

## **The Personal Spiritual Walk of Notable Preachers.**

### **The influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield.**

As is stated in the introductory leaflet for this address, the Spirit's work in the Eighteenth Century Revival is often presented, but the influence of the Holy Spirit in the personal lives of the leaders of the Revival, and their individual spiritual walk experience is not so often spoken of.

All of these men have left behind them Journals, recording the day by day experiences and challenges of their Christian lives. Whitfield's Journal contains far more personal details than that of Wesley's, though the complete set of Wesley's Journals, consisting of 26 bound volumes has never been published. Neither I believe have all the volumes of Charles Wesley's Journal. As far as the published Journals of Wesley are concerned their purpose was chiefly to answer the critics of the Revival and inform believers of the progress of the Gospel at that time. His Journal offers little documentation of his own spiritual walk but certainly provides the context in which his spiritual life developed.

**It is in the published letters** of these men, and uniquely in the case of Charles Wesley, his hymns, we find the best insights into their personal experience of the Holy Spirit's ministry in their lives.

**Another point** which we might mention here is that the emphasis of the Revival on the religion of the heart was not something that produced a kind of sanctified individualism. *There is no such thing as a solitary Christian* was one of the mottos of the Revival. The personal, inward experience soon found expression in the corporate worship, the Experience or Class Meetings, the making of converts, and the public preaching of the Word. The Puritan theology which greatly influenced the Revival and its leaders, was very much focused on the experience of God's redeeming grace, and the out working of that salvation, in the daily life of the people of God.

As the Puritans were concerned to encourage a vital personal spirituality, *without which, Christianity is plucked up by the roots*, so the leaders of the 18th Century Revival also emphasised the need to experience the Holy Spirit of

God working within the area of the human soul. (See page 212 Assurance, Joel R. Beeke)

All of these men emphasize the experimental, or experiential side of the Christian faith, an emphasis which contrasted sharply with what they saw as the spiritual deadness of the contemporary English church.

**We also have to remember that the time in which they lived, the age of the so-called Enlightenment which was suspicious of anything which went under the name of "spiritual experience."** Within the Established Church the Latitudinarians of the latter 17th century exalted reason alongside, but then eventually above revelation. This period has been described as a time of arid rationalism and barren Protestant formalism once referred to as, *The glacial epoch of the Christian Church*.

Even good men like Bishop Butler who is remembered for his famous *Analogy of Religion*, written to defend the essence of the Christian faith against those who wanted to set God firmly on the sidelines forever. (rather as some are trying to do today). Butler referred to some of the entries in Whitfield's Journal and said: "*Pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, very horrid thing.*"

To be fair to Whitfield, we might remember that Whitfield's Journals were the product of a man 23-24 years old and he later readily admitted that he was in his early years too rash in his comments. To be fare to Butler, both Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge expressed the same concerns over some of Whitfield's youthful opinions and comments in regard to God's direct dealings with him. The point I am making however is that at that time in the Eighteenth century it was frowned on to speak of one's private spiritual experiences.( Though there are always times when this can be done to excess or out of wrong motives)

**We might also comment on the fact that these men, the leading figures of the Revival were influenced for the good by the resurgence of Pietism at this**

**time**, which was coming into Britain via the Moravian missionaries. Traditionally, pietists emphasized the "religion of the heart ." Often this led to the neglect of theology and the disregard for the institution of the church. It also was liable to express itself in a certain anti-intellectualism and the reliance on feelings as opposed to reasoned or doctrinal orthodoxy. It was often excessively inward looking, though this certainly could not be said of the missionary minded Moravians. The piety of Whitfield and the Wes leys was greatly influenced by and yet large entirely free from the less helpful aspects of pietism.

Having given this brief introductory background let us go on to look at the work of the Holy Spirit in the personal lives of these great men of God. What is very clear is that these men gave great prominence to the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in their own lives and the life of the Church.

To help us organize our thoughts I want to follow some of the headings from the Third part of William Cowper's Olney hymns, where he gives us the following titles...

### **The Rise, the Progress, the Changes, and the Comforts of the Spiritual Life.**

(I have reversed the order of the last two headings.)

We might have used the titles from Wesley's Hymn Book, which has often been compared to the order of Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress. It is true to say that the concept of the life of pilgrimage, very much dominated every aspect of the thinking of these men at this time of revival.

*Captain of Israel's host and Guide*

*Of all who seek the land above,*

*Beneath Thy shadow we abide,*

*The cloud of Thy protecting love;*

*Our strength, Thy grace our rule Thy Word;*

*Our end, the glory of the Lord*

*By Thine unerring Spirit led,  
We shall not in the desert stray;  
We shall not full direction need,  
Nor miss our providential way;  
As far from danger as from fear,  
While love, almighty love, is near.*

*Raised by the breath of love divine,  
We urge our way with strength renewed  
The church of the first born to join,  
We travel to the mount of God,  
With joy upon our heads arise,  
And meet our Captain in the skies.*

Charles Wesley

### **The Rise of the Spiritual Life or the Conversion Experience.**

The men of the 18th century Revival recognized and emphasized the fact that all human beings needed a radical and deep, conversion experience. More often than not this was a gradual process, taking time, months or even years in some cases. Wesley in his biography of John Fletcher of Madeley notes that the latter's conversion took some time, and involve much wrestling with the Lord, and depended on a strong awareness of his own sin, lostness, and helplessness to save himself.

**In John Wesley's own case** it is well known that for a long period of time he sought salvation through his own works and his own righteousness.

*I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I began to see more and more the value of time. I applied myself closer to study. I watched myself more carefully against actual sins. I advised others to be religious. But now meeting with Mr. Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, and by my continued endeavour to keep his holy law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I was even then in a state of salvation.*

*In 1730 I began visiting the prisoners; assisting the poor and sick in the town; and doing what other good I could, by my presence and by the giving from my little fortune, to the bodies and souls of all men. To this end I abridged myself of all superfluities, and many that are called necessities of life. The next spring I began observing the Wednesday and Friday fasts, tasting no food until three in the afternoon. And now I knew not how to go any further. The image of God is what I aimed at in all, by doing His will, not my own. Yet when I apprehended myself to be near death, I could not find that all this gave me any comfort, or any assurance of acceptance with God.*

Wesley wrote.. *In this refined way of trusting to my own works in my own righteousness, I dragged on heavily till the time of my leaving England for America. On shipboard, (he was crossing the Atlantic to be a missionary in Savannah.) however, it pleased God of his free mercy to give me 26 of the Moravian brethren for companions, who endeavoured to show me a more excellent way.*

To cut a long story short he failed as a missionary and returned home, but soon met another Moravian, Peter Bohler who convinced him of the truth of and his need of justification by grace alone through faith alone. Wesley then speaks of his praying for... *Justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.* ( Wesley his own Biographer p. 21).

The following account of God's hearing this prayer is well known.

Early in the morning of Wednesday 24 May 1738, he opened his Bible at

II Peter 1:4.

*There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature.*

In the afternoon he went to St, Paul's Cathedral in London, where the anthem was a setting of Psalm 130.. *Out of the deeps have I called unto Thee O Lord.*

Then..

*In the evening I went very unwillingly to a Society Meeting in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*

In these words some of the key words of the Revival's spiritual nature and of the Personal ministry of the Holy Spirit are already apparent.

*I felt* in the sense of inner conviction confirmed by experience through the ministry of God's Spirit. *I did trust* in the sense of total dependence on the grace of God; *Christ alone*, echoing one of the great *solars* of the Reformation, to the exclusion of personal moral effort, religious compliance or mystical experience as the basis of justification. *Salvation* a word Wesley and the other leaders of the revival, would spend their lives in the power of the Holy Spirit describing, proclaiming, urging men to seek and showing them where to find.

*Assurance*, the joyful overflowing confidence in a full, free and present salvation. And of course as one has put it... "The emphasis was on the first person singular, and especially the possessive case, used in relation to the sins that are *mine* and the Saviour who is *mine*. It was from the stand point of one whose life had been redeemed that Wesley informed the world, " *It was of mere grace, or free love, of undeserved mercy that God hath vouchsafed to sinful man a way of reconciliation with Himself.*

*My God I am Thine;*

*What a comfort divine,*

*What a pleasure to know that my Jesus is mine!*

*In the heavenly Lamb, thrice happy I am,*

*And my heart it doth dance at the sound of his Name.*

*My Jesus to know, and to feel his blood flow,*

*'Tis, Life everlasting, 'tis heaven below.*

**In the case of Charles Wesley** who records the date of his conversion, Whitsuntide, May 21, 1738.

*I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ. My temper for the rest of the day was mistrust of my own great, but before unknown, weakness. I saw that by faith I stood; by the continual support of faith, which kept me from falling, though of myself I was ever sinking into sin.*

Monday, May 22

*Under Christ's protection I waked next morning, and rejoiced in reading the 107th Psalm, so nobly describing what God had done for my soul. Today I saw him chiefly as my King, and found Him in his power: but saw little of the love of Christ crucified, or of my sins past; though more, I humbly hope of my own weakness and His strength. I had many evil thoughts darted into my mind, but I rejected them immediately (yet not I).*

Tuesday, May 23.

I waked under the protection of Christ, and gave myself up, soul and body to Him. At nine I began to write a hymn upon my conversion, but was persuaded to break off, for fear of pride. Mr. Bray coming, encourage me to finish in spite of Satan. I prayed Christ to stand by me, and finished the hymn.

Next day "Towards ten, my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared. "I believe." We sang the hymn with great joy, and parted with prayer.

This hymn has been described as the birth – song of the Evangelical Revival.

*Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
How shall I all to heaven aspire?  
A slave redeemed from death and sin,  
A brand plucked from, eternal fire,  
How shall I equal triumphs raise,  
Or sing my great Deliver's praise?  
How shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which Thou to me has showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God,  
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,  
Blest with this antipast of heaven!*

*And shall I slight my Father's love?  
Or basely fear his gifts to own?  
Unmindful of his favours prove?  
Shall I, the hallowed Cross to shun?  
Refuse His righteousness to impart,*

*By hiding within my heart?  
Outcasts of men, to you I call?  
Harlots, publicans thieves!  
He spreads His arms to embrace you all:  
Sinners alone his grace receives:  
No need of him the righteous have:  
He came the lost seek and save.*

*Come, O my guilty brethren, come,  
Groaning beneath your load of sin!  
His bleeding heart shall make you room,  
His open side shall take you in:  
He calls you now, invites you home;  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!*

Charles Wesley 1707-88

(Note how the personal experience immediately becomes the public proclamation)

**In regard to George Whitefield's conversion.** George Whitefield knew the Wesley brothers who had invited him to come along to the Holy Club at Oxford University. Like them he pursued a course of salvation by works. He was first set on the right path when he was given by Charles Wesley the small volume of the book, *The life of God in the Soul of Man* by Henry Scougal, (1650-76) a Scot who had written when he was about 20 years old and had died at 28. Whitefield himself was about the same age (20) at this time. It was through the reading of this book his soul was awakened to its need of salvation and of the impossibility of salvation by works. Later It was through the reading of Bishop Hall's *Contemplations* that his soul eventually found peace.

Quoting from *Whitfield's Journal* . Whitfield is now aged 20 and the year is 1735.

*The blessed Spirit was all this time purifying my soul. All my former gross and notorious, and even my heart sins also, were now set home upon me, of which I wrote down some remembrance immediately, and confessed them before God morning and evening. So weak, I often spent two hours in my evening retirements, and prayed over my Greek Testament and Bishop Hall's most excellent contemplations, every hour that my health would permit. About the end of the seven weeks having undergone innumerable buffetings of Satan, and many months of inexpressible trials by night and by day under the spirit of bondage, God was pleased at length to move the heavy load, to enable me to lay hold on his dear Son by a living faith and by giving me the spirit of adoption seal me, as I humbly hope, even to the day of everlasting redemption. But oh! With what joy – joy unspeakable – even joy that was full of, and big with glory, was my soul filled, when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and the full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul! Surely it was the day of my espousal's, – A day to be had in everlasting remembrance. At first, my joys were like a spring tide, and, as it were, overflowed the banks. Go where I will, I could not avoid singing of psalms aloud; afterwards it became more settled – and, blessed be God saving a few casual intervals, has abode and increased in my soul ever since.*

Whitfield's Journal p.58

## II

### **The Holy Spirit's Work in the Progress of the Spiritual Life**

#### **Help in fighting the fight of faith**

These men had now entered into saving faith with all its blessings but there begins now the fight of faith. Outwardly there was to be a great fight against the unbelief and hostility of the age in which they lived. Our interest here is in their inward lives, and inwardly it was to be a great fight also. John Wesley wrote in his Journal entrance for May 25, 1739:

*The moment I awaked, "Jesus, Master," was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him, and my soul waits on Him continually..... Yet the enemy injected a fear, "If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible (perceptible) change?" I answered (yet not I), "that I know not. But this I know, I have now "peace with God." And I sin not today, and Jesus my Master has forbid me to take thought for the morrow."*

*"But is not any sort of fear," continued the tempter, "a proof that thou dost not believe?" I desired my Master to answer for me, and opened his Book upon those words of St. Paul, "Without were fightings, within were fears." Then, inferred I, well may fears be within me; but I must go on, and tread them under my feet.*

Certainly the two Wesley brothers experienced doubts after their conversion as to whether they were truly in the faith. In the October of his conversion year (1738), we have the well-known entry for October 9th. Wesley is walking from London to Oxford, where he records, *"in walking I read that truly surprising narrative of the conversions lately wrought in and about the town of Northampton, in New England."* This of course was Jonathan Edwards famous *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*. Wesley commented, *"Surely this is the Lord's doing, and is marvellous in our eyes."* The reading of this book was a tremendous impetus and encouragement to the revival here in Britain. However in the entry for the same day Wesley is still troubled as to whether a true conversion experience has take place in his heart.

Another entry in the same month October 14, 1738 states:

*I cannot find in myself the love of God or of Christ. Hence my deadness and wanderings in public prayer. Hence it is that even in holy Communion I have rarely any more than a cold attention. Hence, when I hear of the highest instance of God's love, my heart is still senseless and unaffected. At this moment I feel no more love to him than one I had never heard of."*

The Message of the Wesleys Philip S Watson page 24.

Wesley continued to pray for more warmth and love to God in his life, and we find nearly a quarter of a century after the above him recording: *" I feel more want of heat than light, I value light; but it is nothing compared to love."*

All this is evidence of a great fight of faith that went on within him, and yet supported and upheld by the Holy Spirit he was able at the same time to translate Johann Andreas Rothe's great hymn.

*O Love thou bottomless abyss,*

*My sins are swallowed up in the!*

*Covered is my unrighteousness,*

*Nor spot of guilt remains on me,*

*While Jesu's blood through all the skies*

*Mercy, free, boundless mercy! Cries.*

*With faith I plunge me in this sea,*

*Here is my hope, my joy, my rest;*

*Hither, when Hell assails, I flee,*

*I look into my Saviour's breast:*

*Away, sad doubt and anxious fear!*

*Mercy is all that's written there.*

*Though waves and storms go o'er my head,*

*Though strength, and health, and friends be gone,*

*Though joys be withered all and dead,*

*Though every mercy be withdrawn,*

*On this my steadfast soul relies –*

*Father thy mercy never dies.*

*Fixed on this ground will I remain,*

*Though my heart fail and flesh decay:*

*This anchor shall my soul sustained,  
When earth's foundations melt away:  
Mercy's full power I then shall prove,  
Loved with an everlasting love.*

(Sometimes given as a separate hymn but more often in England part of the hymn, *Now I have found the ground where in sure my soul's anchor may remain.*)

One feels the intensity of this fight and of his utter need and reliance upon the Holy Spirit, in a remarkable letter that John Wesley wrote to Charles Wesley in 1776, he wrote:

*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 born along**, I know not how, but I can't stand still. I want all the world to come to Him (whom I do not know).*

The Message of the Wesley's page 25 Quoting letters 27th of June 1766.

The words in brackets were written in a kind of shorthand, that this only intended for his brother Charles's eye.

**Many similar examples could also be given from Charles Wesley's life.** One will have to suffice. Trinity Sunday, May 28, 1738.

*I rose in great heaviness, which neither private nor joint prayer could remove. At last I betook myself to intercession for my relations, and was greatly helped and enlarged herein; particularly in prayer for a most profligate sinner.*

p.14 Watson

**George Whitfield** gives us various details concerning the time immediately after is coming to faith in Christ. He is concerned here with outward assaults. He says:

*Having now obtained mercy from God, and receive the Spirit of Adoption in my heart, my friends were surprised to see me look and behave so cheerfully, after the many reports that had circulated concerning me. However, I soon found myself to be as a sheep sent forth among wolves in sheep's clothing; for they immediately endeavoured to dissuade me, as they had lately done a friend that began with me, from the constant use of the means of grace, especially from weekly abstinence, and receiving the blessed sacrament. God enabled me to resist them steadfast in the faith; and, by keeping close to him in his holy ordinances, I was made to triumph over all.*

Journal page 59.

It is also clear from the same section of the Journal that he immediately begins to witness to his faith. Great demands are now being made on and it is at this time we are given a glimpse of his own personal and inward walk with the Lord

It is at this time he begins, as he says to read the Holy Scriptures upon his knees, laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible every line and word.

Journal page 60.

At this time also he makes a return visit to his home town of Gloucester. Whilst there he makes this entry in the Journal.

*Oh, what sweet communion I had daily vouchsafe with God in prayer after my coming again to Gloucester! How often have I been carried out beyond myself when sweetly meditating in the fields! How assuredly have I felt that Christ dwelt in me, and I in him! And how did I daily walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and was edified and refresh in the multitude of peace! Not that I was always upon the mount; sometimes a cloud would overshadow me; but the Sun of righteousness quickly arose and dispelled its, and I knew it was Jesus Christ that revealed himself to my soul. page 61*

Interestingly also it is at this time that he relates how God made the doctrine of free grace through faith alone more clearly to him.

*Blessed be God! Most of us have now been taught this doctrine of Christ, and I hope, I should be willing to die in the defence of it. It is the good old doctrine of*

*the Church of England. It is what the holy martyrs of Queen Mary's time sealed with their blood, and which I pray God, if need be, that I and my brethren may seal with ours.*

*Burkitt's and Henry's expositions were of admirable use to lead me into this and all other gospel truths. For many months have I been almost always upon my knees, studying and praying over these books. The Holy Spirit from time to time, has led me into the knowledge of Divine things, and I have been directed, by watching and reading the Scripture in this matter, even in the minutest of circumstances, as plainly as the Jews were when consulting the Urim and the Thummin at the height priests breasts. page 62.*

### **Progress in increased assurance**

Though these men were very conscious of the fight of faith and experienced at times doubts about their own standing in the faith it would be very wrong to over emphasise this because one of the great elements of Christian doctrine and Christian experience recovered by the Revival was its emphasis on Assurance of Salvation.

*To know and feel our sins forgiven,*

*Blessed with this antipast of heaven.*

Wesley was fond of quoting the words of his dying father, Samuel Wesley,

*The inward witness, son the inward witness.... that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity.*

Wesley's view of the inward witness is not easy to pin down. It is open to misunderstanding and misapplication. The Evangelical Anglicans were wary of it and said it was too subjective. Wesley quoted John Owen to back up his view together with the Anglicans, Bishop Warburton and Bishop Pearson. ( Owen guarded against a too mystical interpretation of this, by saying that The Holy Spirit applies His immediate witness, through the Word, and not beyond the Word. This witness which is the direct, miraculous and powerful application of the Word, in God's sovereign time and way is both Spirit applied and Word centred... see Assurance p.197

The Savoy Declaration viewed the Holy Spirit as intimately involved with each of the three foundations of assurance

1. The blood and righteousness of Christ.
2. The inward evidence of graces.
3. The immediate witness of the Spirit.)

The main line Anglicans of Whitefield and Wesley's day saw the whole idea as dangerous "*enthusiasm*." The point is both Whitfield and Wesley brought to the fore again this vital doctrine. This assuring ministry in the heart of the believer, however we chose to define its precise operation, was never the less a great source of the spiritual joy, which characterised the Leaders of the Revival and countless believers at that time.

### **Progress in joy**

Gordon Mursel Comments: *There is a tremendous sense of joy in the spirituality of Wesley which is all too often forgotten.*

This is manifestly evident and felt in Charles Wesley's hymns. Numerous examples could be cited. *O for a thousand tongues*, or even *Hark the Herald angels sing*, Get yourself a copy of Wesley's Hymns, the 1876 volume with supplement is still quite easy to get second hand.

Wesley is writing to a sceptic seeking to commend the faith to him, he writes:

*And when you thus love God and all mankind, and are transformed into his likeness, then the commandments of God will not be grievous; So far from it they will be the very joy of your heart; ways of pleasantness, paths of peace! You will experience here that solid happiness which you had else-where sought in vain.*

English Spirituality. Gordon Mursell page. 95

Whitefield commented:

*But oh! with what joy- joy unspeakable- even joy that was full of, and big with glory, was my soul filled, when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense*

*of the pardoning love of God and a full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul!.*

Journal p.38.

### **Progress in prayer**

We get an insight into John Wesley's private life of prayer from a collection of prayers he originally drew up in 1733, before his evangelical experience, but to which he added two later collections. What these collections of prayers, actually called, *A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week*, reveal is that Wesley retained his methodical approach and his liking for ordering and forethought in the matter of prayer throughout his life. Many of these prayers are long and discursive and demand a high level of application and attention to get through them. Some of them include requests for mental composition and a striving of concentration which suggests Wesley himself knew the recurring problem of distraction in prayer. He prayed, *that my wandering thoughts may be fixed on thee, my tumultuous affections composed, and my flat, cold desires quickened into fervent longings and thirstings after Thee*. He prayed.. *That Thy love may fill my heart, and be the motive of all the use I make my understanding*.

In prayer Wesley advocated a regularity in time, a definiteness of purpose, and a clarity of language. He prayed... *Cure us of this intermittent piety and fix it into an even and constant holiness*.

A concern about inner religion is evidence from the level of watchfulness he displays, examining motives, identifying weaknesses and questioning the integrity of his own character. Appetites, passions and understanding are to be carefully guarded, *"That I may resolutely deny them every gratification which has no tendency to Thy glory*. He asked that he might live as... *One who knows this life to be the seed time of an eternal harvest.... And that in this dangerous labyrinth of the world.. Thy heavenly dictates be our map and Thy holy life our guide*. He prays.. *Let me as pure crystal transmit all the light Thou pourest upon me*

See John Wesley's Prayers Frederick C. Gill and Evangelical Piety p. 21.

We may not agree with Wesley's views on Perfection, but it would remember that he said perfection was a life wholly dedicated to God, we may agree with them that it is something that we should strive after ,though as we should say knowing that we cannot attain to the fullness of perfection in this life.

He defined what this dedication of all our life to God ought to be as follows;

*It is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is giving God all our heart; it is desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him who created it. In yet another view it is the loving of God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.*

Evangelical Spirituality page 20

## **II B**

### **The Holy Spirit enabling them in the Progress in the Christian Life as they went forward into Public Ministry**

What we find about all these men is that the Holy Spirit thrust them out straightaway after their conversion, into the great work of the Gospel. For them it could be said... *My heart is full of Christ, and longs the glorious matter to declare.*

On Sunday, 11 June 1738, Wesley preached before the University of Oxford, on the subject of *Salvation by Faith*. This has since become one of his standard sermons and we might say, not a mean achievement for one who at the time considered himself to be "*weak in faith*."

It was the same with Charles Wesley. Journal entry Wednesday 12th of July, 1738,says.

*I preached at Newgate to the condemned felons, and visited one of them in his cell, sick of a fever- a poor slave who had robbed his master. I told him of One*

*who came down from heaven to save lost sinners,.... Described the sufferings of the Son of God, His sorrows, agony, and death. He Listened with all the signs of eager astonishment; the tears trickled down his cheeks while he cried, "What was It for me? Did God suffer all this for so poor a creature as me?" I left him waiting for the Salvation of God.*

**The leaders of the revival were very much aware that such intense and demanding work could only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit, and that this power could only be known by maintaining a very close personal and private walk with God.**

**We may go on to say as far as the subject spiritual progress in our religious experience is concerned, the leaders of the 18th century revival always insisted, that spiritual progress is God's work in us and not our own achievement.** However they also believed that the believer is called to play a part in their own sanctification. Agreeing with Scripture that we are called *to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*. Like all true believers they taught that faith is strengthened and grows through the means of grace, the hearing of the Word of God, in public and private prayer, in the participation in the Gospel ordinances etc.

**In spiritual matters John Wesley warned against what he called "*expecting the end without the means*....** Expecting knowledge without searching the Scriptures, of expecting to know spiritual strength without prayer.... He said the perfection of love is the end of Christian living; God in his goodness has provided various means to the attaining of that end. The chief of these means are prayer..... Searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon,), and receiving the Lord's Supper. (Evangelical Spirituality p. 33).

**George Whitfield gave the following advice to a young convert:**

*We have nothing to do; but to lay hold on Him by faith, and to depend on Him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Not but we must be workers together with Him; for true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No it is an active, lively, restless principle; it fills the heart, so that it cannot be at ease, till it is doing something for Jesus Christ."*

### **The Need of the Spirits help in Prayer**

**Charles Wesley** recognized that a whole complex range of feelings come into play when a Christian personally and privately seeks God in prayer. *Inevitably there will be feelings of unworthiness, a chronic sense of self abasement which creates a longing for increased holiness and a deliverance from even small sins. For the soul seeking holiness, "a very little dust will disorder a clock, and the least sand will obscure our sight, so the least grain of sin which is upon the heart will hinder its right motion towards God."*

Quoted page 33 ibid

Holiness is the outcome of costly discipline. To know God in the fullness of his love demands time spent in his presence. Charles Wesley wrote to hymn,

entitled.. *In an hurry of business*, in which he asks;

*From all entanglements beneath, call off my peaceful heart.*

In a letter to a young Army surgeon Charles Wesley says... *Watch and pray, watching implies early rising... prayer never hinders business.*

In the same way as the leaders of the revival prayed as they read the Scriptures and other Christian literature so they advised others to do the same. In giving advice to a lay preacher **John Wesley** told him *that he was lively but not deep; there is no variety; there is no compass of thought, reading alone can supply this, with daily prayer.*

**With Whitefield** it was said, *for him the relationship between reading and prayer was almost indistinguishable.* Evangelical Spirituality p.62

### **Prayer for the Spirits help to pray**

*Jesus, thou sovereign Lord of all,*

*The same through one eternal day,*

*Attend Thy feeblest followers' call,  
And O instruct us how to pray!  
Pour out the supplicating grace,  
And stir us up to seek Thy face.*

*We cannot think a gracious thought,  
We cannot feel a good desire,  
Till Thou, who call'dst a world from nought,  
The power into our hearts inspire:  
The promised Intercessor give,  
And let us now Thyself receive.*

*Come in Thy pleading Spirit down  
To us who for Thy coming stay;  
Of all thy gifts we ask but one,  
We ask the constant power to pray:  
Indulge us, Lord, in this request;  
Thou canst not then deny the rest.*

All the leaders of the revival believed that Christian progress was a gradual discipline and that we were helped in all this by the Holy Spirit through the faithful use of the means of grace.

**Many of George Whitefield's inner struggles can be traced out in his Letters and entrances in his Journal.**

Whitfield waged a lifelong inner battle against the sin of pride. The egocentric tone and lack of tact in his early Journal is well known, and was regretted by him in his more mature years.

*"I am a proud imperious, sinful worm", he confessed, "it is difficult to go through the fiery trial of popularity and applause untainted."*

James Gordon comments:

For Whitfield self understanding was hard won, wrung from the pain of rejection, conflict and an almost habitual sense of remorse.

*"Oh for further leadings into the chambers of that selfish, sensual and devilish imagery that yet lie latent in my partly renewed heart."*

**Whitefield had a profound sense of personal incompleteness**, of being a sinner in process of being saved daily from sin, of sanctification as gradual growth and often painful cultivation. He almost ran out of acceptable epithets in lamenting the persistence of self love and self will.

*"This remaining body of sin, what an antichrist! What a scarlet whore! What a hell! What a red Dragon!.... How hard, how slow he dies!....O for a heart gladly to embrace every cross, every trying dispensation that may have a tendency to poison, or starve, or nip the buddings of the old, and cherish, promote, or cause to bloom and blossom the graces and tempers of the new man in my soul!"*

The horticultural image recurs at an earthier level when he rejoices that God is still pleased to *"dig and dung, round me, and not cut me down as a cumberer of the ground."*

page 60.

**We might note here that concern for personal holiness in the lives of these men was always balanced by an out-ward looking, concern for the world around them.** John Wesley published his own book of prayers as we have noted above, in which we see how wide-ranging his prayers were. These men had a great concern both spiritual and practically for the world around them and acted upon that concern.

Whitefield and Wesley were involved in all kinds of social action and had a tremendous breadth of sympathy. At different times they were involved in orphan care, schemes to improve the treatment of slaves, and education of children, Wesley made a blistering attack on anti-Semitism at Lisbon. He never hesitated to preach against horse-racing and persuaded the manager of the Glasgow Playhouse to "take the roof down." (p.56 Evangelical Spirituality James M. Gordon.)

**There was certainly a high regard for the preaching of God's Word**, Wesley was particularly keen on early-morning preaching services, that is in the midweek at five o'clock in the morning. Many of his itinerant preachers were less than keen on this practice but for the whole of Wesley's lifetime it was insisted upon. But the Word preached in public had first to speak to us in private, the preacher could only give out what he was taking in.

**Scripture was to be understood only with the help of the Holy Spirit**, Wesley in his notes on the New Testament wrote... *The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those who read it with earnest prayer.*

*Come Holy Ghost for moved by thee,*

*The prophets wrote and spoke;*

*Unlock the truth, Thyself the key,*

*Unseal the sacred book.*

*Or. Come Divine Interpreter, Give us eyes Thy Book to read.*

**In a letter to a certain Mrs. Lewen John Wesley recommended at least two hours personal Bible study per day. He explained his own practice in the following well-known words.**

*At any price give me the book of God! Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be "a man of one book". Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone; only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this*

*end, to find the way to heaven... I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable.*

*When quiet in my house I sit,  
Thy book be my companion still,  
My joy thy sayings to repeat,  
Talk o'er the records of thy will,  
and search the oracles divine,  
Till every heartfelt word be mine.*

*O may the gracious words divine  
Subject of all my converse be!  
So will the Lord his follower join,  
And walk and talk himself with me;  
So shall my heart his presence prove,  
And burn with everlasting love.*

328 Wesley's Hymns.



### **The Comforts of the Spiritual Life**

**We have already mentioned the comfort of assurance**

**The heavenward Look**

The hymn just quoted above in another verse speaks of *blissful dreams and visions of eternal day* which leads me on to mention that there was always the perspective of heaven in the minds of these men.

*Oft as I lay me down to rest,  
O may the reconciling word  
Sweetly compose my weary breast!  
While, on the bosom of my Lord,  
I sink in blissful dreams away,  
And visions of eternal day.*

They through the ministry of the Spirit were not bound by the horizons of this world alone. Always there is a goal ahead, some spiritual place further ahead to be strived for... To quote another hymn...

*Strangers and pilgrims here below,  
This earth, we know, is not our place,  
And hasten through the vale of woe;  
And, restless to behold thy face,  
Swift to our heavenly country move,  
Everlasting home above.*

*Raised by the breath of love divine,  
We urge our way with strength renewed;  
The church of the first- born to join,  
We travel to the mount of God,  
With joy upon our heads arise,*

*And meet our captain in the skies.*

71 Wesley's Hymns

### **The strengthening blessing of attendance at the Lord's Supper**

Another means by which the Holy Spirit comforted and encouraged these men and all believers was through the partaking of the Lord's Supper. There was a high regard for attendance at the Lord's Supper, and Wesley believed that it was not only an ordinance for the strengthening of the faith of individual believers but also a converting ordinance.

Some argue that the outdoor, large communion services of early Welsh Calvinistic Methodism were the true for-runners of the large open air Gospel preaching services so characteristic of the Revival.

### **A high regard for the consolation of spiritual fellowship**

There was also a high regard for spiritual fellowship. *The Class Meeting* within Arminian Methodism and the *Experience Meeting* within Welsh Calvinistic Methodism were a very important aspect of this..

One of the hymns expresses so well...

*Woe to him who spirits droop,*

*To him who falls alone!*

*He has not to lift him up,*

*To help his weakness on:*

*Happier we each other keep,*

*We each other's burdens bear;*

*Never need our footsteps slip,*

*upheld by mutual prayer.*

*A Collection of hymns for the people called Methodists. (Wesley's Hymns) 487, the hymn begins..*

*Two are better far than one,*

*For counsel or for fight;*

*How can one be warm alone,*

*Or serve his God aright?*

These meetings were not study circles, nor discussion groups, and certainly there were not debating societies. They were intended for the sharing of Christian experience, the troubles and triumphs met with on the Christian way, or that struggles experienced as they sought to progress on that way. Sometimes they would take one another to task, sometimes they would confess their sins one to another but always the aim was to help each other grow in grace, faith and hope and love. Their varying degrees of spiritual maturity enabled them all the more to help one another by mutual conversation and prayer, and it was of course understood that no gossip ever took place in Class.

*Help us to help each of other, Lord,*

*Each other's cross to bear,*

*Let each his friendly aid afford,*

*And feel his brother's care.*

I realize I've slightly digressed from my subject in mentioning this, but I do so in order to illustrate the fact that the setting up of these classes by the leaders of the 18th century Revival, illustrates the great depth of spiritual experience which they themselves knew and were conscious of and as a result, lead them to be desire and awareness of the great need to give help and encouragement and give direction to those who at the height of the Revival were experiencing the same spiritual heights and depths as themselves.

## **The Changes of the Christian Life.**

Cowper heads up this section with the well known hymn.

*God moves in a mysterious way,*

*His wonders to perform;*

*He plants his footsteps in the sea,*

*And rides upon the storm.*

**The first going out into the open air involved a great inward struggle for both Wesley and Whitefield.** Whitefield was strengthened though the example of and his correspondence with Howell Harris. Wesley in turn though the example of Whitefield.

**A similar inner struggle was passed through by Wesley when he first began to sanction and send out his itinerant preachers.**

**Wesley himself even as his long ministry was coming to an end passed through many inward struggles as he endeavoured to hold the Methodist movement together.**

Numbers now were very large (there were 550 itinerant preachers, 140,000 members of the Societies, also many other adherents in the United Kingdom, Canada , North America and the West Indies) and there were many within that number with different ideas of what the future should hold, that was some pushing in one way or others in another some with bees in their bonnets about this or doctrine or theological opinion. We forget the many burdens and agonies of soul that these men passed through in order to achieve what they did under God. In all these changing scenes they needed the upholding ministry of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Last great change of their Lives**

**Wesley's last hours are well documented**

His final week in this world was that which began on Sunday the 27 February 1791. On the Tuesday morning of that week he gathered his strength and sang Watts hymn:

*I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,  
And, when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures.*

In the evening he struggled to speak, but could not. Finding they could not understand them, he paused a little, and then, with all the remaining strength he had, cried out, "*The best of all is, God is with us;*" and soon after, lifting up his dying arm in token of victory, and raising his feeble voice with the holy triumph not to be expressed, he again repeated the heart – reviving words, "*The best of all is, God is with us.*" Being told that his brother's widow was come, he said, "*He given his servants rest.*" He thanked as she pressed his hand, and affectionately endeavoured to kiss her. He then said, "*We thank thee, O Lord, for these and all Thy mercies; bless the Church and King, and grant us truth and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, forever and ever!*"

At another time he said, "*he causes his servants to lie down in peace.*"

Then pausing a little, he cried, "*The clouds drop fatness!*" And soon after, "*The Lord is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge!*" He then called those present to prayer, and, though he was greatly exhausted, he appeared still more fervent in spirit. These exertions were however, too much for his feeble frame; and most of the night following, though he often attempted to repeat the Psalm before mentioned, he could only utter, "*I'll praise – I'll praise –*"

The next morning a few minutes before 10 o'clock, after Mr. Bradford a faithful friend had prayed with him, whilst others knelt about his bed, he uttered his last word, "*Farewell.*"

He was in the 88th year of his age, and had been 65 years in the ministry.

After his death those standing around his bed sang:

*Happy soul, thy days are ended,*

*All thy mourning days below;*

*Go, by Angel guards attended,*

*To the sight of Jesus go!*

*Waiting to receive thy spirit,*

*Lo! The Saviour stands above,*

*Shows the purchase of his merit,*

*Reaches out the crown of love.*

922 Wesley's Hymns

**George Whitfield died breathless after an asthma attack in Newburyport**

**New England** at six o'clock on Sunday morning September 30, 1770. He was 56 years old. He expected to die silent; for he said, "*It has pleased God to enable me to bear so many testimonies for Him during my life, that He will require non from the when I die.*" And so it was.

**Charles Wesley in dying asked his wife to write for him these words:**

*In age and feebleness extreme,*

*Who shall a helpless worm redeem?*

*Jesus, my only hope thou art,*

*O could I catch one smile from thee,*

*And drop into eternity!*