life: in a moment in time sanctifying grace is divinely imparted and received by faith. This was no abstract speculation, for though Wesley likely did not experience entire sanctification himself, he found that hundreds of his followers experienced this state of "perfect love," and he adjusted his doctrine in light of how it functioned in their lives.<sup>6</sup>

In order to properly understand how Wesley viewed Christian perfection, one must first look to his definitions of sin and perfection. Wesley made a distinction between original sin, a "voluntary transgression of divine law," and transgressions, an "involuntary transgression of a known law." A justified believer may be forgiven of original sin yet still continue in an unregenerated lifestyle, whereas a sanctified believer is cleansed from willful, voluntary sin and

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<sup>4</sup> Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective" in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Melvin E. Dieter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," 15, lists these verses as foundational in Wesley's theology: Deut 30:6; Psa 130:8; Ezek 36:25, 29; Matt 5:48; 6:13; 22:37; Luke 1:69-75; John 3:8; 17:20-21, 23; Rom 8:3-4; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 3:14-19; 5:25, 27; 1 Thess 5:23; Titus 2:11-14; and 1 John 4:17.

<sup>6</sup> Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Publishing, 1980), 135 (n); John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1950), 40, 43.

lives his or her life for Christ.<sup>7</sup> Yet, such a person may still make unintentional transgressions.<sup>8</sup> These transgressions did not exclude perfection, for Wesley viewed perfection on this side of eternity as holy living in the midst of human fallibility. This leads to Wesley's definition of Christian perfection: "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>9</sup> Perfection does not mean freedom from ignorance, mistakes, weakness or temptation, for as 1 John 1:8-10 states, no Christian is completely free from the potential to sin until after death.<sup>10</sup> However, the expectation holds that the believer is able *not* to sin and is expected not to sin (1 John 2:1; 3:3, 4:16-18).<sup>11</sup> The believer is freed from "evil desires and evil tempers" and natural propensity to sin as he or she is made perfect in love.<sup>12</sup>

In his observations of this experience, John Wesley noted a distinct pattern. Typically, a sinner receives justification from sin and salvation by faith. After time progresses, the initial joy and peace wears off as the new believer begins to see the "depth of pride, self-will, and hell" still within his or her unregenerated nature. The sorrow wrought from that revelation causes the believer to seek the holiness of God anew, and by that faith the second grace is granted.<sup>13</sup> In this

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<sup>7</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 10: Answering the question of when inward sanctification begins, Wesley said, "In the moment a man is justified. Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of sin, till he is sanctified throughout. From that time a believer gradually dies to sin and grows in grace."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. On page 9: "God is mindful of the desire of them that fear him, and gives them a single eye and a pure heart; he stamps upon them his own image and superscription; he createth them anew in Christ Jesus; he

state of “perfect love” the sanctified believer experiences selflessness, peace and joy, desiring only the will of God.<sup>14</sup> This state is not infallible, as Wesley soon learned: “There is no such height or strength of holiness as it is impossible to fall from.”<sup>15</sup> Pride, “enthusiasm,” and complacency are factors that can cause someone to fall.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it can be recovered again by repentance, humility and faith. Indeed, “it is an exceedingly common thing for persons to lose it more than once before they are established therein.”<sup>17</sup>

In response to the question of whether this perfection is a gradual process or is attained at a specific moment in time, Wesley was quick to affirm both processes. The orthodox Reformation and Roman Catholic perspectives held that perfection is a gradual process and not attainable until death.<sup>18</sup> Wesley believed that for many believers it *is* a gradual process over their lifetime, but argued,

If there be such a blessed change before death, should we not encourage all believers to expect it? And the rather, because constant experience shows the more earnestly they expect this the more swiftly and steadily does the gradual work of God go on in their souls . . . whereas just the contrary effects are observed whenever this expectation ceases.<sup>19</sup>

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cometh unto them with his Son and blessed Spirit, and fixing his abode in their souls bringeth them into the rest which remaineth for the people of God.”

<sup>14</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 8: “They are freed from self-will, as desiring nothing but the holy and perfect will of God, and continually crying in their inmost soul, ‘Father, thy will be done.’ At all times their souls are even and calm; their hearts are steadfast and immovable. Their peace, flowing as a river, ‘passeth all understanding,’ and they ‘rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’”

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-46.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3; Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 14.

<sup>19</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 3.

For this reason, Wesley chose to emphasize instant sanctification. There is a moment of change when one dies to sin and is actually living “the full life of love.”<sup>20</sup> Yet this sanctification is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a continual process of growth and refinement.<sup>21</sup>

Having surveyed Wesley’s theology of Christian perfection, we may now turn to the issue of how he perceived one receives this “entire sanctification.” For Wesley, it was equivalent to the act of justification—it is a gift from God, received by faith through the mediation of Christ, and testified to by the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> He was still strongly within the Reformational emphasis upon faith, for this sanctification is not achieved by one’s own effort but is a grace from Christ to the one who believes him for it and abides in him.<sup>23</sup> The one who desires entire sanctification must not wait for it in “careless indifference or indolent inactivity” but seek it in

vigorous universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily, as well as in earnest prayer and fasting and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God. . . . It is true, we receive it by simple faith. But God does not, will not, give that faith unless we seek it with all diligence in the way which he hath ordained.<sup>24</sup>

A careful reader of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* will find no attestation apart from the previous quotation of what a person must do to receive perfection, for it is a “miracle of grace,” a gift of God imparted in His timing and in His divine prerogative, and no human actions

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<sup>20</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. On page 23 he notes how a person knows he or she has attained perfection: “When, after having been fully convinced of inbred sin by a far deeper and clearer conviction than that which he experienced before justification, and after having experienced a gradual mortification of it, he experiences a total death to sin and an entire renewal in the love and image of God, so as to ‘rejoice evermore,’ to ‘pray without ceasing,’ and ‘in everything to give thanks’ . . . None, therefore, ought to believe that the work is done till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification as clearly as his justification.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

may force His hand, though one may hasten it.<sup>25</sup> “Indeed, how God may work we cannot tell.”<sup>26</sup> For John Wesley, the attainment of it appears to have been a mystery, and for that reason his emphasis was solely upon the proclamation and defense of instant sanctification rather than the process by which one attains it. The more people made aware of this grace, Wesley believed, the more would find it.

His desire was soon fulfilled. The Wesleyan teaching of instant sanctification was brought to America where it proliferated with the spread of Methodism, particularly on the American frontier.<sup>27</sup> For the first half of the nineteenth century, Wesley’s theology was largely unchanged, and the grace of entire sanctification was both eagerly sought and patiently waited for. Bebbington records testimonies of English Methodists who “long thirsted” for it for years before receiving it, and this was still true for most American Methodists. Entire sanctification “normally came after a long quest. . . . Even at the crisis point, release was not automatic.”<sup>28</sup> This understanding began to change, however, when Wesley’s theology of instant sanctification was influenced by American Revivalism.

After the Second Great Awakening, expectation of revivals was high, particularly on the frontier camp meetings. The “surprising work of God” that had visited Jonathan Edwards fell upon so many of these locations that it came to be expected, as was shown by the fact that these meetings began to be called “revival meetings.”<sup>29</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the expectation

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<sup>25</sup> W. E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1943), 82.

<sup>26</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 38.

<sup>28</sup> Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth Century England*, 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ian H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), xvii-xviii.



for revival became an intentional conjuring of revival. “Instead of being ‘surprising’ they might now be even announced in advance, and whereas no one in the previous century had known of ways to secure a revival, a system was now popularized by ‘revivalists’ which came near to guaranteeing results.”<sup>30</sup>

The most well-known revivalist was Charles Finney, who popularized the theory that if one plugged in the methods, revival would happen. It was no longer believed to happen “unpredictably, spontaneously, sovereignly,” but it could happen by influencing the will through emotion-inducing procedures.<sup>31</sup> In the area of salvation, Finney believed that “the Holy Spirit’s aid is permanently available to all” and conversion is “nothing more than the moment when the sinner, employing that aid, yields to the truth and makes his decision,” often signified by standing, kneeling, or coming forward.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the primary responsibility of the preacher was to bring them up to the crisis point of immediate submission.<sup>33</sup>

Just as Wesley’s understanding of justification paralleled his theology of sanctification, Finney’s methods of influencing a sinner to choose justification were applied to move a believer to choose entire sanctification. As he believed it is promised in scripture to Christians, and as faith is “always the expressed or implied condition” of these promises, then “this state is attainable on the ground of natural ability at any time.”<sup>34</sup> He puts it even more bluntly: “*Full faith in the word and promise of God, naturally, certainly, and immediately produces a state of*

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<sup>30</sup> Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, xviii.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Charles G. Finney, *Principles of Sanctification: Studies on Biblical Sanctification and Its Distinction from “Perfectionism,”* ed. Louis Gifford Parkhurst, Jr. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1986), 133, 135.

*entire sanctification.*”<sup>35</sup> This reasoning lead to two conclusions: first, the state of entire sanctification is guaranteed at the moment one chooses faith; and second, if it is obtained simply by faith, then *not* attaining it is due to unbelief, which is sin—a conclusion that Finney states repeatedly.<sup>36</sup>

Gone are both John Wesley’s acceptance of gradual sanctification and allowance for divine prerogative in the bestowal of instant sanctification. Instead of actively waiting in faith—in obedience, prayer, and self-denial—for God to grant this grace, one can, and most definitely will, receive it in the moment of genuine faith. One would think that Finney would have even looked upon Wesley’s requirements as works.<sup>37</sup> Now, “according to [revivalist Wesleyan] teaching, the Word of God called all Christians to receive entire sanctification as a work of grace subsequent to regeneration.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, all who desired this state but did not receive it—including Wesley himself!—were in sin because they did not receive it. Also, revivalism focused on creating an atmosphere of crisis, in which after persuasive preaching the hearer is confronted with a climactic moment of choice. Now, instead of merely proclaiming the possibility of entire sanctification, it was preached with the expectation that all who listened and responded positively would enter in it by the time of the altar call.

Several other developments to Wesley’s theology of entire sanctification occurred during nineteenth-century America. Phoebe Palmer introduced “altar terminology” that became

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<sup>35</sup> Finney, *Principles of Sanctification*, 135, italics his.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: “If this state were not attainable on the ground of natural ability, it would not be required and its absence would not be sin. . . . If it can not be instantly accomplished, it would not be instantly required. If it were not, in its own nature, capable of being attained at once, the non-attaining of it at once would not be sin.”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 138: “1. A state of entire sanctification can never be attained by an indifferent waiting for God’s time. 2. A state of entire sanctification cannot be attained by any works of law, or works of any kind performed in your own strength irrespective of the grace of God.”

<sup>38</sup> Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 38.

inseparable to instant sanctification: “On everyone who will specifically present himself upon the altar [the finished work of Christ]. . . for the sole object of being ceaselessly consumed, body and soul in the self-sacrificing service of God, He will cause the fire to descend,” cleansing the soul from all sin at the very moment of sacrifice.<sup>39</sup> She, like Finney, also believed that immediate action of faith is required at the moment of crisis, and that the failure to act, or even to receive, is ultimately due to unbelief, which is itself disobedience.<sup>40</sup> Thus the pressure upon preachers to lead their hearers to a crisis and exact an immediate response so that their hearers do not “fall into condemnation by delay” was great.<sup>41</sup>

Another development actually had its beginnings in a contemporary and friend of John Wesley: John Fletcher. At Pentecost in Acts chapter two the Holy Spirit came upon people who were already believers and empowered them for a life of service and holiness. Fletcher believed that we are still in the age of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit is still waiting to empower a believer in a moment of time for the “full potential of salvation from sin.”<sup>42</sup> Even before the birth of modern Pentecostalism, language of the “baptism of the Holy Ghost” was in use. By the second half of the nineteenth century, this phrase had become synonymous with the reception of entire sanctification.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 42; Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 40.

<sup>41</sup> Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 40; Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 24: “If you do not now receive it, the delay will not be on the part of God, but wholly with yourself.”

<sup>42</sup> Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

In the 1860s, a former Quaker named Hannah Whitall Smith struggled with the dichotomy between biblical promises of victory over sin and her own continual failings.<sup>44</sup>

Confronted by the testimony of a factory worker at a Methodist prayer meeting, Hannah found

there are some Christians who say that by receiving Christ by faith for our sanctification, just as we received Him by faith for our justification, all that I long for is accomplished. . . . That the Bible teaches that the Lord can deliver from the power of sin, as well as from its guilt, and the soul learns to trust Him to do it and to cease to rely upon resolutions or efforts. . . . I saw that *faith links us to the Almighty power of God*, so there seemed no limit to its possibilities.<sup>45</sup>

This state was one of victory over sin by “ceasing to live my own life and by letting the power of God ‘work in me and to do of his good pleasure’.”<sup>46</sup> After she and her husband Robert Pearsall-Smith experienced this “rest of faith” themselves, they began to write and speak about this “higher life,” ultimately bringing Wesley’s theology of sanctification back to Britain—and to the Church of England that had originally rejected it—in 1873. This message of the surrender of the self in exchange for the Holy Spirit’s filling and sanctifying empowerment became the foundation for the annual convention on holiness held at Keswick.

The atmosphere of Keswick was that of the American holiness camp and revivalist traditions. The week-long convention was held in tents in an idyllic setting with persuasive preaching designed to lead the attendees to a moment of decision. The content of each day’s message was generally progressive, “with the hope that, step by step, the believer may be led

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<sup>44</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Unselfishness of God and How I Discovered It* (New York, 1903) in J.B. Figgis, *Keswick From Within* (London: Marshall Bros., 1914), 10: “I had been a Christian nine years, but while I had found a religion that provided perfectly for my future deliverance, it did not seem to give me present deliverance. I was continually sinning and repenting, making good resolutions and breaking them, hating what was wrong and yet yielding to it; longing for victory and sometimes getting it, but more often failing. I could not help seeing all the while that the Bible seemed to imply that Christ came to bring a real and present victory to His followers, but I was painfully conscious that I knew little of it.”

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12; Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 133.

<sup>46</sup> Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 133.

onward to the fullness of power for life and service.”<sup>47</sup> And the leading of the Holy Spirit was important, as were personal testimonies and congregational song.<sup>48</sup>

The Keswick understanding of entire sanctification was largely the same as Wesley’s original understanding. It took scriptural promises for holiness and victory over sin at face value and believed, like Wesley, that this victory could be instantly attained by faith in the finished work of Christ in the same manner that one is justified. This state is described by both as “pure love reigning alone in the heart and life,” evidenced by purity of character and devoted service.<sup>49</sup> It brings a sense of profound joy and peace, a fervency in prayer, and a victory over life’s temptations. Both believed this state was fallible—one could lose it through pride, complacency, or unbelief—but that it could also be regained in repentance and faith.<sup>50</sup> Both believed that it is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a greater, continued ascent in holiness.<sup>51</sup> And both believed in a solemn responsibility to proclaim this experience to all believers so that as many as possible could receive it.

But the Keswick “rest of faith” also differed in significant ways from Wesley’s entire sanctification. The speakers shied away from any hint of perfectionism that originated in Wesley and was brought to extremes by the “Oberlin heresy” of Finney and his associates. They firmly rejected any notion of sinlessness before death. The Reverend Webb-Peploe, speaking at the Keswick Convention in 1895, said, “When I read such words as dear John Wesley’s, ‘The evil

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<sup>47</sup> *The Message of Keswick and its Meaning* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd., [1939]), xii.

<sup>48</sup> Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 157-158.

<sup>49</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Evan H. Hopkins, “Crisis and Process” in *Keswick’s Authentic Voice: Forty-Eight Outstanding Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1882-1962*, Herbert F. Stevenson (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 336, preferred to see it as reconsecration and restoration, instead of losing and regaining. This could be due to the Calvinistic background of Keswick in contrast to Wesley’s Arminianism.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

root, the carnal mind, is destroyed in me; sin subsists no longer,' I can only marvel that any human being, with the teaching of the Holy Ghost upon the Word of God, can thus deceive himself, or attempt to deceive others."<sup>52</sup> Rather than the eradication of sin in the believer, sin is repressed, kept under control and overcome by the Holy Spirit. "So there was a constant struggle going on inside the consecrated believer, but one in which God, if he was allowed, would always defeat the enemies of the soul. . . . Consecration did not terminate sin: it inaugurated the ongoing process."<sup>53</sup>

Because sin is only repressed and not eliminated, the problem Wesley had in defending the need for the mediation Christ was removed. Abiding in Christ is the only way one remained in this state and found victory over sin. Wesley also asserted this, but the importance of abiding in Christ only became paramount at Keswick.<sup>54</sup> Submission to the lordship of Christ was imperative: "Would we know the Christ in us in His power? We must yield ourselves to the Christ over us in His will, in His rights."<sup>55</sup> The power of this message of submission to the

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<sup>52</sup> Sangster, *The Path to Perfection*, 81. Yet, Wesley, in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 17, asserts, "'sinless perfection' is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions." But the leaders of Keswick were especially reacting to the weaknesses in his theology that were later exploited by perfectionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>53</sup> Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth Century England*, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 16: "Q. But still, if they live without sin, does not this exclude the necessity of a mediator? At least, is it not plain that they stand no longer in need of Christ in his priestly office? A. Far from it. None feel their need of Christ like these; none so entirely dependant upon him. For Christ does not give life to the soul separate from, but in and with himself. [Quotes John 15:5] . . . For our perfection is not like that of a tree, which flourishes by the sap derived from its own root, but, as was said before, like that of a branch, which, united to the vine, bears fruit, but, severed from it, is dried up and withered."

<sup>55</sup> H. C. G. Moule, "The Message of Keswick" in *Keswick's Triumphant Voice: Forty-Eight Outstanding Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1882-1962*, ed. Herbert F. Stevenson (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 42: "Christ our power for internal simplicity and cleansing, as He is received in submissive trust, as the soul trusts Him and entrusts itself to Him, so that He shall have His way, and do His work, and, at the very springs of thought and will, put out His blessed, loving power . . . having first—not last—cast their sins and their iniquities into oblivion at the Cross. . . . This great truth of Christ over us by every claim of lordship, sovereignty, and possession, this is the other side of Keswick's distinctive message to Christian hearts."

lordship of Christ was evident in the thousands of attendees who, like Hudson Taylor, dedicated their lives without reserve or comfort to the mission field.<sup>56</sup>

There were also differences in terminology. Whereas Wesley used terms like “Christian perfection,” “entire sanctification,” “full salvation,” and “perfected in love” to describe this experience, Keswick used terms like the “higher life” of victory over sin, the “rest of faith” of “letting go and letting God” conquer sin, and the “second blessing” of empowerment by the Holy Spirit. “Dedication,” “consecration,” “surrender,” “deliverance,” “power,” and “victory” were also key catchphrases.

The final and primary difference with Wesley’s theology, and the topic of this paper, is Keswick’s understanding of how this sanctification is attained. As previously mentioned, Wesley exhorted believers to eagerly seek entire sanctification and wait for this grace to be bestowed while growing in gradual sanctification. In line with American revivalism, Keswick believed *now* is the time for reception—in the moment of surrendered faith. While *now* could be upon the reading of a book or a flash of divine enlightenment, at the Convention a progressive format was followed to lead the attendees to the crisis moment of decision.<sup>57</sup>

The organizers of Keswick quickly discovered that the mere proclamation of the availability of this holiness was not sufficient—it must be preceded “by a ‘breaking up of the fallow ground.’ All that hinders holiness must be revealed and discarded before the work of

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<sup>56</sup> J. Robertson McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, Melvin E. Dieter, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 156.

<sup>57</sup> J. Elder Cumming, “What We Teach” in *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice: Forty-Eight Outstanding Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1882-1962*, ed. Herbert F. Stevenson (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 24, taught that some enter this experience “without know it, led silently, unconsciously, by God’s Spirit,” while others enter it through some great sorrow that strips them of self and causes them to depend on and be filled by God. “For the most part Christians do not grow into it. If they grow at all, it is so slowly, so partially, so one-sidedly. . . . They are content to live under the power of certain sins, because they do not believe it is possible to be set free from those also.

grace can be fully accomplished in the regenerate heart and life.”<sup>58</sup> Just as a nineteenth century revivalist would begin by expounding on the unsaved soul’s bondage to sin, the first day of the Convention was devoted to addressing the problem of sin and its continuing hold in the lives of most believers. If an attendee believed himself or herself to be doing quite well in that department, this illusion was soon shattered by sermons detailing spiritual immaturity and insipidness, fruitlessness, secret sins, wrong attitudes, pettishness, unbelief, and a plethora of other common examples of daily defeats to sin.<sup>59</sup>

With pride and complacency in shambles, the attendee “dead in sin” is ready to hear the remedy of “alive to God in Christ.” Just as a revivalist presents the salvation of the work of Christ to the unsaved, Keswick presents “the Cross of Christ [as] God’s remedy for sin—and the place of power over it. . . . the secret of fruitfulness is found in submission to death.”<sup>60</sup> The finished work of Christ appropriates not only salvation but also provision to live a life of victory over sin—what J. Robertson McQuilkin says should be the true expectation for a normal Christian life.<sup>61</sup> Identification and union with Christ in his death (for the believer to self and sin) and resurrection (victory over sin) as written in Romans chapter six is the key.

The third day is the time for the crisis of decision—the most “absolutely critical” moment at the Keswick Convention.<sup>62</sup> “The Keswick maxim, ‘No crisis before Wednesday,’ derives from the conviction that individuals must clearly see their own bankruptcy and God’s abundant

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<sup>58</sup> Herbert F. Stevenson, ed., *Keswick’s Authentic Voice: Forty-Eight Outstanding Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1882-1962* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 25.

<sup>59</sup> A number of these are actually titles of sermons at Keswick as listed in Stevenson, *Keswick’s Authentic Voice* and *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice*.

<sup>60</sup> Herbert F. Stevenson, ed., *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice: Forty-Eight Outstanding Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1882-1962* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 149.

<sup>61</sup> McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective,” 151-152.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.



provision before they can adequately respond to the challenge of unconditional surrender.”<sup>63</sup>

Cumming describes the steps by which one receives the rest of faith: first, “the absolute surrender to God, as far as the soul knows, of everything”; second, “a believing acceptance of the fullness of God’s grace” for one’s own; third, the “indwelling of Christ in the heart” comes, which is a “ceasing from self, and letting Christ work”; fourth, the “death of self” is required: “Self died to sin, and in its stead there is a new life. . . . It is because self died that there is room for Christ to live in us.”<sup>64</sup> This moment of surrender is in nature nearly identical with that of initial justification, so the same means used by revivalists for salvation are used here. Passionate preaching for the necessity of making the decision *now* is utilized, as is evident in the title of a Keswick sermon by W. Graham Scroggie appropriated for the title of this paper: “Now, Then, Do It!” An after-meeting is provided when the day’s entreaties are over and those who have not yet made a decision are encouraged to linger before the “favourable hour” is lost and the heart is again dangerously hardened by unbelief.<sup>65</sup>

Here the greatest discrepancy between the Wesleyan and Keswickan theologies, and the influence of American revivalism, is most evident. While Wesley proclaimed its reception as a *possibility*, Keswick guaranteed it as a *certainty*, dependent upon the attendee’s choice to surrender or not. In contradiction to Wesley’s stipulations above, Cumming stated, “It is of no small importance to understand that instead of waiting in the hope of growing into this blessing, it is possible to enter in at once, by a decided step of faith” in surrender and acceptance of His

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<sup>63</sup> McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective,” 155; W. Graham Scroggie, “Now, Then, Do It!” in *Keswick’s Authentic Voice: Forty-Eight Outstanding Addresses Delivered at the Keswick Convention 1882-1962*, ed. Herbert F. Stevenson (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), 370, summarizes, “After the exposition comes the action. All such gatherings as these must be productive if they are to be of any use at all.”

<sup>64</sup> Cumming, “What We Teach,” 20-23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

offered grace.<sup>66</sup> Its availability to all was unquestioned, for a bounteous Lord would not reject any who came to him in genuine surrender and faith.<sup>67</sup> “We have reason to hope and expect that everybody who has come to this Keswick will be blessed. . . . Do not wait. This is your hour of opportunity.”<sup>68</sup>

If impassioned pleas were not enough to move the attendee to a positive response, the fourth day offered testimonies of the glorious benefits that accompany surrender through the filling of the Holy Spirit: power, victory, peace, fruit, and sweet fellowship with God. Finally, the fifth day (a later addition) was devoted to calls for dedication to service, particularly on the mission field.<sup>69</sup>

The Keswick Convention’s modifications of John Wesley’s theology of entire sanctification were both beneficial and misguided. On the one hand, they provided appropriate corrections to the weaker aspects of his theology, such as his unsupported distinctions between original sin and transgressions, the possibility of a sinless life this side of the grave, and the lack of prominence given to Christ’s continued role in the life of the sanctified believer. Keswick’s moderate stance enabled its message of holiness to spread beyond denominational boundaries and impact generations of insipid Christians around the world.

On the other hand, however, its assumption that entire sanctification not only exists but that it is instantly available to anyone who receives it by faith is both exegetically and

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<sup>66</sup> Cumming, “What We Teach,” 24.

<sup>67</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 151: “The sound Reformation principle, they could point out, was that salvation is the gift of God to the person who trusts him. They were simply pressing the principle further by contending that progress in the Christian life as well as its commencement can be had for the asking. God is as willing to give holiness as he is to confer salvation.”

<sup>68</sup> Scroggie, “Now, Then, Do It!” 375.

<sup>69</sup> *The Message of Keswick*, xii; Stevenson, *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice*, 14.

experientially misguided. A doctrine that is only hinted at in scripture but not solidly proved, such as the “second blessing’s” later inclusion of speaking in tongues, should not be proclaimed as an expected experience for all believers. If a grace bestowed by divine initiative upon only a portion of believers is preached as instantly available to *everyone* who responds in faith, then those who believe but do not receive it are burdened with an overwhelming and undeserved guilt. No doubt among the many who received with joy an experience of the “higher life” at Keswick were many more who left in despair over not receiving it, no matter how hard they tried to surrender or believe. This unfair expectation, the offspring of nineteenth century revivalism, unfortunately lives on today in many doctrines and denominational practices.

Whether or not the experience of entire sanctification even exists, the message of Keswick, as well as its Wesleyan predecessor, bore fruit that multiplied in a manner rarely seen today. The gritty exhortations to surrender the desires of the will, consecrate the self to God, abide daily in Christ, depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to root out strongholds of sin, and devote oneself to loving service to God and humans is among the most needed of messages to our self-absorbed and pampered Christian culture. Taught within appropriate boundaries and measures, it could once again aid the church toward its most critical objective of holiness.

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